

From Negative to Positive Existentialism in Paulo Coelho's Selected Novels



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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MPhil in
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To

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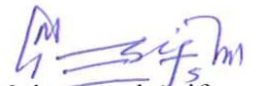
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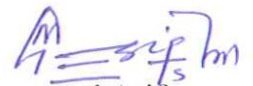
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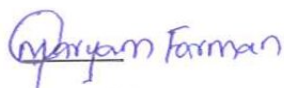
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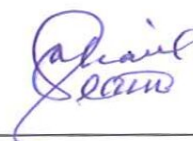
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Declaration

I, Hajra Mueen D/O Mueen Ud Din, a student of MPhil English (Literature), at the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Management and Technology, hereby declare that this thesis titled, "*From Negative to Positive Existentialism in Paulo Coelho's Selected Novels*" is my own research work and has not been submitted, published or printed elsewhere in Pakistan or abroad. Additionally, I will not use this thesis to obtain any degree other than the one stated above. I fully understand that if my statement is found to be incorrect at any stage, including after the award of the degree, the University has the right to revoke my MPhil degree.

Acknowledgement

“By the morning brightness and the night when it covers with darkness” (Quran 93: 1-2).

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Table of Content

Certificate of Approval.....	iii
Similarity Report.....	iv
Declaration	v
Acknowledgement.....	vi
Table of Contents	vii
Abstract	ix
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Existentialism.....	2
1.2. Paulo Coelho and His Existential Interweaving in Texts	4
1.2.1. Veronika Decides to Die (1998).....	5
1.2.2. Brida (1990)	6
1.2.3. Eleven Minutes (2003).....	7
1.2.4. The Winner Stands Alone (2008).....	8
1.3. Research methodology.....	8
1.4. Research Questions:.....	10
2. Literature Review	12
3. Data Analysis.....	25
3.1. Existential Elevation and Thematic Coherence	25
3.3.1. An Individual’s Quest.....	26
3.1.1. The Search for a Soulmate and Love.....	29
3.1.2. Existential Angst, Anxiety, and Loneliness.....	32
3.2. Sartre’s Freedom of Choice and Paulo Coelho.....	38
3.2.1. Freedom of Choice in Veronika Decides to Die	40
3.2.2. Freedom of Choice in <i>Eleven Minutes</i>	42

3.2.3.	Freedom of choice in <i>Brida</i>	45
3.2.4.	Freedom of Choice in <i>The Winner Stands Alone</i>	47
3.3.	Existentialism through the lens of Simon De Beauvoir and Frankl’s Logotherapy	49
3.3.1.	Simon De Beauvoir and Feminist Existentialism	49
3.3.2.	Paulo Coelho and Victor Frankl’s Logotherapy	53
4.	Conclusion	59
5.	Work Cited	60

Abstract

This research examines the works of Paulo Coelho, with a particular focus on his four novels: *Veronika Decides to Die*, *Eleven Minutes*, *Brida*, and *The Winner Stands Alone*. The primary objective of the study is to explore the existential themes inherent in Coelho's writings, with a particular emphasis on the theme of freedom of choice. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study aims to analyze thematic coherence within the primary texts. The theoretical framework of the research is grounded in Jean-Paul Sartre's existential philosophy, complemented by Simon De Beauvoir's feminist existentialism and Victor Frankl's Logotherapy. These philosophical underpinnings are employed systematically to navigate the optimistic tendencies of existential philosophy as manifested in the selected novels. Drawing insights from the respective journeys of the characters Veronika, Maria, Brida, and Igor, the findings of this research propose that the pursuit of purpose and meaning in life necessitates navigating through existential challenges such as absurdity, self-doubt, redirection, freedom of choice, and decision-making. These thematic elements, when examined through the lens of existential philosophy, contribute to tipping the delicate balance of life towards perseverance and purpose. While existential philosophy often conveys a sense of quietism and pessimism; this research aims to demonstrate the optimistic tendencies of individuals to take control of their lives and understand the consequences of their decisions, drawing insights from Coelho's protagonists.

Keywords: Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, Paulo Coelho, Freedom of Choice

1. Introduction

The study aims to explore the pervasive themes of Existential philosophy within Paulo Coelho's literary works, including *Veronika Decides to Die* (1998), *The Winner Stands Alone* (2008), *Brida* (1990), and *Eleven Minutes* (2003). Existential philosophy delves deep into human experiences that include personal and interactive experiences. It focuses on the concrete trajectory of life, freedom of choice, and decisions concerning meaning-making in life. It highlights the finitude of human existence and the inevitability of death. Existentialism acknowledges the limitless nature of human beings, their propensity for precarious choices, and the boundless depth within their conscience. However, it also underscores the inescapable finitude of life and mortality. Felicity Joseph et al. state that existentialism is "a rejection of any external determination or morality or value" (Joseph et al. 3). The philosophy emphasizes individuality and responsibility, providing each individual with the colossal responsibility of the consequences that accompany the freedom of choice. Societal, cultural, and parental norms are identified as potential impediments to human individuality and freedom of choice. Existentialism shuns positivism, rejects external determinism, and already sets essential laws of human nature.

This study intends to explore the philosophy of existentialism and its positive tendencies substantiated by Simon de Beauvoir's theory of existentialism and Victor Frankl's logotherapy in Paulo Coelho's selected novels. The following research uses Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism to explore the hidden need for vivification of the world by exploring the characters of Veronika, Maria, Brida, and Igor to meticulously look at the choices they make for their life's course of action. Simon De Beauvoir's feminist existentialism will help explore most of the female characters in Coelho's novels in this research, which explains the dire need to shatter the unwanted shackles chained by society. Lastly, Victor Frankl's

Logotherapy will help discover meaning in life in order to dial down the feelings of loneliness and angst. Subsequently, the following chapter intends to explore the philosophy of existentialism and summarize the selected novels such as *Veronika Decides to Die*, *Eleven Minutes*, *Brida*, and *The Winner Stands Alone*.

1.1. Existentialism

Existentialism focuses on “existence precedes essence” (Sartre). The philosophy encourages human beings to realize the genuinely valuable things in life. It also nudges an individual to reject being complacent and be critical of their choices and the world that they live in. “Existentialism offers an understanding and potential dismantling of the mechanics of oppression, whether colonialist, sexist or racist” (Joseph et al. 11). Furthermore, Joseph et al. explain that Kierkegaard’s existentialism is associated with individualism, and it requires freedom of choice and decision-making skills based on giant leaps of faith. Jaspers is of the view that one must limit guilt and suffering because it projects a lack of an essential self. Nietzsche emphasizes the de-individualization of social mores, and Heidegger and Camus insist upon the importance of angst, death, and dread to actualize the authenticity of life (Joseph et. al. 15).

Existentialism rejects positivism, thus resulting in freedom of choice. Authenticity, individuality, and responsibility are the core principles of existentialistic philosophy. Existentialism rejects positivism to focus on personal convictions and validate deep feelings and sentiments of human beings. The presence of inflexible reasoning neglects human convictions. Freedom of choice and decision-making affect individuals involved in the situation at hand, but it becomes personal and somewhat problematic when choices differ to co-exist and collide based on personal experiences. Paulo Coelho in his literary compositions has prominently highlighted existential themes and their optimistic tendencies. He has

highlighted the power of freedom of choice and finding one's self through the journey of soul enlightenment as it originates from choices and decisions. Bandyopadhyay highlights existentialism through Coelho's point of view. He says that the world needs what existential psychotherapy has to offer because the culture is crying for vivification, enlightenment, awakening, and transformation. To meet that need, we as modern existentialists must learn to speak the language of the people and introduce them to the works of existentialism on their terms (182). Many studies have explored the pessimist aspects of existential philosophy. These studies have highlighted the alienation, isolation, loneliness, anger, and frustrations of human existence. Moreover, the research conducted on Coelho's works majorly revolves around some of his specific novels which include his world-famous, *The Alchemist* (1988). However, this study intends to conduct thorough qualitative research on Coelho's understudied novels which include *Veronika Decides to Die*, *Eleven Minutes*, *Brida*, and *The Winner Stands Alone*.

This research intends to reflect the positive qualities of the following philosophy in Coelho's works, which requires deflecting the negative connotations attached to the philosophy and reflecting the positive features. Existential philosophy for eons laces itself with negativity and pessimism. It highlights the adverse sensations of human existence that a human being is alone among millions of other human beings. For individuals, the focal point of life is their existence, helplessness, isolation, alienation, and folded under the layers of thought process. According to Eric Edwards, "existentialism preaches a philosophy of hopelessness, fear and meaninglessness of existence, and such as fosters anti-social inclinations justifying the negation of morality and principles" (np). Similarly, Langford quotes Nietzsche as he complies that 'God is dead' (Langford 1). According to him God's absence or presence makes no significant difference for human existence. Nietzsche

recognized the human condition without God's existence and clearly stated that humanity is dangerously on its own (Langford 1).

To answer the assertions against existential philosophy this research intends to quote and discuss Sartre, De Beauvoir, and Victor Frankl to highlight the positive aspects of existentialism. Victor Frankl (1985) believed that the Light Triad could overcome the Triad of Death as he states that freedom of will, will to meaning, and meaning of life can overcome suffering and guilt (Frankl Theory of Logotherapy). Simone de Beauvoir inverts the pessimist claims against existentialism. Beauvoir states that not only do we assert that the existentialist doctrine permits the elaboration of ethics, but it even appears to us as the only philosophy in which ethics has its place" (Beauvoir 13). Sartre focuses on the "free organic individual" (Flynn 10). According to him, existentialism is a philosophy of a concrete individual; everything is based on choices and their consequences.

Researchers have focused on Paulo Coelho's works through the lens of pessimist existentialism. However, this study intends to focus on the existential thematic coherence of the four selected novels, as it will unravel the power of freedom of choice within the ethical boundaries and focus on the positive aspects of existential philosophy by substantiating it with De Beauvoir's *Existentialism* and Frankl's *Logotherapy*.

1.2. Paulo Coelho and His Existential Interweaving in Texts

Coelho constantly uses existential tropes in his works, which include Frankl's free will, Sartre's freedom of choice, responsibility, existential depression, anxiety, nothingness leading to meaningfulness, authenticity, spirituality, and enlightenment. Coelho's characters and their journeys are the epitome of the quests to find meaning, knowledge, love, and human connection in life. "Coelho diffuses existential issues through the stories of the novels without being deeply philosophical and making it easy for every reader to untie the knots of

life and live every moment of it” (183). Coelho’s famous works include *The Alchemist* (1988), *Eleven Minutes* (2003), *Brida* (1990), *The Pilgrimage* (1987), *Veronika Decides to Die* (1998), and *The Winner Stands Alone* (2008). Coelho has probed into the human psyche and emotions; he tracked down universal secrets and portrayed them in a simplified language for each individual to understand.

His use of symbols like omens, dreams, personal legend, traditions of the Sun and the Moon, love, sixth sense, guilt, conscience, sexual desires, and unexpected complicated events in his character’s lives interweave with existential tropes. This research intends to explore the selected novels, including *Veronika Decides to Die* (1998), *Brida* (1990), *Eleven Minutes* (2003), and *The Winner Stands Alone* (2008) to deduce the existential tropes that Coelho interweaves throughout the text. These characteristics include existential loneliness, anger, depression, anxiety, and the burden of positivism. Paulo Coelho portrays existential characteristics in his texts in a positive manner. He highlights the burdens of human existence and shapes his stories in a manner in which they reflect the power of practicing freedom of choice.

1.2.1. *Veronika Decides to Die* (1998)

Coelho crams existential depression in Veronika’s character and leads her to learn to practice her freedom of choice. This study explores Veronika’s struggle of beating existential depression as she makes some grave and some life altering choices in life. *Veronika Decides to Die* is a text that reflects insanity, anxiety, depression, and mental disorders resulting from repression and being left unheard. The story revolves around Veronika, Eduard, Mari and Zedka. Coelho has depicted the shackles of society, the need for love and parental pressures that can drive a person crazy and delusional. Veronika becomes a victim of existential depression and tries to commit suicide, though her unfortunate fate turns fortunate for her

when she ends up being rescued and finds herself in a mental hospital, Vilete. Veronika's parents restrict her from pursuing her passion and nudge her to become a librarian for an apparently respectable future which pushes her into absurdity and depression, which ultimately leads her toward attempting suicide. Veronika's attempted suicide has two philosophical reasons the first one was old age and irreversible physical scars and wrinkles and the second one was the feeling of powerlessness, that everything around her was wrong in the world and she had no power to make it right (Coelho 11). As the text proceeds, she watches life unfold itself in a completely different manner before her suicide, which strengthens her idea that freedom of choice and owning oneself can bring extraordinary positive changes to life, and there at Vilete, she finds the one true love of her life, her hope to live life to its fullest.

