

# Tahmima's Utopia in *The Startup Wife*: The Existential Feminism in a Male Tech World

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**Abstract**—Tahmima Anam's newest novel, *The Startup Wife* (2021), represents a debacle of a female utopia. Since the modern world humans live in nowadays is science-oriented and focused on technology, the novel deals with the significance of courtship and female entrepreneurship. Tahmima uses Asha Ray as the main female character in the novel. By analyzing certain instances from the novel that depict the entire journey of Asha Ray as a female scientist, the paper primarily focuses on the role of women in science. This young woman, with her natural programming abilities and self-assurance, comes up with an algorithm for a brand-new social media company that has the potential to transform an entire society for the better. It is critical to realize that before determining one's essence by existentialism, one must acknowledge his existence. The paper concludes that with her feminist fervor, Asha Ray is forced to recognize the importance of upholding what she views as hers. Having Asha Ray as a female in a male-dominated industry turns her into a subsided woman. The suffering of women in the startup world to be heard is at the heart of Asha's work. Women in a technologically male-dominated world can use Tahmima Anam's *The Startup Wife* as an example to examine existential feminism, which this paper aims to demonstrate and deliver to readers.

**Index Terms**—existentialism, feminism, Tahmima Anam, *The Startup Wife*, utopia

## I. INTRODUCTION

Existentialism is described as the kind of philosophy that focuses on the idea of the tangible individual, which is a fact that is generally accepted. This is for its crowning achievement and its greatest weakness. To the credit of existentialism, it defends the inherent value of its primary proponent in an age of mass information exchange and massive destruction. Jean-Paul Sartre refers to this as the "free organic individual," another way of saying the agent is made of flesh and blood (Flynn, 2006). So, since such a philosophy focuses on the person and his question of life purpose, such a theory is very much applicable in many modern feminist novels that focus on the survival of women in the world of patriarchy. *The Startup Wife*, written by Bangladeshi-born British writer, Tahmima Anam, is a novel about a woman who discovers her strength and then attempts to claim her power. During her interview with Aby Sam Thomas during Sharjah Entrepreneurship Festival, Anam said, "Um, so I wanted to write a novel about a woman finding her power and how difficult that is and the challenges she faces" (Sharjah, 2021, p. 38). So, *The Startup Wife* is different from Anam's previous novels; while Anam's famous trilogy (*A Golden Age*, *The Good Muslim* and *The Bones of Grace*) focuses on the Bangladesh War of Independence by tracing the life of the Haque family, *The Startup Wife* takes on a different theme because it focuses on the life of one woman. In the middle of her Ph.D., computer scientist Asha already dreams of running her lab. Everything changes when she has a chance to encounter and fling with Cyrus, her high school sweetheart. Cyrus and Asha desire big and create a revolutionary idea with their friend Jules to build a social networking app that could give meaning to thousands of lives, so they are not alone in this.

This research paper aims to apply existential feminism to *The Startup Wife*. The reason that existential feminism is very applicable in *The Startup Wife* is that a woman, like the character of Asha Ray, is not in a position that allows her to self-actualize. Cyrus's likability makes him a star, while Asha does all the hard work. Asha is supposed to be ecstatic when the app takes off and becomes the next big thing, but instead, she feels like she is left out of the decision-making process at her own company. Throughout the book, she battles with the idea that she has lost something that belongs to her.

According to Silbergeld (1997), feminists who advocate for gender parity in citizenship seek the same legal protections and duties for women as men. Thanks to technological advancements and the entrepreneurial spirit, the modern world is of speed and possibility; being an entrepreneur and working for startups is appealing because startups feel like they will fundamentally change the world. As an entrepreneur, however, Asha faces additional challenges because of her gender. She is the main female character in *The Startup Wife*, which is a way to create custom rituals that

help people organize their lives.