1.2.2. *Brida* (1990)

Paulo Coelho in *Brida* continually highlights the protagonist's strong will to pursue her passion. He adheres to existential philosophy in an optimistic manner. Coelho's character Brida practices her freedom of choice and stands firm in the face of chaos and crises. The text *Brida*'s story revolves around witchcraft. It includes rituals associated with witchcraft, such as the tradition of the Sun, and the tradition of the Moon. The protagonist Brida is a self-centered woman driven in life to find meaning and purpose through the art of magic, and to learn the mysterious secrets of life. She encounters two teachers in her journey who help her unleash her potential and learn to dive into the subconscious. Brida wends her way to witchcraft, and life tests her with love, sleep, anger, anxiety, mystery, fear, and resilience.

The teachers, Magus and Wicca, and her boyfriend, Lorens, play a vital role in Brida's transformation. Her journey requires the practice of certain rituals and the courage to face her fears. She also had to learn to read the tarot cards, and then experience

heightened sexual intimacy to open doors for her initiation into witchcraft. “What propels a person toward this ecstasy are the five senses. The more the senses are stimulated, the stronger will be the drive toward ecstasy and the more powerful the ecstasy” (Coelho 54).

Paulo Coelho has vividly highlighted the dire need for love and purpose in one’s life.

Simultaneously, Brida’s last test before she could practice being a witch was to choose between two men.

1.2.3. Eleven Minutes (2003)

Paulo Coelho in *Eleven Minutes* creates Maria’s character in a manner where rational and irrational choices make her take responsibility for all her actions as she works as a sex worker. Maria is a prostitute and opts for this profession by choice. Coelho celebrates the story of a woman who becomes a prostitute by free will, to experience human nature, explore sexual intimacy, earn enough money to buy a piece of land, and start her own business, all of it to become independent and practice free will. Maria’s adolescence’s inability to be decisive enough provokes her to make some rational and mostly irrational choices in her early twenties.

Coelho has dotted on the need for human connection and understanding. Through the plot of *Eleven Minutes*, Coelho highlights loneliness and emptiness through her character. Maria shuns herself from falling in love; she stays professional, studies pleasure, and follows the rules of prostitution professionally. Until Maria encounters Terence and learns about sadomasochism (BDSM), Maria learns new ways of pleasure paired with pain and disrespect. Her need for emotional attachment increases, and she falls in love with Ralf Hart, a worldwide-known artist who loves her in a way that a woman admires and longs for. The quest to find love, a soulmate, and a personal legend is one of the most prominent themes in Coelho’s texts.

1.2.4. *The Winner Stands Alone* (2008)

The Winner Stands Alone is a dark tale of obsession with worldly desires such as fame, power, money, class, and love. Coelho highlights the role of power and unrealistic dreams, which may cause a person to surpass the boundaries of morality and ethics. Through the characters of Igor, Eva, Hamid, and Gabriella, Coelho traverses the journeys of psychopathy and dark desires that originate from the need to live a life full of superficiality.

The characters in the text are head over heels obsessed with, the quest of achieving their dreams. Igor desires to win his ex-wife back, and his need makes him commit murders as long it serves him right. Eva's life revolves around fashion, clothes, fame, and travelling worldwide. Hamid is a business mogul and the second husband of Eva. He becomes a part of the ultimate race of fame and power. Lastly, Gabriella's goal is to become a well-known high-end celebrity. Coelho has highlighted the self-destructive mindset of the super-class and the dire consequences of being blindfolded towards the morality of life.

1.3. Research Methodology:

This research intends to play between Sartre's idea of existentialism, Simon De Beauvoir's idea of feminist existentialism and Victor Frankl's idea of Logotherapy. The research intends to weave its fabric by drawing from these groundworks, and seeks to elucidate the complexity of human nature, freedom to make a choice, and to be courageous enough to responsibly own the consequences. According to Sartre, human freedom is radical and human beings have the choice of creating their own essence through their actions and decisions. His concept of existentialism plays between 'Authenticity and 'Bad Faith'. According to him individuals either have a choice to shape a life they desire or they can exercise bad faith and deny freedom to themselves. Exercising bad faith nullifies their desired

identity formation. On contrary to this concept, the current research aims to analyze Coelho's characters and their practice of Freedom of Choice.

Secondly, the next chapter intends to utilize Simone De Beauvoir's Existential Feminism and extract the idea of freedom and autonomy of women from the selected novels. Beauvoir unveils the patriarchal truth and oppression of a woman's individuality. The rationale of this research to use Simone De Beauvoir's existential feminism roots itself in the observation that Coelho has surpassed the representation of women in number, than that of men in the novels selected for this research. Moreover, this research also highlights Simone's 'Ethics of Ambiguity', power of freedom and rejection of traditional notions.

Last but not least, the research inculcates Victor Frankl's 'Logotherapy' in the last chapter. The theory emphasizes on finding meaning and purpose in life. Logotherapy as a theatrical framework gives insight about resilience and sense of identity formation especially during the phases of existential crises. In addition to this and similar to the idea of Sartre's Freedom of Choice, Frankl suggests that individuals possess complete freedom over their responses towards complicated and somewhat unwanted situations in life. He is of the view that sometimes the only way to face unavoidable suffering is to select a certain kind of attitude to help one out of miserable circumstances.

Jean-Paul Sartre argues that "existence precedes essence" (np), which states that birth does not shape the life story of human beings. The choices and experiences that humans choose to undergo shape it, and it also comes hand in hand with the responsibility of the consequences. Existential philosophy got the nod as a pessimist's approach. It includes the feeling of loneliness, crises, nothingness, absurdity, and nihilism. This research nevertheless intends to explore the optimistic tendencies of this approach, the use of existential psychotherapy, and the concept of freedom, which frees an individual from positivism and

the rapacity of societal, social, and parental mores. “Sartre thought that existence manifests itself in the choice of actions, anxiety, and freedom of the will” (Bhandari 1). It focuses on existential themes in Paulo Coelho’s selected novels: *Veronika Decides to Die*, *Eleven Minutes*, *Brida*, and *The Winner Stands Alone*. This study is qualitative research. The current study explores individuals and their sense of surroundings and circumstances by tracking down their practice of freedom of choice. The essence of this research is directed towards the significance of finding meaning in the absurdity and nothingness of life, by analyzing the existential expeditions of the chosen characters. The characters include Veronika from Ljubljana Slovenia to Villette (the lunatic asylum), the journey of the protagonist Maria from Brazil to Rio de Janeiro, Brida’s quest for knowledge and her journey in Ireland, and Igor’s dark spiral of psychopathy and his expedition in the Cannes Festival in southern France. The data resources in this research assert the connection of existentialism and its link to freedom of choice. Furthermore, the current study intends to use the chosen novels as the primary data and internet sources, such as research articles, and books on literary theory and philosophy by relevant theorists and philosophers, respectively, as supporting data. The findings of this research are kept ethically considerate because the subject of the current study is highly respectable in the contemporary era.

1.4. Research Questions

- 1.4.1. What perspectives does Sartre's positive existentialism offer on contrary to the prevailing pessimistic existentialist framework?
- 1.4.2. Which existential themes show consistency across Coelho's novels?
- 1.4.3. How do the protagonists in these texts find purpose and meaning through their existential expeditions and freedom of choice?

1.4.4. What is the concept of Logotherapy (existential psychotherapy), and how does it contribute to the contemporary world?

2. Literature Review

Paulo Coelho is a wide-read author and highlights existential themes throughout his works. He is a flagbearer of existentialism. Lisa Vallejos cites Coelho, “the culture is crying out for vivification, for enlightenment, and to awaken and to transform” (Vallejos np). She further states, that there is a dire need for the spread of this philosophy around the globe for people to understand the importance of freedom of choice and responsibility (Vallejos). Similarly, Yogesh Sarathi states that Coelho’s characters remain optimistic throughout their journeys and stand firm in the face of chaos. He further says, “Life never gives a person only one color, it’s full of grey, black, and white shades” (806). Moreover, Vijay More explains Coelho’s philosophical vision, as “he believes that one must dare to have a different identity” (More 4). He explains that Paulo dared madness in his characters. Each individual who dares to break the conventional rules and roles of society is a lunatic (More 3). In addition to More’s point of view, the following research intends to explore the significant optimism and resilience in Coelho’s chosen characters for this research i.e. Veronika from *Veronika Decides to Die*, Maria from *Eleven Minutes*, Brida O’Fern from *Brida*, and Igor from *The Winner Stands Alone*.

Coelho births existential characters and themes in his texts. Similar to More’s concept, Bandyopadhyay quotes Coelho, he states that people need to understand the demand for existential psychotherapy and for that, they need to understand and analyze the works of existentialism (Bandyopadhyay 2). He explains that everything to this day is a result of decisions taken by individuals, rather it is the choices made by individuals in their past according to their circumstances (1). His take reflects on the potential of decision-making, which shapes and reshapes the course of life for human beings. Coelho through his works brings back existentialism by repeatedly using an individual’s art of decision-making and the conscious practice of freedom of choice.

This research explores Coelho's connection to existentialism, freedom of choice, and individualism adhering to Sartre's philosophy of existentialism. Sartre pens down the aphorism of existentialism in his essay 'Existentialism is Humanism', he is of the view that existentialism makes every man responsible for his existence. Each individual is responsible for his possessions, and the responsibility of his existence relies squarely on his shoulders. Moreover, when Sartre says that a man is responsible for himself, it does not only mean that he is responsible for solely his existence, it also means that the decisions and choices he makes affect others around him as well. He is of the view that when a man makes a choice, he chooses humankind (3). Sartre dotes on individual experiences, and building on his philosophy this research aims to explore how decisions made by Veronika, Maria, Brida, and Igor shaped their lives and affected others around them.

In addition to freedom of choice, this study counters the pessimist claims attached to existentialism by highlighting the optimistic viewpoint associated with the respective philosophy. An objection to existentialism is that extreme individualism as existentialism portrays can be a threat to ethics. Charles says existentialism suggests absurdity in everyday life by rejecting the fixed binding principle under the motto of 'anything goes' (Charles np). Contrary to this belief, this research aims to shed light on the optimistic tendencies of this philosophy as portrayed in Coelho's novels and their protagonists. To support this, the following research adheres to Beauvoir's concept that "not only do we assert that the existentialist doctrine permits the elaboration of an ethics, but it even appears- to us as the only philosophy in which an ethics has its place" (Beauvoir 13). Another objection to existentialism is the 'will to freedom' and its non-existent concrete action. Simone de Beauvoir expresses a contrary belief to this objection as she says, "Ethics is the triumph of freedom over facticity" (18). To counter these claims against existentialism this research

intends to use Beauvoir's concept of ethics, that freedom does not play a role in unethical behaviour on the part of an individual; rather it becomes the grounds of morality.

Subsequently, the first selected novel in this research *Veronika Decides to Die*, is full of existential concepts such as depression, alienation, and freedom of choice. Sundari and Rashika, highlight the abnormalities of the psyche; they are of the view that a degraded society can breach existential trauma and terror, which in return can make a man powerless and a victim of identity crises (41). The article further explains the psychological aberrations of Veronika that she found herself amid a boundlessly meaningless routine. Veronika's mother leaves her feeling unheard and rips her off her passion for piano, which consequently pushes Veronika to the edge of absurdity. "Quiet significantly, when the existential agony remains unnoticed, the tormented psyche is exploded" (41). According to Sundari et al., unheard cries for help result in psychological problems and feelings of hopelessness, alienation, and loneliness, which then consequently brings inevitable damage. However, building on their argument this study intends to explore the recovery of psychological trauma through the practice of freedom of choice and quest for meaning in life.

Moreover, Kanchana and Saha state the discovery of freedom and understanding the concept of choice and responsibility accompanied by authenticity. Existentialism highlights the damaging effects of societal rigidity on individuals' personal lives. The novel brings out the role of society in curtailing individual interests and Paulo Coelho scripts his own experiences where his parents send him to an asylum for not acquiescing to be an engineer instead of a writer (3). The purpose of the current research through the character of Veronika is to unveil the impending doom in an individual's life, which occurs after unheard screams at the end of parents and society. Fika Alfianti Aljannah highlights Adler's theory of 'Individual psychology' and the power of the creative self, "people's freedom allows them to reshape their goals and thereby change their lives. It is because they want to change their lives, so

they will learn new attitude” (133). Furthermore, she explains the concept of an inferiority complex in which individuals have a poor sense of themselves and their life, neglecting experiences and high but unrealistic future goals can instil a person with unmet needs and future hopelessness (138-139). According to Aljannah, psychological aberrations can embed an inferiority complex and low self-esteem in an individual. Whereas, this research focuses on Veronika’s ability to retrieve her power and confidence after suffering from suicidal depression.

The article *Negation of Volition: A Critical Study of Veronika Decides to Die*, highlights that “Freedom of choice and free will are the qualities that distinguish human beings from other creatures” (Iqbal et al. 794). The young protagonist falls victim to depression whilst she does fine materialistically. Wilfin John states that existential depression is a gifted form of depression associated with individuals who are set to break conventional rules and follow their talents. This kind of depression may end up in the form of isolation, alienation, or even death, nevertheless if channelled correctly it can be advantageous for the victim as well. John states, “Veronika soon develops an urge to live a new life because of her passion (np)”. Building on this argument the following research will explore the journey of Veronika and will portray that freedom of choice plays an important role as a tenant of existentialism and helps emotionally oppressed people find a new will to live.

The second selected text for this research is Coelho’s *Brida*. Coelho has written an intriguing journey of a young passionate and ambitious girl in search of meaning. Kundan Makwana and Dr. S.G. Chauhan, discuss the importance of love, purpose, and philosophical dimensions. “It is truly said that we have to suffer, have to face difficulties and hurdles to get our love, soulmate or any other human being or a thing” (770-772). They are of the view that a human being must have a purpose bigger than self, to make the inevitable suffering look bearable and valid. In addition to this argument, this study intends to traverse the

protagonist's journey and explore free will; freedom of choice, confidence, and the idea of responsibility interweaved by Coelho in the text.

Similarly, Sobia Naseem et al. explore *Brida* through the lens of spiritual intelligence as, "spiritual knowledge is utilized when one should be adaptable, visionary or inventively unconstrained" (8251). She explains the protagonist's instinct to attain something soulfully higher with the help of magic, which leads to higher forms of self-awareness (8253).

Coelho's texts have intense thematic coherence among them as the protagonists written by him are destined to find themselves through self-exploration, self-actualization, and self-reflection. This study intends to traverse the journey of witchcraft, that *Brida* goes through and unravel the existential themes such as finding meaning, and purpose bigger than self in life, understanding the mysteries of the self, the ability of decision-making, overcoming absurdity, and understanding the importance and need of love and a soulmate.

The dire need to find human connection and stability comes with an extreme form of loneliness. Seema Dutta explains the longing and the urge to find a soul mate, she is of the view that that individuals cross each other's paths multiple times until they meet and connect. Substantiating the idea of witchcraft, reincarnation, soulmates, and magic is visualized to prove the existence of a missing other half (95). She mentions the 'Soulmate Theory' according to which "A Soulmate is a person with whom one has a deep affinity. This may involve similarity, love, romance, friendship, comfort, intimacy, sexuality, sexual activity, spirituality, compatibility or trust" (96). She states the reference to a medieval Latin phrase 'Anima Mundi', which means the soul of the universe. Each time an individual finds their soulmate, they ultimately find themselves thus, becoming whole and stronger (99). The current research explores the concept of love and its power to overcome loneliness, in Paulo Coelho's novels and its importance across the world, as well as its dire need among individuals.

Coelho has also tapped into gender roles in his novels. In *Veronika Decides to Die*, Veronika looks for feminine ways to commit suicide so her death does not seem as manly. “Shooting, jumping off a high building, hanging, none of these options suited her feminine nature. Women when they kill themselves choose far more romantic methods like slashing their wrists or taking an overdose of sleeping pills” (Coelho 9). Similarly, Itsna Syahadatud Dinurriyah and Raudlotul Jannah in their article, reinstate the relationship between masculinity and femininity around the world. They are of the view that back in the day men were accepted as magicians but women were rejected as witches. In Coelho’s *Brida*, Magus’s character represents the tradition of the Sun, and that all men belonged to this tradition, and Wicca’s character represents the tradition of the Moon, thus people learned the traditions based not on their interest, but rather on their gender (20). The article further unrolls the role of men as dominating beings in terms of action and sexual intimacy, “it is understood that a man is considered a master of magic since he knows that not everybody comprehends” (23). The following research resonates with the idea of gender roles in a way that a throng of characters under exploration in this study are females. The current research will also explore gender roles using Beauvoir’s concept of feminist existentialism.

The third selected text is *Eleven Minutes*, it is a tale of adventure, love, sensuality, sexuality, and self-discovery. Abia Anwar et al. unveil the dark sect of society comprised of ethically compromised individuals who objectify and humiliate prostitutes for sexual pleasure and gratification. The researchers state, “The problem arises with the categorization of the individuals into two groups, one that represents the standard and possesses the valuable identity, and the other group that has no identity, is devalued and described by its faults” (483). As per the article, the concept of ‘indoctrination’ is stimulated in Maria’s life where she accepts her position as a prostitute and behaves professionally towards the disrespect and inhumanity of the male customers (486). The current study aims to traverse her journey as a

human being and as an individual on the quest to find meaning, and this research aims to humanize the protagonist by exploring the existential elements in her journey of self-discovery. Society plays a vital role in letting individuals dehumanize, marginalize, and alienate individuals with less respectable jobs. Humanizing an individual is a crucial aspect of this research as it unveils optimism and positive aspects of existentialism.

Dr Kumar Gaurav explains the self-destructing qualities a human being can possess and lead themselves to the road of pain and destruction. According to Gaurav, “It was one of Maria’s self-awesome qualities that turned her into a destructor of the soul” (2535). Furthermore, Gaurav highlights Adler’s theory of Individual Mental Viewpoint, according to him, “Individual mental viewpoint has six rudiments in particular inadequacy emotions, endeavouring of prevalence, style of life, and social intrigue, innovative self and the anecdotal world” (2536). Gaurav unveils the universe of a prostitute and her victim psychology, this research intends to unveil Maria’s quest to find a purpose and human connection in life that would provide meaning to her life and rid her of loneliness.

Sexual intimacy plays an important role in most of Coelho’s works. Gian Chand in his journal article, *Sex, Desire and Subjectivity in Paulo Coelho’s Eleven Minutes* unravels femininity and rejection of subjectivity. According to Chand, the women of the modern world have broken the shackles of subjectivity, and ideas like male dominance and sadomasochism are often subjects of laughter and disgust (26). Desire precedes excitement, but societal and religious restrictions impede with will and coil around an individual’s psyche in the form of guilt. Maria’s guilt was due to her religion and her link to the Virgin Mary’s ethical conduct and purity (27). As freedom of choice comes hand in hand with isolation and loneliness, building on this argument this research intends to explore the prior mentioned connection between loneliness and human connection.

Moreover, the article *Commodification of Women in Paulo Coelho's Eleven Minutes* explains women's exploitation and male dominance in a capitalistic society. The treatment of women as sexual objects and demoralization in a patriarchal society devalues the existence of a woman (Ghimire 1). "The novel *Eleven Minutes* represents the pathetic condition of the modern youths especially working class 'women' in modern capitalist society" (2). The character of Maria from *Eleven Minutes* has been widely analyzed through a psychological perspective as well as an alienated, misfit character. In their article *Re-exploring the Soul of Maria in Paulo Coelho's Eleven Minutes*, P. Arul Jothi is of the view that it was Maria's depression and sense of isolation that led her to prostitution (2). Loneliness and isolation tend to be the major driving forces behind existential depression in people and Coelho's characters, "human beings can withstand a week without water... but not loneliness and it is the worst of all tortures, the worst of all sufferings" (Coelho 94). Maria finds herself through self-exploration and love. Jothi further states "Her journey from body consciousness to soul consciousness through the body is, not straight. It has complex ways to lead up to the aim of self-realization, and ultimately the summit has been attained" (4). Jothi has highlighted the consequences of long-term loneliness and its effects on an individual's psyche. Similarly, this research also embeds the same argument and intends to explore loneliness, isolation, and the required courage to get rid of them.

Lastly, Coelho's *The Winner Stands Alone* is one of the most intriguing novels, which highlights human greed, defeat, materialism, psychological angst, and power. Yet this novel stands as an exception among other novels because, unlike the rest of the three, this novel does not end on a successful note, but rather on lessons learned through suffering and failure. Ishora Bhandari uses the approach of postmodernism and post-structuralism to identify subjectivity in the roles of Igor, Eva, and Gabriella. Subjectivity grows on individuals through their experiences of struggle, power, force, capability and quality of life (2).

Subjectivity is a crucial element of the philosophy of existentialism and according to Ishora Bhandari, the traditional notion of predetermined and fixed subjectivity still rules people's life to a great extent. Similarly, the current research explores subjectivity. Contrary to positivism, this study unveils individual subjectivity.

Rawan Aqrabawi in his thesis explores the modern world's obsession with capitalism, fame, money, power, and materialism. According to Aqrabawi, the Elite class, or as we call it the superclass is a mere means of advertisement in front of the world. The reality inside the glorious world is filled with alienation and fragmentation. The superficiality they portray is temporary and rules out the ever-lasting impact of its existence (28). Furthermore, the thesis taps into psychological problems that individuals face when they live in a superficial world such as alienation, isolation, and angst. Similar to this approach, the current study reveals the fragmented emotions of superficiality and consequences of violation and exploitation of freedom of choice.

Moreover, Coelho highlights the price individuals have to pay if they follow their desires heedlessly. Coelho describes Igor, the male protagonist and his quest, as a character who creates his meaning of life by going down a dark spiral of life. "Everyone has a particular idea of the world, and for Igor, killing the person is like destroying the universe, Igor feels like killing is acceptable if there is a good reason for it" (Bhandari 9). Coelho has described the urge for meaning-making as a necessity of life and his characters are destined to climb steep journeys with a risk of falling back. Igor is the view that killing may be acceptable if it's done for good such as negating evil or fulfilling one's dreams. However, this research focuses on practicing freedom of choice whilst maintaining ethical and moral boundaries and without violating the fabric of reality.

Zafar et al. explore the process of learning through experiences. The character Igor wants to destroy the world and build his own because of his anger against his ex-wife. On the

other hand, Gabriella divorces Igor and marries Hamid to materialize her dream of living in a superficial world, though in the end both of them realize that murdering and divorcing is not the way to achieve one's goals and missions (21-23). The current research aims to observe Igor's journey full of murders, angst and revenge and identify psychological disorders associated with existential psychotherapy. It also intends to explore that pessimism, negativity, forcefulness, subjectivity, crises, absurdity and passive psychology bring nothing but chaos if existential tropes such as taking responsibility for one's actions and decisions are practiced with maturity and optimism, that by standing firm in the face of trials and tribulations, it will help in paving the way towards positive freedom. Ethics, morality, control, optimism, decision making and freedom of choice under ethical and respectable circumstances can promote a life free of existential angst and psychological distress.

Coelho through his texts gives out a message that freedom does not mean relinquishing one's self from commitment, rather it means possessing the ability to choose. This research intends to explore Coelho through Sartre, De Beauvoir, and Victor Frankl. Sartre roots his motif that existence precedes essence. In his essay *Man Makes Himself*, Sartre discusses subjectivity. According to the essay, a man is in complete possession of himself. The responsibility of shaping his existence is squarely on his shoulders. If a man chooses himself, it means he is consciously choosing everyone around him as well. "I am thus responsible for myself and all men, and I am creating a certain image of man as I would have him to be. In fashioning myself I fashion man" (5). Choices come with actions, their responsibility, and the consequences of those actions. On the contrary, Nabil bin Imran studies Sartre's existence precedes essence and stands his point against Sartre's philosophy as he states, "Sartre's concept of existence precedes essence, merely means that there is no pre-determined purpose towards humanity's existence . . . The existence of a human being, merely exists without purpose, without essence" (2). He further criticizes Sartre's notion by

putting forth an argument that Sartre's concept of moral direction is nothing but a utopian idea that would drastically fail in everyday life because elements of human nature such as lust, passion, and greed are ever-present (3). Imran suggests that Sartre's philosophy of existence, anguish and the psychology of an individual is full of contradictions. On the contrary, this research reinstates Sartre's positive concept of existentialism.

Sartre answers these objections and further explains his philosophy. He intends to lay off all the allegations set against his philosophy of existentialism and highlights the optimistic tendencies of this approach to life. "What is annoying them is not so much our pessimism, but, much more likely, our optimism" (2). Moreover, Sartre states "What we mean to say is that a man is no other than a series of undertakings, that he is the sum, the organization, the set of relations that constitute these undertakings" (8). This research builds its argument on Sartre's viewpoint that existentialism is not a pessimist's philosophy, rather it puts forth responsibility and freedom based on moral and ethical grounds.

Victor Perton explores Sartre's essay. He says that according to Sartre no other philosophy is more optimistic than the philosophy of existentialism. He further states that existentialism is not a philosophy of quietism or pessimism, but rather an ethic of action and self-commitment. It places the destiny of man within himself and tells him that the one thing which permits him to have life is the deed. In this way, existentialism offers an individual the freedom and responsibility to create their meaning and purpose in life, which can be a source of optimism in the face of life's challenges and uncertainties (Perton np).