Asha feels isolated because of the male-dominated tech culture, which idealizes male visionaries and male founders. She is a woman in a male-dominated industry. As a result, Asha's pitch does not work when the workers go to their pitch meetings, and no one buys them. The public pays attention when she shares her thoughts with her husband, who does all the speaking part. People started to say, "Cyrus Is the Messiah" (Anam, 2021, p. 271), and Asha becomes subsided. The way she strives to fight for her existence and life purpose as a female living in a Tech world is the leitmotif of the paper.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In many sources, scholars have discussed the concept of women and feminism in Tahmima Anam's novels. According to Harputlu Shah (2018), the research titled "Women and the Nation's Narrative in Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* and Roma Tearne's *Bone China*" seeks to investigate the gendered dimensions of national identification and historical consciousness in women's contemporary South Asian fiction. Harputlu Shah argues that the female protagonists of Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* and Roma Tearne's *Bone China* represent the advancement of women's roles in both formalized and non-formalized spheres as the perspective of male and female roles in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka during the struggle for freedom. According to Harputlu Shah (2018), the two books show how patriotic conflicts, political debates, chronological processes, and migration-related events have contributed to developing women's official, personal, and global standing and obligations. Despite patriarchal norms, women were significantly more active participants in political processes and contributed substantially to the collective memory of national independence.

The thesis, "Women and Displacement in The Context of Partition: A Study of Selected Fiction by South Asian Women Diasporic Writers." examines how immigrant women experience homelessness and attempt to create a sense of belonging in unfamiliar environments. According to Papari (2013), women do what they can to preserve their heritage. However, women often yearn for a sense of domestic belonging because of their stronger ties to the household. However, everyone has a unique concept of what a house should be like. The situation is unique for women in particular. This is because some women feel a strong attachment to their childhood homes, while others find a sense of belonging in their husband's homes. Therefore, 'home' for the women diaspora becomes a sentiment, a retreat into memory due to their departure from their native place. The researcher concludes that Tahmima Anam's novels *A Golden Age* and *The Good Muslim* detail the events leading up to and following the Bangladesh War of Independence and show the entire arc of Rehana's life after her marriage to Iqbal and subsequent relocation to East Pakistan. Rehana's loss of her children to her in-laws (though she was eventually successful in regaining custody of them), her kids' involvement in the Bangladesh Liberation Movement, Sohail's transformation into a guerilla troop, his detachment from her and Maya as he became more religious, and his death from a tumor were all devastating setbacks in her life. From the story, readers can infer that she eventually learned to roll with the punches.

According to Momena and Keya (2018), a woman puts aside her needs to live perfectly for her husband and children. Women's efforts are rarely recognized and respected. Despite devoting their lives to serving others, there are times when even the most minor decisions they make for themselves come under scrutiny. Tahmima Anam's fiction gives a vivid, tangible account of the lives of Bangladeshi women. The researcher concludes that Anam unconsciously depicts successful women who have overcome significant obstacles. Even though the total number of women in this category is relatively small, it is steadily growing. This research ingrains in the minds of its readers the conviction that Bangladeshi women are the magicians of their own lives and those of their families.

So, tough times proved that women could be heroines because they have shown their female power, as the context of Tahmima Anam's trilogy (*A Golden Age*, *The Good Muslim*, and *The Bones of Grace*) indicates. The female presence in the character of Asha Ray, as portrayed in *The Startup Wife*, is a different case because Tahmima presents Asha Ray as a woman who tries to claim her power outside the context of war times. So, the literature gap of this article is to investigate the debacle of Asha Ray as a female character in the text by tracing certain instances of her life since she dropped her Ph.D. and joined a startup business until she lost her power over her marriage.

TABLE 1  
FEMINIST POWER/DEBACLE IN TAHMIMA ANAM'S TEXTS

Tahmima Anam's Texts	Women power	Women Debacle
<i>A Golden Age</i>	Yes	
<i>The Good Muslim</i>	Yes	
<i>The Bones of Grace</i>	Yes	
<i>The Startup Wife</i>		Yes

Table 1 shows that throughout the trilogy of Tahmima Anam, women have successfully achieved their power because they have been able to fulfill their purposes during tough times. However, *The Startup Wife* is a different case because the main female character in the novel fails and loses power, which is taken for analysis in this article.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This article uses the existentialist methodology by tracing instances from the novel, *The Startup Wife*, which supports the theory of Existential Feminism. This can be a reference for future researchers working on the same or similar topic.

By taking into account certain instances from the novel, readers will understand how Asha represents the feminist existential struggle in the modern world and how she fails to fulfill her purpose. The gap in this article is to trace the life of Asha Ray as another heroine of Tahmima's novels.