Similarly, Singhmar backs Sartre's notion of responsibility and its positive outcome on the lives of individuals. According to her making decisions, taking actions and upholding the consequences of those actions is a concrete idea. "That is precisely the beauty of the philosophy of existentialism, one is rendered entirely free to choose one's actions" (1). Sartre is of the view that instead of making existentialism a pessimist idea that only renders anxiety

about the future, an individual must consider it a positive approach to shape one's life as one wants it to be. This notion leads to Coelho's idea of following one's dreams and breaking through the shackles of society which impede human growth and give rise to existential crises, angst, anxiety, loneliness and depression.

The following research backs Sartre's existentialism with Simon de Beauvoir's concept of existential ethics. Anja Steinbauer in their blog *Simon's Existentialist Ethics*, highlights Beauvoir's point of view. She says that according to Beauvoir no matter the type of situation individuals find themselves in, there is always a choice awaiting. Human life does not work on autopilot, there is not an instruction manual telling human beings to make decisions according to it, rather individuals have the freedom of choice which can only be perfectly used if used ethically (Steinbauer np). Similarly, Ramani Rodriguez explores Beauvoir's concept of existentialism, "Beauvoir, like Sartre, holds that every human is born into this life free, meaning that he is ontologically free and is thus responsible for making his own moral decisions" (2). This research will use Beauvoir's concept of ethical freedom to unveil existential characteristics in Coelho's texts.

Furthermore, Beauvoir explains one's quest in life through existentialist perspective. She states, "starting from an existential fact: the subject's tendency toward alienation; the anxiety of his freedom leads the subject to search for himself in things" (81). Both Sartre and De Beauvoir consider human beings as subjects, individuals with complete authority over life. This research intends to explore this subjectivity based on the personal experiences of the chosen protagonists from Coelho's selected novels.

Another approach in existential philosophy is Logotherapy. Mark Kelland introduces Logotherapy in his book, he explains, "Frankl had begun to recognize three possible ways to find meaning in life: a deed we do or a work we create; a meaningful human encounter, particularly one involving love; and choosing one's attitude in the face of unavoidable

suffering” (Kelland 370). Moreover, the blog *Logotherapy and Existential Analysis* explains the philosophical and psychological triad put together by Victor Frankl i.e. freedom of will, will to meaning, and meaning in life. Freedom of will refers to modelling one’s life within the parameters of given possibilities. Will to meaning points towards the quest of each individual to find meaning in life which is otherwise meaningless, hopeless, and empty. Meaning in life explains the responsibility that squarely lies on the shoulders of human beings through which they give meaning to their life and the lives of others around them (Batthyány np). This research aims to highlight the importance of freedom in one’s life to free it from existential angst, anxiety, and meaninglessness. It will use the connection between existential psychology and Logotherapy and aims to draw a parallel connection between Logotherapy, and the primary texts. It also intends to highlight the essentiality, need, and importance of existential psychotherapy and Logotherapy in the contemporary world.

3. Analysis

3.1. Existential Elevation and Thematic Coherence

An existentialist believes that life's only purpose becomes what one gives to it. Ancient philosophers were of the view that philosophy is not merely something theoretical rather it is a way of life. They had a firm belief that adhering life to philosophy can significantly enhance its quality. Pierre Hadot states that philosophy demands from life is "lived exercise exhibited" on each step of life throughout existence (21). Expanding on this concept Paulo Coelho adheres to this philosophy, according to him individuals must explore their passions and they should delve on the journey of self-exploration. Coelho in his texts has drawn characters who seek spiritual enlightenment and discovery of self, he gives importance to introspection and maturation. In his novels, *Veronika Decides to Die* (1998), *Brida* (1990), *Eleven Minutes* (2003), and *The Winner Stands Alone* (2008), he dotes on individual freedom and insightful self-discovery throughout the texts. Moreover, existential philosophy since ages in its rendered form is negative; contrarily it does not certainly dote on either negativity, hopelessness, nothingness, or purposelessness in life. It merely focuses on freedom of choice through which an individual can choose the course of their life, choices are not always correct and freedom is not always beneficial to life. However, freedom of choice can able people to choose what makes them happy, freedom of choice can help a person walk out of toxic relationships, and freedom of choice can help people choose the limits of their potential.

Sartre provides an exemplified union between philosophy and literature. According to philosophy, the truth is bifurcated among scientific methods and morality. The former needs no self-authenticity to know the truth which is based on empirical data and positivism. On the other hand, existentialistic philosophy focuses on moral truth. Sartre's existentialism anchors

on choosing freedom to practice self-discipline and manner of speech and for an individual to use freedom of choice to shape their life and personality. Thomas Flynn says that Sartre uses Heisenberg's uncertainty principle to prove his point. According to this principle, one cannot accurately measure the speed and position of a particle, neither speed nor position can stand explicitly. It requires an amalgamation of both phenomena to measure a particle (5).

Similarly, to know the truth of life one must consider the validity of experiences and freedom of choice to make meaning of life and find purpose behind one's existence, instead of relying on empirical data formulations and a positivist approach to life, an individual must approach subjectivity.

Sartre's existentialism roots itself in the works of Paulo Coelho. The characters written by Coelho hold a speciality of standing firm in the face of the storm. This section of the research will focus on the journey of four characters i.e. Veronika, Brida, Maria, and Igor from *Veronika Decides to Die*, *Brida*, *Eleven Minutes*, and *The Winner Stands Alone*, respectively. The journey of Veronika traverses from existential depression and existential crises towards finding the will to live in a hospital, Villete where she finds her long-lost passion of becoming a pianist, and Edward; her one true love. The journey of Brida traverses from being an ambition-driven girl to a witch, a woman who comes to choose between her soulmates and her duty. The journey of Maria traverses from a girl who once lost her childhood love and became a prostitute, to a woman who finds true love in a world she thinks, lacks all kinds of human connection. Lastly, the journey of Igor, a male protagonist who thinks he can achieve whatever he will if he can keep on justifying his murder rampage in the name of freedom of choice.

3.3.1. *An Individual's Quest*

Sartre upholds his philosophy of existentialism majorly on the quest for freedom. In *Existentialism is Humanism* he states, "the actions of men of good faith have, as their

ultimate significance, the quest of freedom itself as such” (12). According to him every being, in each moment of their life, comes across some sort of choice that they intentionally or unintentionally have to make. An individual must make choices to give meaning to their life and to escape from the feelings of purposelessness and nothingness, one must have something to look forward toward, a goal to live and strive for. Coelho is the view that when someone wants something, possesses a purpose or desires to have something, the whole universe helps him achieve it (Coelho np). This concept leads toward the concept of high-quest individuals, these individuals are deemed to explore and struggle in the journey of their life and come across existential concerns. According to existential philosophy, people must create and recreate their journey in its entirety. It is done when people set themselves off on quests in life to find the purpose behind their existence. A purpose bigger than self

In the text *Veronika Decides to Die*, Coelho defines the urgency and dire need to find a purpose in life that heeds individuals to live their lives and cherish all kinds of moments i.e. moments of love, ecstasy, success, relationships, conversations, sunsets, and sunrise, and the moments of intimacy. This can prevent an individual from falling into the trap of absurdity and purposelessness. Coelho in the text highlights the existential view of life as he jots down “Wouldn’t you say that trying to understand life was the real problem?” (Coelho 85). In the novel, Veronika understands her purpose in life and asks her doctor to let her get out of the hospital so she can enjoy what is left of her life. Veronika’s new found Quest in life was that she had to squeeze every ounce of happiness and fulfilment out of life for herself. Similarly, in *Brida*, Coelho describes the protagonist’s obsession with finding her purpose through the art of witchcraft. S. Suganya et al. highlight that Brida finds herself leaning towards magic and mysticism. Her passion is to learn the hidden secrets of the universe, and in addition to this, the same journey also becomes a quest for her (3). Sartre talks about purpose, he states that man can only authenticate his existence when he becomes what he intends to become

(Sartre 3). Coelho depicts that people who intend to become questers in life believe in the fact that the universe will help them achieve what they intend to achieve.

Furthermore, in *Eleven Minutes*, Maria's quest is to earn money and become a strong independent woman who can own a piece of land and make decisions for her life for herself. Maria's quest after becoming a prostitute was "to find herself, to find that woman ... who was full of light wisdom, experience and charm" (77). Lastly, in *The Winner Stands Alone*, the quest of the protagonist is to get his ex-wife back at all costs. "He wanted them to get back together again and not to allow a little word like "goodbye" to erase their whole past" (Coelho 224). Igor's quest was intentionally a quest but it differed from other protagonists because for him destroying worlds and killing people in the way was a part of his duty. Jean-Paul Sartre's existential philosophy focuses on creating meaning in life, which means to practice freedom and decide for one's self. Coelho's *The Winner Stands Alone* differs from other texts in a manner that the protagonist of the text practices freedom of choice without adhering to the ethical boundaries of humanity. For this purpose, in the following chapters, this research will explore the necessity of ethics and morals while practicing freedom of choice.

Another attention-grabbing aspect of this perspective is Coelho's personal life and his quest to find meaning in life. In most of his writings, Coelho's personal life takes a peek into his character's lives. For instance, Veronika is a woman who had to destroy her wishes of becoming a pianist and had to become a librarian for the sake of her parents. Similarly, Coelho had to withstand the wrath of his parents just because he wanted to be a writer and according to his parents writers cannot secure a stable financial and respectable position in society. Geetha et al. in their article 'Expression of personal experience in the novels of Paulo Coelho', explain a similarity between Coelho and Veronika's life, they state that "the book touches on one of the significant experiences of Coelho. He recollects his experiences in the

mental hospital, the electroshock therapy, the violence of his father and his relationship with his parents” (100). Moreover, Coelho had three failed marriages before he married Christina Oticia. This concept of finding more than one soul mate in a lifetime is reflected in his novel *Brida*. Most of Coelho’s novels portray the picture of an individual setting on a quest to find meaning in life and studying the signs of the universe for help. Sartre is of the view that nothing holds meaning in the universe for a man except for what he creates for himself out of his freedom (Bhandhari np). Coelho’s books carry the same existential messages as Sartre, which help people understand that it is possible to choose the face of difficulty. Coelho himself fulfilled his dream of becoming a writer, not just a writer but one with the most following worldwide.

3.3.2. *The Search for a Soulmate and Love*

The search for a soulmate is another important recurrent theme found in Coelho’s works. Loneliness can be a real torture for individuals to endure. “To live alone one must be either a beast or a god, says Aristotle” (Flynn 41). All the characters under study in this research intend to find human connection i.e., their soulmate. A soulmate must become a part of an individual’s life to make it fulfilling and satisfactory. According to the philosophy of existentialism, an individual is free to give meaning to their life, to fall in love with the person next door, or to travel across the world and find someone to fall in love with. Monica McCarthy in her podcast quotes Sartre. She states that it requires a lot of energy, will power, generosity and blindness to start loving someone. Sartre is of the view that sometimes an individual has to jump off into an abyss and if by chance the person starts to think about it, then he might not jump (McCarthy np). In *Veronika Decides to Die*, the concept of love changes Veronika’s view on life, she urges herself to have an intimate relationship with Eduard, her feelings of existential nothingness and the viewpoint on life that it is nothing but

an amalgamation of infuriating and frustrating happenings one after another takes a turn after the intimate attachment between her and the man she falls in love with. “tonight I played for you like a woman in love. It was wonderful. It was the best moment of my life” (Coelho 112). Veronika discovers that the key to living a happy life is to choose to be happy and to live significantly in the most insignificant moments. Love transforms her life and makes her want to visit all the places she adored and enjoy all the little things she had missed out on in the days of her depression. “I want to feel the rain on my face... I want to kiss my mother tell her I love her... I want to give myself to one man, to life and finally to death” (Coelho 119). Her anger, frustration, and hatred take the shape of small fantasies waiting to be fulfilled.

In the novel *Brida*, the concept of a soulmate is explored ecstatically. Coelho highlights the Greek concept of Anima Mundi (soul of the world). According to this concept, all living beings in the world are connected just like a soul is connected to a body. In the process of finding one’s soul mate a person finds love and thus discovers the purpose of being. “as well as dividing into two we also find ourselves... because when a soul divides, it always divides into a male and female part” (Coelho 19). Brida’s teachers i.e. The Magus and Wicca, and her boyfriend Lorens teach her about the true sense of love. At one point in life, each one of us is destined to encounter our soulmates. Coelho in the text depicts the yearning of souls that during reincarnations the souls divide in two just like crystals, plants, cells, and stars. “in each life, we feel a mysterious obligation to find at least one of those soulmates” (19). Individuals struggle to find people as their soul mates who metaphorically make it easy to communicate, understand and comprehend life for each other. It is only when we find our soulmates, we understand the universe.

The third text *Eleven Minutes* focuses on human connection and the urge of piecing together with solely one soul among millions of others. “When we meet someone and fall in love, we have a sense that the whole universe is on our side” (8). Maria since her childhood

feels a strange curiosity about human connection, the need to have intimacy of all kinds i.e. emotional, sexual and intellectual. In her adolescence, Maria was sure that love was not for her, and neither she could have the luxury of finding her soul mate. She despised love and considered it as a wretched thing which burdens and tortures people for no apparent reason. She took on prostitution on a professional level and explored human connection, understood the loneliness and dire need of the body and soul to find familiarity and affection. Coelho unravels the deepest secrets of the heart and its yearning to find love. Her apparent hatred for love crushed her soul with loneliness and isolation unless she met Ralf Hart (the painter and the love of her life), “the art of love is like your painting. It requires technique, patience and practice... boldness and courage” (146). Sartre is of the view that love is like throwing yourself off of a cliff, it requires a lot of courage, an individual never knows where is he going to settle, or if he is going to settle at all (Cleary np). Maria realized that in an apparently stone-hearted world love exists, soul mates exist and people can fall in love with dignity and grace regardless of their profession, and the act itself requires a lot of courage.

The Winner Stands Alone is a slightly different novel than the ones explored above, in this text, the characters play the game of love to achieve what they desire the most but in reality, each soul desires to be loved and fears being left alone. Igor, the protagonist of the text makes it the endeavor of his life to get his ex-wife back because he loved her and had vowed to be with her till death did them part. His twisted sense of love makes him kill people. “he must find someone he can sacrifice in the name of love” (Coelho 19). Coelho draws a storyline equipped with multiple minor characters, including Ewa, Gabriella, Hamid and Javits as each one of them struggles to find a connection in the masked world of the luxury class. According to Igor, every soul he kills is asked one haunting question and that is if they had loved when they were alive “for that is the essence of life, the ability to love” (Coelho 52). Sartre talks about authentic love, he is of the view that love destroys and

threatens an individual's freedom (Berenpas np). This means that Igor's search for love demanded him to destroy multiple universes to make him believe that he was capable of doing anything if it meant to have Ewa by his side. Coelho in this text has highlighted the importance of love. Yet, he is adamant in explaining that like other decisions, love also requires ethical and moral boundaries to make it authentic and secure.

3.3.3. *Existential Angst, Anxiety, and Loneliness*

Existentialism as a philosophy deals with deeply embedded psychological issues in human beings; it highlights the constant state of anxiety, fear, and loneliness. Shaun Gallagher states that

Existential loneliness is sometimes characterized as involving a default state of incommunicability because it is based on a fundamental ontological or transcendental structure – a profound intrinsic absence – in human existence, something that we may be inclined to hide from ourselves. Accordingly, some theorists claim that the human being is ultimately, necessarily, and forever lonely in such a way that any attempt to escape this loneliness results in self-alienation (Gallagher 1).

Furthermore, existential angst is an inevitable condition that every human being suffers from. The response to frustrating and challenging situations in life determines the level of authenticity in an individual. People try to hide from the bone-breaking burden of angst, some try to commit to social conformity, some try to hide it by becoming workaholics and some find other distractions but the only way to defeat this angst is to face the freedom of choice.

Paulo Coelho portrays existential angst and the pain of existence in *Veronika Decides to Die*. Coelho through the character of Veronika exemplifies that if an individual loses sight of the purpose in their life, they are least likely to survive, let alone live a fulfilling life. Veronika becomes a victim of existential depression. She is a woman with the passion of becoming a pianist but is reduced by her parents to become a librarian, apparently for a respectable future. The novel begins with a note on absurdity in the life of Veronika. She had two reasons to end her life. Apparently absurd reasons, yet psychologically serious i.e. there is no point in growing up to reach old age, where all one can have is a deteriorating body, no extended family or friends, a husband who might have cheated various times throughout the marriage and kids who would not need her as often when they grow up. Moreover, the second reason according to her was more philosophical, which was that everything in the world is wrong, and she had no way to make it right for herself or people around the world, “that gave her the sense of complete powerlessness” (Coelho 11). These reasons were valid enough to solidify her decision to attempt suicide, “that is why she had chosen suicide, freedom at last, eternal oblivion” (Coelho 12). Her need to fix things around her, to experience things according to the wish of her heart and not being able to manifest it and her dire need to keep her pain within herself riled Veronika with angst, depression, and feelings of nothingness and powerlessness.

In Emily Young’s movie, ‘*Veronika Decides to Die*’, the protagonist confronts her doctor and screams not-so-absurd thoughts aloud. The thoughts which are kept locked inside of a person for a long time tend to take the shape of rage, hatred, betrayal, angst, anxiety, fear and feelings of loneliness and alienation. “Fine. I hate your stupid desk. I hate your ugly ties... I hate my parents for spending their last penny to keep me in this zoo... and more than anything I hate the zombies on the subway who have forgotten all their dreams or the fact that they ever had any to begin with” (Young 00:40:43). The states of existential crises and

existential depression made the protagonist realize that life has no meaning and no purpose. A high-end paying job and even parents who cover their invalidation and manipulation through the simple act of care and love make no sense, especially when an individual feels empty inside.

In the novel *Eleven Minutes*, Maria experiences detachment and loss of human connection throughout her life. As a young girl, like every other teenager, she had the fantasy of experiencing a fairytale saga of love with a prince charming and a beautiful feeling of unending enchantment. Despite her fantasies, she fails miserably at any shot of love life throws at her until she decides to become a prostitute and experience human connection on professional terms, consequently ruling out the basic human need i.e. emotional attachment and validation. For this purpose, she had to numb all her emotions, needs and desires to be valued, respected and explored at the same time. “She put aside her feelings, she stopped crying every night, and she forgot all about the person she used to be ... feelings could wait” (Coelho 25). Michelle Carter describes Nietzsche’s concept of loneliness that it can bring a human being toward the abyss and can force an individual to decide the course of their life. These decisions help to negate the feeling of unpleasant subjectivity that comes from feeling lonely among millions of other individuals. A person may choose an act to amuse themselves, to judge, or to drown in work just to stop themselves from facing the bitter truth of loneliness (Carter np). Coelho in *Eleven Minutes* describes Maria’s loneliness as

She knew she was not the only person who felt lonely. Human beings can withstand a week without water, two weeks without food, and many years of homelessness, but not loneliness. It is the worst of all tortures, the worst of all sufferings (Coelho 51).

Loneliness is a state that each individual faces at least once in a lifetime. Coelho has portrayed this emotion throughout his works. The character of Maria, whilst being a

prostitute is the depiction of the natural human state in the face of loneliness and misery. As mentioned above in Nietzsche's concept of loneliness, Maria hides her misery with her profession and endures in silence. Similar to the character of Veronika, Maria experiences uncertain bouts of the future. She looks at a group of young individuals laughing, talking, and living as if no worries plague their lives. Her first thought goes to their future filled with real-life frustrations and a boring meaningless life without the tinge of satisfaction. "Work, marriage, children, television, bitterness, old age, frustrations... loneliness and death" (86). Existential philosophy portrays the uncertainties of the human mind and its ability to make a person feel lonely, anxious about the future, and most of the time hopeless.

The novel *Brida* depicts Brida O'Fern and her journey full of uncertainties, anxieties, and fervent decisions. Brida's connection with her teachers of the tradition i.e. tradition of the Sun and the tradition of the Moon, unveils the enigmatic yet evident mysteries of human nature. Paulo Coelho has illustrated fear, angst, bouts of anxiety, and loneliness through this text. Brida as a passionate individual sets herself on the quest of finding meaning in life. Coelho has depicted the anxieties that weigh on people's minds; these people intend to shoulder the responsibility of their future. William M. Arnett, in his book 'Existentialism in the thought of Bultman and Tillich' talks about existential anxiety, "It is a state of anxiety or indecision-the anxiety of deciding whether to preserve his innocence or whether to experience actuality through knowledge, power, and guilt" (34). Brida's quench for knowledge of witchcraft, to learn about the hidden mysteries of the universe, about her gift, and to experience love entangles her in a web of anxieties.

She had to spend a night stranded alone in a forest, abandoned by her teacher the Magus. He taught her that each individual goes through certain phases in life, "he too had to go through the anxiety of making decisions" (173). Brida during her journey of witchcraft had to learn to read the tarot cards, she had to learn to stay patient whilst she waited for

Wicca to teach her about the gift of witchcraft. “But she also remembered her meeting with the Teacher. She tried to master her feelings of shame and fear and anxiety— they would always be with her, and she must get used to them” (Coelho 204). Existential anxiety refers to feelings of unease and instability associated with future events. Hanscomb et al. in their dissertation address anxiety as “the anxiety most existentialists are concerned with is phenomenologically unlike 'worry' or 'fear' or 'panic'” (9). Brida’s quest was an unending urge to learn about the world of witchcraft, to experience the sub-conscious realms, and to make decisions despite the fear and anxiety of their consequences as her bravery is to persevere in the face of difficulty. Existential anxiety manifests itself in the form of fear of the future, fear of isolation, fear of death, fear of events going wrong in the near future, or the fear of consequences of the decisions taken. “Choosing a path meant having to miss out on others. She had a whole life to live, and she was always thinking that, in the future, she might regret the choices she made now” (37). In this novel, Paulo Coelho has depicted existential anxiety making its roots in Brida’s journey into witchcraft as she learns to love and let go, to experience complicated and unexpected events, and then to stand firm despite the continuous bouts of anxiety.

The Winner Stands Alone depicts loneliness, angst, anxiety, fear, and isolation in a slightly different manner than other novels of Coelho. The text picturizes the Cannes film festival and innumerable amount of people masking their real lives just to adjust to the extravagant fluorescence of the elite class. Igor, the protagonist of the novel stands by the point of view that a man who can stand alone amidst the storms of life is always the Winner. “Igor has no one to talk to, nor does he want to, the winner stands alone” (Coelho 5). His belief revolved around conquering the world on his terms even if it meant destroying other people’s worlds. John T. Bennet in his paper ‘Inner gnawing, outward clawing- the role of existential crises in crime causation’, highlights Dollard’s theory of Frustration-Aggression,

he is of the view that aggression can be displaced and expressed in altered form or can “be directed towards individuals who were not the source of frustration” (1). Coelho through the character of Igor has depicted that existential crises do not always end up in the saddened or isolated form of suicidal depression, rather they can manifest themselves in the form of passive aggression and it can cause a person to spiral down the dark path of psychopathy. Other than the character of Igor, Coelho has penned down existential loneliness and anxiety through the story of other minor characters.

Ewa the ex-wife of the protagonist is a woman who feels alone and deeply saddened by the absence of her husband as he tries his best to win the best of luxuries that life can offer. Regardless of an immeasurable amount of luxury and money, she felt trapped in the role of a homemaker and wanted out. “She couldn’t stand the empty existence she was leading; if she wouldn’t do something soon, she would go mad” (Coelho 89). Another prominent character Coelho writes about is the character of Gabriela. A young woman in her mid-twenties faces days of struggle before landing herself amidst a group of high-end celebrities. Coelho has depicted uncertainty, fear, anxiety, and insecurities in his text to elucidate the sword that hangs above the heads of people who try to make choices for their existence. “The fear of the unknown becomes a dread that she might never have the chance to discover what it means to be here” (264). Javits is a minor yet important character in the story of *The Winner Stands Alone*, he is portrayed as a money tycoon, a rebel with a cause, and he is an important figure of the superclass as he has the luxury of making and ruining the lives of people with whom he pleases and displeases. Despite his authorial position, the most basic question that engulfed his life was “What does being normal mean?” (47), he kept a list of all the things people deemed normal like being ambitionless, being practical rather than believing in love, comparing one’s self to other people and several other things (49). Coelho

describes that even money and all the luxuries in the world cannot buy a person out of loneliness and the feeling of being empty inside.

3.3.4. Sartre's Freedom of Choice and Paulo Coelho

Jean-Paul Sartre forks his philosophical division as mentioned above in Literature Review into two categories i.e. being in itself and being for itself. The phenomena of being in itself denote the things which exist as they are, the objects which cannot mould or persona-shift themselves, these things include rocks, chairs, mountains and paper, etc. Moreover, the individuals who consider themselves a part of the phenomenon of being in itself confine themselves to bad faith. Bad faith for a man means to turn his back on himself and reduce one's self to nothing but a mere object. For example, if a person dictates himself to be a waiter at a restaurant and believes that he might never become something more, in that moment he defines himself as being in himself and kneels to bad faith (Manzi 5). On the other hand, the phenomena of being for 'itself' refers to human beings, the individuals who tend to believe themselves as subjective beings, individuals who encompass freedom of choice and liberty to exist and decide. Elijah Akinbod in his article, explains that a man has the potential to turn into what he desires, to mould himself, and go through a personality shift if need be. "Sartre describes the being for itself as being what it is not and not being what it is" (16). To exist and go through experiences, to decide and to act upon those decisions makes a man a subjective entity. According to Manzi "For Sartre, existence precedes essence, freedom is absolute, and existence *is* freedom" (4). Freedom of choice gives individuals the power to make decisions and break free from the shackles of society, parental mores and already-set traditional, cultural and social customs. These shackles can impede human beings from choosing the things that make them happy and satisfied.