#### IV. RESULTS

##### A. *Existentialism and Existential Feminism*

The result of this article is the addition of another female debacle to the modern satire of feminism in the world of fiction. This article further adds that women's attempts to get noticed and credited in the sexist Male Tech world have failed. This is because society always ignores a woman in entrepreneurship, especially a woman like Asha. So, even though Asha creates an algorithm that saves humanity from the trifles and sadness of the world, she cannot make a solution to save her marriage; hence her husband Cyrus leaves her alone to handle the company by the end of the novel. The Table below represents which of the two main characters got acknowledged in the eyes of society as a successful person.

TABLE 2  
THE SOCIETY'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SUCCESS

Characters	Succeeded by Getting Acknowledged by society
Asha	No
Cyrus	Yes

Table 2 shows that Asha Ray is a character who loses the game of claiming her power as a woman in the novel, but her husband Cyrus wins by getting more acknowledgment from society. It shows how the male's voice is superior to the female's.

According to Risdaneva (2018), Ideology and power must be considered alongside discussions of gender or the representation of women. So, taking this matter of gender and power into account is very important. It is only fair to describe the relationship between the two terms, existentialism and feminism, along with their relevance to the chosen text. According to existentialism, a philosophical and cultural movement, individuals and their experiences should be the beginning of philosophical thought; moral and scientific reasoning alone is insufficient to understand human existence. Therefore, a set of new classifications controlled by the validity standard is required to comprehend human experience and reality. This philosophy examines individuals, things, other people and their influences on the individual's ability to make choices. Feminism is a political and social movement dedicated to pursuing gender parity. When the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was passed in 1920, it marked the beginning of the first wave of feminism.

According to Jean (2000), Simone de Beauvoir built the foundations of existential feminism. She did this using the existential framework of Jean-Paul Sartre's 1943 book *Being and Nothingness*. 'The Other' is a vital part of Sartre's philosophy, and Beauvoir's revision of his ideas is based on this idea. 'The Other' is any other state of awareness that the 'Self' (the One) thinks is different. By "gazing" at someone, others try to make that person seem less important. Significantly, existential feminism contributes more to the overarching goal of feminism than just illuminating the object or subject dynamic (Jean, 2000).

Regarding gender equality, the second wave of feminism was advocated in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Attempts were made in the third wave to correct what some people saw as absent attention to markers of female difference, such as race, class and religion. While men would be expected to work, women would have no choice but to stay home and support their husbands. This is the standard norm in this situation. This helps the Second Feminist Movement because it shows women that there is more to life than the stereotypes held for them. Only the nursing and teaching professions and the traditionally female-dominated secretarial field are open to them professionally (Higginbotham, 2003). Moreover, most women would hate this: "What I hate is the thought of being under a man's thumb" (Matuz, 1990, p. 409).

According to Reskin and Bielby (2005), Men and women have long been segregated in the workplace, and men have historically had better luck landing jobs than women. Economists and sociologists have found a connection between gender and career outcomes. More men than women work, and they do so for long hours and a more significant number of weeks on average each year. The cultural belief that men have a higher status in society than women (i.e., status beliefs) influences men's and women's evaluations of their competencies in career-related tasks, affecting their performances (Correll, 2004).

Women's existence is examined through an existential lens by existential feminists. Existential feminist research focuses on women's struggles and how they form their identities in a male-dominated society. Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" significantly contributes to this theory, which examines women's subservient role as the "Other". What is currently referred to as the distinction between sex and gender was first introduced by the famous line from "The Second Sex" and the idea that being a woman is a social construct (Bergoffen, 2004). Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" provides readers with a framework for critiquing the traditional notions of femininity and words for analyzing them. This tool frees women from patriarchal structures that rob them of their "can-do" bodies. According to Nabi (2017), sometimes feminism helps women and hurts them. This is highly true in the case of *The Startup Wife* by

Tahmima Anam.

Feminist revisions, while helpful in highlighting the patriarchal tendencies of traditional citizenship and proposing alternative models, are ultimately limited by the sex-gender system made possible by romance narratives and the logic of the sexual contract. Equality feminists, on the one hand, advocate for citizenship that is blind to gender, arguing that women should have the same rights and responsibilities as men. Anne Phillips supports this view in her book *Democracy and Difference*, arguing that the concept of the citizen is inherently public, universal and gender-neutral. Phillips (2002) argues that being a good citizen and a good mother are different things. Furthermore, it is evident in Jane Austen's time, where literature shows readers that women can only achieve security by marrying wealthy men. Austen writes in *Pride and Prejudice*, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Austen, 1813, p. 1). Women have been undervalued for a long time because of the patriarchal system. In the context of *The Startup Wife*, this patriarchal system is practiced highly in the male tech world. According to Steinberg (2014), the tech sector has its own unique set of challenges. Several factors contribute to the prevalence of sexism in the tech industry, including the industry's high male-to-female ratio, the unusually high number of men in powerful positions at ages when they, or many of their peers, have just moved out of frat houses, and the lack of human resources departments at a disproportionate number of startups. It is possible to learn about women in the modern world from contemporary female authors who have experienced something and written about it in their novels. Tahmima Anam is a modern example of this; she is a Bengali writer and a Harvard graduate who has won the Common Wealth Prize and published a trilogy and short stories that have found success. Tahmima Anam claims that telling stories about strong women has always interested her. She considers female protagonists to be the focus of her writing (Prose, 2021).

#### B. *The Existential Manifestation of Feminism in The Startup Wife*

*The Startup Wife* by Tahmima Anam examines what happens when fame and fortune precede morality and marriage. According to Flynn (2006), the existence of a person is something that precedes his essence. What a person is (his essence) is the result of his choices (his existence) rather than the reverse. Essence is not destiny. A person is what he makes himself to be. Likewise, Asha chose her essence when she claimed what was rightfully hers; the algorithm was her idea from the start. Because of this, she had to find a way to compensate between her love and self-actualization, and these two things are at odds in this novel. As a coder, Asha Ray develops an algorithm and starts a company with her husband, Cyrus Johns, who was her high school crush. Her feelings for her husband began when she was a student in elementary school. She says from the beginning of chapter one,

The first time, I was in ninth grade, and Cyrus was in eleventh. I knew his middle name, his classes, when he had a free period, and which afternoons he stayed late for swim team or jazz band practice. In other words, I was in love with him. (Anam, 2021, p. 9)

Regarding technology, it can be challenging to be a woman in a male-dominated field, and it can be even more complicated when one's husband is the CEO of the family business and his wife's. *The Startup Wife* portrays feminism through Asha's deep desire to improve herself in every aspect. As Asha describes in chapter one, she had long admired and aspired to be like the other successful women she had met. Awkwardness hardened into an opaque, terrifying brilliance when Asha went to grad school and started working in Dr. Melanie Stein's lab. She describes Dr. Melanie as one of those formidable women who thrived in academic departments. Even though she was not malicious, she was rude because she never said anything to break the tension or make Asha feel silly for saying something stupid. Before Asha met Cyrus again, she aspired to become a doctor like Dr. Melanie. Hence, her sense of accomplishment is hindered since she has chosen to fall in love and get married instead of pursuing her Ph.D.

Interestingly, Anam portrays Asha Ray as a funny character, making the novel a typical satire on feminism. In the past, there were jokes about feminists; one of the classic jokes is the one demonstrated in a thesis by Kathryn Kein when he said that mocking women activists as people who cannot fix a light bulb is not a funny joke (Kein, 2016). In the case of Asha Ray, the "light bulb" joke is about the relationship between Asha and her husband. As a result, "That's not funny" is used as a feminist critique of humour because it is said by the listener rather than the original joke-teller. Feminists from the second wave are portrayed in popular culture as angry and unflappable, and this refers to this widely held view (Kein, 2016). Since 2016, mainstream comedy has been dominated by women, which has led to the recognition of humour as a platform for feminism. According to Quintero (2008), it is commonly held that satirists care deeply about the greater good when they put pen to paper, making satire unique among literary genres. So likewise, Anam's novel functions as a feminist satire to add a delightful flavor to the demand the novel tries to make; women deserve to be heard, acknowledged, and praised in the startup world.