“Existentialism is a philosophy of freedom” (Flynn 37). Paulo Coelho has emphasized personal freedom and the ability of decision-making. This section of the research will explore the decisions made by the protagonists of the selected novels. It will also explore the consequences of those decisions and the role they played in the transformation of the characters’ lives. Furthermore, Flynn suggests that Sartre calls a free individual as “Free organic individual is the flesh and blood agent” (10). For Veronika (*Veronika Decides to Die*) to commit suicide and not to commit suicide was a choice, to write a letter to the press explaining where Slovenia is, was her choice. Showing her vulnerable side to Edward in the mental hospital was a choice. Leaving her dreams and ambition aside for her parents was her choice, and in the end, running away from the hospital to claim her life back was her choice. Paulo Coelho depicts that in the modern world, there is a strong pull towards social conformity but individuals who realize their freedom as a useful tool, successfully achieve existential individuality.

Similarly, for Maria (*Eleven Minutes*) leaving her homeland to explore other possibilities out there in the world was her choice. Not getting married on her mother’s wish and becoming an independent woman was her choice. Opting for prostitution as a profession to fulfil her dream of earning enough money to buy land was her choice. Willingly having sexual encounters with men and exploring human nature was her choice. Falling in love and moving back home to start a new life was also her choice. Moreover, Brida (*Brida*) chose to become a witch. Choosing the tradition of the Moon over the tradition of the Sun was her choice. Choosing to stay firm during challenges to complete her initiation into witchcraft was a choice and choosing her lover, her boyfriend over her soulmate, as a life partner was also her choice. Igor’s (*The Winner Stands Alone*) way of practicing freedom of choice was murdering people and setting out on a manslaughter rampage. Choosing grey morality was his choice. Following his ex-wife after losing her to another man (Hamid) was his choice and

prioritizing his money and work over his relationship was his choice. Choice always exists and its existence does not assure the possibility of happiness but it does assure consequences and responsibility of those choices.

3.3.5. Freedom of Choice in Veronika Decides to Die

“Freedom at last” (Coelho 12), Veronika’s sense of freedom in the initial stages of the text points towards suicide. According to her, the end of everything for once and for all would be her freedom. Veronika’s existential depression, feelings of nothingness and hopelessness towards her future entangles her into the shackles of the absurdity of life. According to Vara Saripalli, the philosophy of existentialism talks about the dread and panic that a person may feel when they think about the limitations of human existence. This fear originates from the feelings of nothingness and hopelessness about the future (Saripalli np). However, Tarun Mittal is of the view that Sartre being a humanitarian focuses on the optimistic tendency of human freedom. He wanted us to break free from our self-fastened shackles and attain our massive potential. Paulo Coelho in this text depicts Veronika as a victim of existential depression when she found herself waking up in Villette. Her behaviour is unpredictable and her motive remains to kill herself before she realizes that there is a complete life waiting for her, outside the walls of Villette. Dr Igor (Veronika’s Doctor) keeps her under false medical treatment and tells her that she will naturally die of a weakened heart in a week or so. Her impending death dangles in front of her eyes and she realizes everything good she missed in her life.

Veronika suffers from depression majorly because of the repressed feelings and forsaken dreams that she left behind because of the will of her parents. Her lifelong dream was to become a pianist but her mother directed her towards a different path and she had to become a librarian to secure an apparently respectable place in society. Existentialism as a

philosophy dotes on subjectivity and rejects positivism. Manzi states, “Existentialists maintain that we cannot know anything if not from our subjectivity. The first and only real thing we know is that we exist and that we experience everything subjectively” (2).

Subjectivity focuses on personal experiences. Veronika was a victim of the shackles of society and her parents. Her feelings of nothingness and hopelessness came from living a life she never dreamt of living. Coelho through the character of Veronika depicts that societal pressure can take away personal freedom and that already set traditional laws and customs must not be adhered to. Individuals must possess the freedom to decide for themselves. Existentialists associate freedom with anxiety, and Sartre emphasizes on highlighting the positive aspects of practicing freedom within boundaries.

In Vilete, Veronika witnessed madness, silence, violence, and all sorts of human behaviors considered ill in the world outside of a mental hospital. It gave her a sense of freedom; different from the one she felt when she tried to put an end to her life. “Once in a mental hospital, a person grows used to the freedom that exists in the world of insanity and becomes addicted to it” (Coelho 130). Sartre explains freedom as a choice, individuals in every moment of their life encounter a choice, and it is the responsibility of a person to make it count. “Man cannot be sometimes slave and sometimes free; he is wholly and forever free or he is not free at all” (Rajkhowa 876). Veronika’s behavior changed, she tested the limitations of human freedom and its acceptance inside the walls of a mental hospital. She wanted to behave as inappropriately as she could to let her frustrations out. “she had begun by slapping an old man in the face, she had burst into tears in front of a nurse; she had refused to be nice” (Coelho 59). Sartre in his essay *Man Makes Himself*, talks about subjectivity and freedom, “subjectivism means on one hand the freedom of the individual subject and on the other; that man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity” (Sartre 5). Sartre highlights that freedom of choice must know its limits and stepping beyond the moral and

ethical boundary of freedom results in chaos and damage. Similarly, Veronika's character development happened within the boundaries of her subjective experiences. She realized that one must possess the will to live life to its fullest and experience the depth of even mundane things in life and must not succumb to death before time.

Veronika in her state of angst, during her time in Vilete, started to realize that her anger is not toward her life rather it is an amalgamation of un-lived and stifled dreams. "Veronika hated everything, but mainly she hated the way she had lived her life" (Coelho 60). Eduard is an important character in this text whom Veronika encounters and with whom she finds herself relatable. "Eduard was capable of understanding her music, of admiring her talent; even if he couldn't utter a word, his eyes said everything" (124). Her newfound friend let her believe that she can choose a different life for herself, a life where she has the freedom to make choices, to experience life, and to live like she's dying. Dying in Veronika's case was not metaphorical as her doctor (Dr. Igor) told her that she has an unpredictable yet short span of time to live. After meeting Eduard, Veronika decides to explore her choices and live as she wills until she dies, "I feel like starting to live again Eduard... I'll tell them not to follow the manual of good behavior but to discover their own lives, desires, adventures, and to live" (129). Little did she know she had a long life to live.

3.3.6. *Freedom of Choice in Eleven Minutes*

A perfect fairytale of love, like every other teenager Maria had the dream of a Prince Charming on his way to sweep her off her feet. Nonetheless, like every other woman her mother tells her to marry a rich man, settle down and let money buy her heartfelt desires. On the contrary, "Maria was more intelligent than her mother" (21). Maria preferred her freedom instead of settling for a man and living a blind-sighted life as a homemaker. Sartre in *Man Makes Himself* suggests that the only thing a man prefers in his forsakenness is his freedom

(19). Coelho writes Maria's character as a woman of a demeanor who prefers to accept loneliness if it means that she could practice her freedom of choice. Maria takes up residence in Rue De Berne to work as a sexual worker. Coelho has generated an unconventional form of practicing freedom of choice through her character. Maria did not choose to become a prostitute to change the world or save humanity, "She had to survive another six months of solitude and another six months of the choice she made" (Coelho 50). *Eleven Minutes* is a text of choices, decisions and living up to those choices with responsibility.

Coelho as an existential writer destines his characters to face complicated and unexpected turns in their life journey and challenges them to make choices on instinct. Maria willfully chooses to become a prostitute. She needed to earn money and build a life of financial ease and success but that is what everyone intends to do yet; only a small number of people willfully take challenging roads to do so. Coelho describes prostitution for Maria, not as an act of subjugation or compulsion but rather as a conscious choice. For instance, in Elif Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love* (2009), the character of Dessert Rose the Harlot, is a woman without family and security, thus forced to become a prostitute in Constantinople. "Soon I understood why the gang leader asked me if I was a virgin?" (Shafak 130). Rose's freedom of choice was ripped from her. The gang leader who found her alone and helpless did not care about her existence as a human being, rather used her as an object for his sexual satisfaction, against her will. Similarly, in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's movie, *Gangubai* (2022), Gangubai Kathiawaadi is a young beautiful girl in love and she becomes a prostitute forcibly. On the contrary, in *Eleven Minutes*, Maria's choice was not forced or dictated instead it was according to, as Sartre states freedom of choice.

'The freedom that we have to make our own choices is the control we have over our own happiness' (Hamm 15). In Maria's subconscious her choice of becoming a prostitute was not a choice of need, but instead a decision based on an expedition of human connection

and sexual exploration. According to her, people blame other people for their misery and their unhappiness. However, for Maria, co-incidentally her happiness was also a result of someone else (Ralf Hart) making her realize that securing the element of happiness was just as necessary as washing oneself of guilt for the sake of survival. “She had spent the whole afternoon wondering what she could give to a man who had restored her dignity and made her understand that the search for happiness is more important than the need for pain” (Coelho 119). According to Sartrean philosophy of existentialism, a person must create a purpose of their own to rid themselves of the inevitable absurdity and loneliness of life. Coelho through the character of Maria and her ability to make precarious choices determines that choices can give a person a sense of purpose in life, which consequently defines the course of life.

Maria whilst she traversed through her journey of freedom, she made countless choices on each step of her life. Travelling to Rio de Janeiro, sleeping with an Arab man for three times the amount of money that she could get with any other customer, as a prostitute. Maria’s meeting with Ralf Hart, stopping to have a conversation with him in a cafe, a conversation full of emotions rather than a prostitute who gets paid to show affection and be intimate with men. Her next choice was to become the lady of the night for one of the special customers who came to the bar and acted like they owned it or had a deal for special treatment and entertainment. Maria’s encounter with Terence was different from other customers that she had, as a sex worker. Terence was a dominant man with a clear conscience of his needs and demands. It was the first time Maria learned about pleasure through pain, she learned about a completely different realm of the carnal world i.e., bondage and discipline, sadism and masochism. “His voice altered between being gentle and authoritarian” (Coelho 101). Her sexual encounter had no intimacy with Terence rather she experienced an immense amount of pleasure through humiliation and pain, which gave her a kind of guilt that she

thought she deserved. Terence taught her that even when individuals act as slaves they still hold the power to make choices in their lives, “you may have been the slave and I the master, but my only power was to push you in the direction of your freedom” (Coelho 105). Maria’s last choice was to choose between Ralf Hart and Terence, one who respected her, made her understand that she could choose happiness over guilt and the other who made her experience intense pleasure and taught her about a world she never knew, existed. As an individual always has the freedom to choose in order to give a purpose to their life and shape the course of it, she chose the preceding and made her way back home.

3.3.7. Freedom of Choice in Brida

“It was not so much of a question; it was a choice, the most difficult choice anyone would have to make in life” (Coelho 12). Brida had to start her journey into witchcraft by making choices, numerous choices at instinct. Her teacher the Magus, on her first day of learning wisdom, walks her through a dense forest. He asks her that he will only teach her after she answers a question, that when the time comes, will she choose between her knowledge or her soulmate? After which he left her stranded amidst the forest to spend a night alone in the woods, and to face her fears. Freedom of choice, knowingly or unknowingly exists within the bounds of each individual. Social and societal pressures, responsibilities and pledging completely to morality and ethics can make individuals prone to shun their freedom of choice. On the contrary, Paulo Coelho through his protagonist has highlighted the way freedom shapes purpose in life, instead of succumbing to the pressures of life and being terrified of freedom, an individual must realize its benefits and use it within the bounds of respect, and human decency.

According to Coelho, individuals have the innate power to choose their response in the circumstances they encounter. Magus left Brida alone and she felt the anxiety creeping up

her spine. She panicked and feared “snakes, scorpions and childhood ghosts” (14), she also feared men of the forest “who can be more dangerous than a wild animal” (14). Brida’s choice was to play the brave card, to understand that crying and screaming would do nothing except add to trouble. She needed to have faith that nights are just as safe as days. Webber states that the ways we think, perceive and feel about the world “and how we respond to it are all ultimately manifestations of the projects that we have chosen to pursue” (59). At the moment, Brida had to choose between facing her fear of the dark or standing brave to complete her test so she could learn further about the traditions of witchcraft and take her first step towards her initiation (a significant ritual in the training of the becoming a witch).