*The Startup Wife* has instances showing how difficult it is for a woman to exist in a world of technology. So, her existential feminism is threatened by her husband, Cyrus is taking the light from her, and he is winning over the attention she feels she deserves. Jules, a friend of both Cyrus and Ray, suggests in Chapter 2, "Jeez, Cy, if only you could give every skeptic what they wanted, some kind of believable replacement for God" (Anam, 2021, p. 46), suggesting that technology could be a replacement for anything. Asha says,

I just said I could code an algorithm that would allow people to get a kind of Cyrus ritual, a combination of all their things, wrapped up in a little modern package, without the sexism, homophobia, and burning in the fires of hell of actual religion. (Anam, 2021, p. 46)

That was Asha's wish behind creating the code in the first place so the world could be "without the sexism". This is exactly what applies to Beauvoir's biographers, Claude Francis and Fernande Gontier, when they said, according to the translation of Gilbert, Beauvoir's feminism is grounded in her ethics, which require her to work towards a world in which inequality is reduced through her pursuit of justice (Gilbert, 1987). So, Asha here demonstrates this existential notion of feminism, which makes Asha stand as an example of a woman striving to create something positive but is not much recognized. Asha refers to her husband as the "new messiah," one of the book's central themes is the exaggeration of the idea that male CEOs are revered by turning Cyrus into a spiritual figure. Even though the book is about Cyrus and Ray's marriage and has nothing to do with religion, Cyrus is still considered a cult leader. Asha asks herself how the algorithm she made has led many people to worship her husband, which is satire. In an interview with Megha Majumdar, Anam explains how sexist the world and the workplace are and how capitalism has bred generations of white male leaders who are looked up to as pioneers. Anam says:

It is definitely one of the major themes in the book so much so that I wanted to exaggerate this point which is that male CEOs are revered by making Cyrus into a slightly spiritual character and making WAI into kind of replacement for religion because even though it's supposed to be a non-religious thing he still starts to get looked at as a cult leader and Asha says to herself like how is it that I built this algorithm that makes millions of people literally worship my husband that is just so, you know, ironic um so it's definitely that I think the thing that I would say about the tech world is that it is the world so in all the ways in which the world and the workplace is sexist and in all the ways that capitalism has bred generations of white male leaders who are then looked upon as the kind of pioneers and the new inventors and the Bransons who go to space and you know all of that tech is just a part of that the exciting thing about tech is that it's been sold to us as an alternative culture that it's pitched as being disruptive. (Prose, 2021, pp. 33, 30)

Asha Ray comes up with the concept for the company, and when it takes off, many see her husband as a savior figure. Cyrus performs individualized atheist rituals, and Asha converts those rituals into a computer program. In the novel, the risk factor of decision theory comes into play when the choice comes with some danger. According to Neville et al. (1932), several constraints on decision-making in the face of uncertainty have been proposed recently. They are all roughly analogous or related, leading to the same conclusion: any delay can be reduced to some form of risk for a "rational" person. As Asha Ray observes, people's fears and desires become more apparent when they invest emotionally in social media. She sees this as a potential threat. When asked about her concerns, she replies, "We're mitigating risk" (Anam, 2021, p. 143). Asha is rational because she considers the possible outcomes of her actions in light of the potential harm they may cause to humanity. According to Karni and Vierø (2013), the decision-makers beliefs about the connections between possible actions and outcomes and their perception of the feasible state space may shift in light of new information (e.g., scientific evidence, an observation). So, Asha's love for Cyrus reaches its extreme when she decides to marry him. Still, when she feels that her existence as a successful female in the startup community is ignored, she becomes rebellious, striving to reclaim what she feels is rightfully hers.

At several points in the book, Anam uses Asha Ray's sister as a metaphor for today's women living in perilous conditions. Asha's sister Mira lives her life based on the choices made for her by men. Asha praises her sister for being decisive and unapologetic in expressing her opinions; when discussing Mira's options, Asha presents them as weighty and casual. Asha recounts how Mira's parents react angrily when she decides to wear a hijab for the first time at the age of fifteen, telling her to "Go out in a bikini!" and "That's what America is for" (Anam, 2021, p. 56). Even though Asha's parents claim that she and her siblings have complete freedom of choice, this shows that such freedom is a myth in the family.