Brida O’Fern being the passionate young girl that she was, tried not to back down in the face of the toughest decisions. “She knew that if she gave up now, she would find it harder and harder to make choices in life” (Coelho 18). Her first lesson was to learn about the Tradition of the Sun, a tradition which teaches about love and ancestral knowledge. Her second lesson was the Tradition of the Moon; which teaches about the things “imprisoned in time’s memory” (12). Brida’s choice was the tradition of the Moon, which was the Wiccan tradition of initiation. This tradition was mostly the tradition of action and response of the body in which the witches learn “to have an embodied spirituality — it means that the body itself must learn to act and respond . . . Witches existentially transform themselves both in ritual and out of it” (Berger 120). The choice between traditions was Brida’s way of paving her way to freedom and according to her choosing the right path on which she was supposed to serve humanity was through the Wiccan tradition of initiation into witchcraft.

Lastly, after bearing patience in learning to read the tarot cards, experiencing the astral plane and realizing her gift, Brida’s initiation helped her realize that her final choice was to choose between her soulmates. On one hand, it was the Magus and his world of knowledge, on the other hand, it was Lorens, the love of her life. Coelho destines his

protagonists to pursue the right choices even if they are the tough ones. Webber further states, “My situation is the motif that explains my action; it is the appearance of my surroundings as organized in a certain way, inviting a certain behavior to achieve my aims” (48). These are the choices, which set the course of an individual’s life according to their will. Brida decided to serve her duty to humanity as a witch and manifest her love for Lorens i.e., the person who would love her in all her choices and support her when the time comes for her to practice her witchcraft.

3.3.8. *Freedom of Choice in The Winner Stands Alone*

Coelho’s *The Winner Stands Alone* slightly differs from other texts under observation in this research. The character of Igor in the novel is a well-established, successful and handsome business tycoon. He is a man who portrays a twisted sense of freedom, which makes him a morally grey character. According to Sartrean existentialism, freedom of choice helps navigate the purpose of life whilst breaking through the unwanted shackles of society and familial pressures. Nevertheless, in *The Winner Stands Alone*, Igor’s world revolves around practicing freedom at the cost of destroying other lives. Igor loved his wife but never had the time to build a lasting relationship, their divorce flipped his world upside down and the purpose of his life became to win her back by hook or by crook.

Freedom does not always come with the luxury of responsibility. People often tend to use, misuse and abuse their freedom in the name of liberty of choice. According to Elijah Akinbode,

People could abuse their limitless freedom, using it to the detriment of others, since there are no social values or moral codes, and existing laws, which can hinder such possibilities. Man’s freedom can be wrongly exploited to commit

terrible acts and the fact that they are responsible for their actions does not curtail these possibilities” (17).

Igor’s psychology did not register the fact that setting oneself out on a murder rampage does not qualify as freedom of choice. According to Igor, killing people was reasonable as long as he had a solid justification such as putting them out of their misery of living a life full of poverty or sending a message to Ewa, that he was capable of destroying universes if meant he could get her to come back. Igor’s notion of choice was that fate decided his actions of killing people; according to him, life awarded him with the duty to lessen the misery in the lives of people by helping them sleep the eternal sleep. Each individual must go on continuously to make one choice or another, to set the course of life. Every choice that individuals make, they do so with anxiety and dread because it comes at the cost of existence (Leddy 12). In the case of Igor, the trigger of his anxiety was the loss of freedom and the loss of his empire. His choice to murder people and to take away their chance at life was his action, which set the course of his life. Igor arrives at the Cannes Film Festival thinking that he could win his love back, and leaves the festival with the thought had every murder he committed was his ex-wife’s fault “and if anything went wrong it would all be her fault” (196). The murders were his moral duty because according to him the soul of his first victim had become his guiding angel.

On the other hand, the character of Ewa presents a contrary depiction of the concept of freedom of choice in this text. Ewa’s choices helped her walk out of a toxic relationship with a psychopath. “However unhappy she was with her new partner; she would never return to the past because her ex-husband was unbalanced” (Coelho 220). Coelho has highlighted the consequences which engulf the world of freedom, through the character of Igor, it is portrayed that freedom of choice if practiced relentlessly can become a vicious circle of pain for others. As mentioned above according to Sartre’s existentialism when a man decides for

himself, he is also deciding for others around him. In Igor's case, his freedom of choice was comprised of the violent act of being a serial killer in order to send a message. On the contrary, Ewa's choice of leaving her ex-husband (Igor) made her realize that taking control of life and making a hard choice can be one of the best things an individual can do to protect themselves from falling victim to existential crises and depression.

Coelho in *The Winner Stands Alone* drives a wedge between freedom without accountability and morally practicing freedom of choice to set the course of life in action. According to Sartrean philosophy, every step of life demands an action and every action is the result of a choice. "The individual can never know what the outcome of his choice will be, can never know what will become of him" (Leddy 13). Igor's choice of murder made him question the worth of the love he had for Ewa. He was not willing to relinquish the control of his freedom in the name of love, "he intended to destroy universes, not relinquish his freedom out of love" (Coelho 123). He tried to turn himself into the police, and it was his only regret from the list of his choices.

3.4. Existentialism through the Lens of Simon De Beauvoir and Frankl's

Logotherapy

3.4.1. *Simon De Beauvoir and Feminist Existentialism*

Sartre bases his existential philosophy on three major tenets i.e., freedom of choice, decision-making, and responsibility. As mentioned in the previous chapter, existentialism as a philosophy nudges an individual to make choices in life. The protagonists of *Veronika Decides to Die*, *Eleven Minutes*, *Brida* and *The Winner Stands Alone* make choices, which bring forth challenges to them, and places they could never fathom in their dreams. A mental hospital for Veronika, Rio de Janeiro for Maria, A Dark Forest and Astral Journey for Brida O'Fern, and the Cannes Film Festival for Igor and the fashion industry for Ewa (Igor's wife)

the places they were encountered as a product of their choices in life. Simon De Beauvoir's existentialism backs Sartre's existentialism. Her idea of freedom of choice is similar to that of Sartre's. Simon De Beauvoir explains choice as "The drama of original choice is that it goes on moment by moment for an entire lifetime, that it occurs without reason, before any reason, that freedom is there as if it were present only in the form of contingency" (Beauvoir 16). According to them individuals, face a choice in each moment of their life.

Simon De Beauvoir is famous for her feminist existentialism. Margaret A. Simons in her article, *Is the Second Sex Beauvoir's Application of Sartre's Existentialism?* explains Simon De Beauvoir's situation as, "Beauvoir experiences both an exhilarated sense of freedom in breaking free from the confines of a woman's traditional role, and a despairing sense of dread as she imagines her lonely future" (Simons np). Furthermore, in 'The Second Sex' Beauvoir explains the importance of choosing for one's self. She states,

Indeed, along with the ethical urge of each individual to affirm his subjective existence, there is also the temptation to forgo liberty and become a thing. This is an inauspicious road, for he who takes it – passive, lost, ruined – becomes henceforth the creature of another's will, frustrated in his transcendence and deprived of every value (Beauvoir 6).

The novels under exploration in this research majorly focus on female protagonists. Coelho has depicted the importance of choice through major and minor female characters and their struggle to survive in the world after practicing their freedom of choice. The following chapter of the research intends to explore Coelho's selected works through Simon de Beauvoir's feminist existentialism. The previous chapter put Sartre's existence precedes essence to use. Similarly, this chapter will put Beauvoir's "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (np) to use, to explore Coelho's female characters.

A woman's spirit molds itself according to the amount of pressure, which society and culture put on her. Women taming is a necessary tool to shape them as better daughters, homemakers and mothers. Victoriya Sus explains Beauvoir's feminism that stands against this representation of women. She says that the situation which women live in, across the globe will not change for them; it is only possible for a woman to make a life for herself if the change comes from within. "A unique female existence must realize its non-objectionable nature and make every possible effort to become the mistress of her own life" (Sus np). According to Beauvoir, a woman must have the complete freedom to shape her life as she pleases. A woman must not be considered as other or as an object to the existence of the ideal; the man.

In *Veronika Decides to Die*, Coelho focuses on Veronika's struggle to free herself from the shackles which were the reason behind her existential depression. Coelho shapes Veronika's sub-conscious in a way that according to her, due to societal pressure, the method of suicide must also have a feminine touch to it. "shooting, jumping off a high building, hanging, none of these options suited her... women when they kill themselves choose far more romantic methods" (13). Veronika's angst in the text depicts that if society would not let a woman live in peace, it would not let a woman die in peace as well. Moreover, Sylvia Plath also adds a feministic touch to suicide in her poem *Lady Lazarus* (1965), she is of the view that women train themselves to stand firm in the face of oppression. "comeback in broad day, / to the same place, the same face, the same brute" (52-54). Similar, to the situation of Veronika, Plath in her poem highlights female resurrection as she depicts that women learn to rise after facing intense trauma in an oppressing society. Veronika rebels against the structure of culture, society and parental pressure which oppresses her and forces her to abandon her dreams.

Felicity Joseph explains Simon de Beauvoir's view on female sexuality. In her opinion, a woman's body parts, her days of menstruation, pregnancy and menopause are meaningful biological developments. However, in an oppressive society, "they can come on to take a meaning of burden and disadvantage" (np). Maria, the protagonist of the text *Eleven Minutes*, explores the discomfort of female sexuality as a sex worker. "she felt as an object, a mere instrument" (Coelho 151). Women in a society must become homemakers, to serve their husbands and their families. Moreover, in the case of Maria, women like her must submit themselves to the sexual desires of men. In a capitalist society where competition is the second name of success after money. A woman can opt for prostitution as a profession if she wants freedom from becoming a homemaker. Simon de Beauvoir emphasizes women's freedom. Petterson states, "Men and women are equally free to choose how to live their lives" (60). She takes on the concept of freedom from Sartre and accentuates that women like men must also have the freedom to shape their lives without feeling guilty or being criticized.

The text *Brida* revolves around a young passionate woman. "I am a strong determined woman" (Coelho 38). Coelho depicts the turmoil of being a career-oriented woman in a male-oriented society. He depicts the guilt and shame which come through when a woman decides to opt for a job or profession which comes with sacrificing the duties of a homemaker.

We feel guilty when we go out to work because we're leaving our children in order to earn money to feed them. We feel guilty when we stay at home because it seems we're not making the most of our freedom. We feel guilty about everything because we have always been kept far from decision-making and power (254).

Simon de Beauvoir focuses on women's freedom, not just freedom from the manacles of society. Rather she focuses on the freedom of making a choice. Beauvoir's personal life also depicts her sense of freedom. Her strong connection with Jean-Paul Sartre did not nudge her to

make her mind to get married to him. “According to Beauvoir, men benefit from marriage...wives provide sexual, domestic as well as economic services for husbands and their families” (Gandhi np). Coelho in his texts, provides a view that goal-oriented women go through a lot of guilt and pressure for chasing their dreams.

In the text *The Winner Stands Alone*, the second major character after Igor is his wife Ewa. Coelho’s depiction of Ewa is of a woman who feels immensely lonely and unhappy in their marriage. According to Beauvoir, the institution of marriage takes away subjectivity and autonomous freedom. “it curbs the autonomous subject’s tendencies to forget its ethical responsibilities to let the other be” (Bergoffen 104). In modern times marriage is a conscientious decision from two individuals to spend their life together. To pledge to love and sexual intimacy, and to be there for each other through tough times. But according to Beauvoir it hardly fulfils the sanctity of the vows. In *The Winner Stands Alone*, Coelho describes monogamous relationships as “monogamy is a myth that has been rammed down people’s throat for far too long... the inability to be monogamous is not just a matter of excess hormones or vanity...but a genetic configuration found in almost all animals” (21). Ewa’s freedom of choice as a woman comes into existence when she takes a step towards separation from a gut-wrenchingly painful marriage to a psychopath. Coelho like Beauvoir in his work depicts that even if a woman is fulfilled financially in a marriage, it does not secure the relationship. Respect, time, loyalty and sexual satisfaction are all important matters at hand for a woman to be fulfilled and satisfied in an otherwise empty marriage.

3.3.2. Paulo Coelho and Victor Frankl’s Logotherapy

Logotherapy is Victor Frankl’s version of existential analysis. Frankl in *Man’s Search for Meaning* defines Logotherapy as a process in which people sit attentively and listen to things which are otherwise hard to listen to make sense of life (Frankl 120). Paulo Coelho’s

novels portray a sense of life which depicts that each individual is bound to go through unexpected, unwanted and challenging circumstances in life to find a meaning and a purpose to live for, in an otherwise meaningless, purposeless, boring and anxiety-filled life. Frankl describes a meaningless life as a life which is full of senseless, unexciting, ritualistic activities. He trumps the negative side of existentialism and states, “It is here that we encounter the central theme of existentialism: to live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering” (11). This chapter intends to explore Victor Frankl’s ‘Theory of Logotherapy’, the theory revolves around finding meaning and giving purpose to life. This chapter will explore this phenomenon in the lives of the characters of the selected novels. This chapter will scrutinize the theme of will to meaning. Furthermore, as mentioned above according to Logotherapy people sometimes need to hear the harder things in life in order to muster up the courage to keep living in challenging circumstances, the following chapter will analyze and explore the characters and their interactions and encounters with challenging situations and hard truths.

Frankl describes existential depression as an existential vacuum. He targets people who find themselves empty and hollow after they get a break from daily life activities. “the void within themselves becomes manifest” (129). In *Veronika Decides to Die*, Veronika faces a severe form of existential depression as she plans her whole life within minutes to comprehend if it matters and conjures up nothing but utter despair and meaninglessness. Victor addresses this situation as “we had nothing to lose except our so ridiculously naked lives” (34). Depression manifests itself and takes the form of a silent killer when individuals condition themselves to useless, ritualistic, and materialistic living environments. In the text, Veronika opts for a materialistic living environment to run away from the searing hollowness beneath. Coelho in his text describes that “sometimes its provoked by most banal things” (147). Which may include lack of light, lack of serotonin, divorce, displacement, or painstakingly the death of a loved one.

Frankl through his concept of Logotherapy, explains that loss and grief are not always cured with listening or psychoanalyzing an individual, Frankl does not trump Freudian psychoanalysis but he builds his theory on his foundation in a slightly different manner and offers kinship to other psychoanalytical theories. He is of the view that hard truths and reverse explanations of situations may also save individuals from plunging into depression (Frankl 135). Similarly, the characters of Dr. Igor and Veronika's other mates play this role of reversing her psychological and existential depression. "and for the very first time it made her ponder the truth... nothing in this world happens by chance" (Coelho 10). Veronika realizes that her life would have turned out differently if she allowed herself "to be a little crazier" (224). Coelho in *Veronika Decides to Die* explains that sometimes harsh truths and hard realities can bring an individual back to life. This makes a person capable of finding a purpose in life. Taylor Swift in her song 'I Knew You Were Trouble' (2012) gives a message "I don't know if you know who you are until you lose who you are" (Swift 00:03:28). Which concludes that individuals are prone to making mistakes, become victim to depression and face loss in life. But, the only way to survive is to persevere through challenging situations and find meaning in hardship and suffering.

Moreover, Frankl also addresses sexual intimacy through his theory of Logotherapy. He is of the view that sex is sanctified but it holds power "as long as it is a vehicle of love" (Frankl 134). This issue is upstanding in Coelho's *Eleven Minutes*. Maria explores all sorts of men and their sexual desires as a sex worker. Nevertheless, not any of those men provide her with an intimate connection or a decent human connection. The job of a sexual worker outdoes her desire to be respected as a woman and to find a loving connection. She is unable to get satisfaction from any of her partners because of the lack of emotional connection. Sexual intimacy without love creates a frustrating void "I love you, though, were three words she had often heard... and it seemed to her that they were completely devoid of meaning, because they

never turned into anything serious” (Coelho 35). Victor Frankl suggests that sexual intimacy can only be fruitful and not be void of emotion if it expresses the ultimate togetherness of two people (Frankl 134). Frankl does not undermine suffering, nor does he deride depression or feelings of nothingness. Frankl through his theory of Logotherapy focuses on the fact that people can find meaning through suffering.

Logotherapy, as a theory dotes on deciding for one’s self on a positive note. “for what then matters, is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one’s predicament into human achievement” (Frankl 135). Maria then turns her feeling of detachment into bloom as she accepts Ralf Hart (the love of her life), and experiences love, respect, power, dignity and sexual satisfaction. Coelho describes Maria’s change of situation from feeling filthy and guilt-ridden towards feeling loved, respected, and dignified. Frankl further describes that life does not always mean to seek or attain pleasure, but rather seek purpose “It is one of the basic tenets of Logotherapy. That man’s main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see meaning in his life. That is why man is even ready to suffer. On the condition, to be sure, that his suffering has a meaning” (136). Maria’s guilty suffering turned into a meaningful life with love and money because her character persevered through storms and challenges.

The text *Brida* mostly revolves around finding the right soul mate and standing firm in the face of challenges to achieve life’s goals. The text describes the spectacle of finding a soul mate as to see a light through the shoulder of one’s soul person and fathom that they are meant for you. In the whole text, Coelho picturizes Brida O’Fern struggling to find the right path to follow, to understand the steps of her witchcraft initiation and to choose to learn from her teachers of the tradition. Among all the choices the hardest choice Brida had to make was the choice of her soul mate. Frankl best describes this situation, “love goes very far beyond the physical person of the beloved it finds its deepest meaning in his spiritual being, his inner self.

Whether or not he is present, whether or not he is still alive at all, ceases somehow to be of importance” (58). The character of the Magus which Coelho depicts as Brida’s first teacher and then soul mate. His character understands and portrays this concept unreservedly.

Frankl through Logotherapy and Coelho through his texts portrays that existential suffering is inevitable for each individual. One may suffer through circumstances, may it be death, depression, anxiety, hopelessness, meaninglessness, loss of a job, unmet goals or simply boredom out of routine. However, people always stand a chance of choice, no matter the circumstances. Logotherapy puts forth the concept that it is an individual’s achievement to be worthy of suffering. The question arises, what does it mean to be worthy of suffering? It means to portray courage and bravery in times of distress, it refers to the amount of potential and refined grace a person radiates in times of anguish and agony. “the way they bore their suffering was a genuine inner achievement. It is this spiritual freedom which cannot be taken away- that makes life meaningful and purposeful” (Frankl 87). Brida’s journey also represents inner freedom and self-respect, her character emphasizes self-respect and making the right choice even if it comes with struggle.

The next text under exploration is *The Winner Stands Alone*, the character of Igor is the portrayal of compromised values. Frankl in his book, describes this inner turmoil as

A man’s character became involved to the point that he was caught in a mental turmoil which threatened all the values he held... under the influence of a world that no longer recognized the value of human life and human dignity... the personal ego finally suffered a loss of values (Frankl 70).

Igor’s morality can be best described as grey morality. In the world of choice, the responsibility of making the right choice holds a fundamental ground. Igor’s choices were a trouble for people around him, in the text Coelho draws a storyline which depicts that compromising ethics and morals will not help people achieve their desired goal. In the case of

Igor, his goal was to win his ex-wife back. Nonetheless, a sinister sense of morality can never let a person win. Moreover, Igor possesses a sense of deflection, he is a man who ignores self-reflection and can justify his murders. He gives his deeds a philosophical vision in order to rationalize his wrongdoings. “he doesn’t need anyone’s support to justify what he’s doing; he’s convinced that everyone will die one day. Some must do so in the name of something greater” (Coelho 41). Frankl in his book about *Logotherapy* suggests that each individual is prone to answer his or her inner voice also known as a personal calling. According to him when individuals follow their calling, it leads them to freedom from their psychophysical facticity (Frankl 14). In this text, the character of Ewa holds a certain importance. Her character also represents choices. Her choices differ from the ones that of Igor. She realizes the psychopathic potential of Igor and decides to leave him, which ensures her a different future. His psychopathic murderous tendencies affected her psychology and personal relationship.

The connection between Coelho’s novels and Frankl’s *Logotherapy*, explains that making choices also means to ensure morality and inner respect. Likewise, to Sartre and Beauvoir, Frankl also suggests that the kind of choice one makes can make the whole difference. Robert Frost in his poem ‘The Road Not Taken’ (1916) describes this phenomenon as “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I / I took the one less travelled by, / and that has made all the difference” (Frost 18-20). It illustrates that people come across intentional, unintentional, expected, unexpected, simple and complex choices in their lives. The choice which makes a difference in the lives of individuals themselves and others around them is the choice of practicing freedom by keeping ethical and moral grounds intact.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This research studied multiple divergences in the philosophy of existentialism extracted from Paulo Coelho's selected works i.e. *Veronika Decides to Die*, *Brida*, *Eleven Minutes*, and *The Winner Stands Alone*. It analyzed the concept of existentialism, and its thematic subspecialties including loneliness, anger, frustration, and quest in an individual's life, freedom of choice, responsibility of consequences, ethical and moral boundaries of choice, feminist existentialism, and Logotherapy. Each one of these subthemes is connected subtly. This research has explored Coelho's works through the lens of existentialism adhering to Sartre's existential philosophy, Simon De Beauvoir's concept of existentialism and Victor Frankl's Logotherapy. The above-mentioned themes in this research point toward significant enlightenment and self-discovery in an individual's life i.e. Veronika, Brida, Maria and Igor and give a holistic idea of introspection and self-actualization.

This research has delved into the realm of existentialism and answers the research questions mentioned above. It concludes, as the word spread has it, existentialism as a philosophy for ages has been laced with pessimism. However, Sartre provides a different view on this perspective. Sartre says that existentialism may portray hopelessness, anger, pain and loneliness but human beings yield power of freedom. Which means that humans can make their life as they please it to be with a bit of courage and a plethora of right choices. He further states that pessimistic outlook of existentialism makes life look meaningless and absurd, whereas, Sartre's concept of 'authenticity' means that people can live up to their values and commitments with dignity and responsibility rather than succumbing in front of existential crises and angst.

Secondly, this research addressed thematically coherent themes in Coelho's selected novels. The first important dimension extracted in this research is existential angst, which results from feelings of loneliness, anxiety, pointlessness, and emptiness of existence. This

study has explored Veronika's attempted suicide due to existential depression. Brida's hopelessness and anxiety about her failures in life. Maria's disconnection and dissociation with human connection and affection. Lastly, Igor's psychopathic and apathetic sense of life. This study also explored the search of a soulmate. Which is also a reoccurring theme in Coelho's novels. This theme is linked to existentialism in a manner that loneliness and absurdity can be overcome by getting to know someone, falling in love and starting a fresh. The search of a soulmate is an innate need of a human being and it gives a purpose to life. It helps individuals look for reasons to thrive and make a worthy living. It gives individuals a sense of rising above themselves.

Third, the research adhered to explore the ways in which the protagonists of the selected novels accomplished the sense of freedom and acknowledged to find purpose in life. Thus, this study unveils the benefits of freedom of choice for individuals who lose their will to live and sense of life to the hands of pointlessness and emptiness. This research highlighted Veronica's change of personality and her choice to live her life as she pleases by breaking the senseless shackles of society and parental pressure. Second, Brida's journey towards witchcraft, self-enlightenment and her triumphant over her failures. Moreover, the research unveiled Maria's quest to find love and affection after an absurd journey of working as a desensitized sex worker. Lastly, the research exposed the consequences of practicing freedom of choice without thinking it through morally and ethically through the character of Igor. Thus, proving that practicing freedom of choice whilst adhering to ethical boundaries can result in life-enhancing effects and reinforcing strength.

The study has also explored Simon De Beauvoir's concept of feminist existentialism. The reason that this study dedicates a full length chapter to feminist existentialism is that the female characters in the chosen novels for this research intentionally succeed at life by altering their circumstances and making choices against the wills of society, and patriarchy.

The research through her lens highlighted women's taming and sexual objectification. The characters of Veronika, Maria, Brida, Ewa and Gabriella from these novels depicted a society's unflinching need to tame and mold women according to its expectations. The study also highlighted the character's choices to turn their lives the other way around. Simon De Beauvoir builds on the concept of Sartre's freedom of choice and brings gender equality and inequality to terms. This study explored that according to Beauvoir, women must also have the advantage to shape and reshape their lives as they please instead of molding themselves into the society given sculpture of their existence.

Lastly, this research explored Frankl's theory of Logotherapy, which is a subset of existential psychotherapy. While exploring this theory the current research extensively unveiled the dire need for vivification of an individual's psychology. By addressing the core principles of psychotherapy, redefining the notions of love and intimate relationships, and channeling personal tragedy towards triumph, individuals can transform a sense of purposelessness into a fulfilling and successful life. This research has built its argument on Frankl's concept that people may find meaning through their suffering. Suffering and challenges can be channeled through and one can hope to find light at the end of the tunnel through persistence and perseverance in life.

To conclude, this research celebrated existentialism rather than lamenting it, as the existence of a human being is often mourned. The four mentioned novels and their protagonists are an example of such celebration because Coelho gives freedom of choice to his characters rather than confining them into the shackles of society. However, the study can be further extensively studied by doing a comparative analysis between Camus' and Kafka's pessimist claims toward existentialism and Sartre's and Simon De Beauvoir's optimistic concept of existentialism. Furthermore, it can explore existentialism by comparing Coelho's existential novels and their optimism with Virginia Woolf's existential novels. Similarly, on a

broader lens, the respective explored novels can also be studied through Michelle Foucault's theory of power structures.

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