On the other hand, Asha appears to be proud of her sister's independence and willingness to do what she thinks is right, regardless of anyone else's opinion. Asha explains, "She would not hesitate. She would not wait for anyone's permission. She would grab it with both hands and fly like a girl on a dragon's back" (Anam, 2021, p. 57). Asha Ray makes choices based on the assumption that she is very good at adapting to novel circumstances. Since her husband is a visionary, the people of WAI (who work in the company of Asha and Cyrus) will do anything he asks of them. The more Asha talks about her ambition, the more she believes she can start something new. As she considers the challenges women face in the currently male-dominated tech industry, she begins to formulate a plan to help them achieve success.

Asha says in chapter thirteen, "I'm starting to think about other things\_ a mentorship program I might kick-off to help young women get ahead in tech. I might even ask Cyrus if I can spend some of our WAI money on building a lab for the Empathy Module" (Anam, 2021, p. 223). Incompleteness in either judgment of relative probability or preferences between outcomes has been posited as the root cause of failure of completeness in decision-making (Chandler, 2017). This means that Asha cannot decide for herself unless her husband is involved in the decision-making process, which ultimately leads to her failure.

Regarding Asha's existential goal, she still needs some key pieces. Asha could count on her husband's support no matter what she chooses, but she would feel isolated. Nothing can be avoided before sexism and gender roles are clearly defined. Despite her evident engineering prowess, Asha's husband pays her little attention. Therefore, Asha Ray's failure to make good choices is based on her realization toward the novel's finale that she did not articulate a code to assist her marriage, regardless of humanity. Asha Ray, trying to save her marriage, comes up with a plan to help other people achieve their goals. She decides to make it her mission to write a book that improves the lives of others. She hopes this

will make a difference because she thinks all other problems can be solved once marital and professional issues are resolved. Asha Ray rebels against the deeply sexist office culture that stereotypes and marginalizes women by portraying them as passive and submissive rather than independent and ambitious like men. As Asha explains in the novel, this is because women have historically faced discrimination and sexism in the workplace. The inability to pitch ideas because of gender biases is the core issue that Anam pinpoints.

I just said I could code an algorithm that would allow people to get a kind of Cyrus ritual, you know, a combination of all their things, wrapped up in a little modern package, without the sexism, homophobia, and burning-in-the-fires of hell of actual religion. (Anam, 2021, p. 46)

Asha's existential decision about coding the algorithm asserts that the workplace creates differentiated roles between men and women; men head off to work, leaving their responsibilities at home, while women tend to the house and the kids (Stories, 2021). Asha Ray decides to make some changes because the technology behind startups promotes the stereotype that men can do anything they set their minds to and make their investors wealthy. The myth of self-creation that comes with technological advancement is overridden by the solid structural forces at work, which will stifle any attempt at disruption. Adjustments within choice builder's opinions about the connections between them change the collection of feasible states while leaving the set of imaginable forms unchanged, in contrast to the emergence of new viable impacts and new viable actions, which also broaden the set of potential and the location of possible conditions. According to the novel, it is only when the full scope of the problem is recognized that effective action can be taken. As work becomes more strenuous, female workers fade into the background.

As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Asha's choices regarding cooperating between "marriage" and "job" are meaningless because she never accomplishes either. Asha is a stereotypically decisive protagonist who goes after her life goals despite her husband's resistance, only to lose her marriage and blame herself for its failure. Asha says near the end of the novel after she has failed to save her marriage:

When I hear the door close, I want to run after him and tell him to come back, tell him it'll be okay, that I will take care of everything: him, the company, our marriage... More than anything, I wonder if it all will have been worth it. (Anam, 2021, p. 294)

As a result of the choices that Asha makes to preserve her status as a successful woman, she is now forced to deal with the aftermath of her husband, who has become known as the "New Messiah," abandoning her after he has achieved his goal of becoming a leader. Asha is overly critical of herself by entertaining the notion that she should blame herself for being excluded and rejected. Because picking one action means deciding against all the others, the individual might experience either regret or joy when thinking about other activities they passed up (Loomes & Sugden, 1982). The guilt that Asha feels for being able to bring about a cultural shift but being excluded from it brings her much sadness. Because love by itself does not necessarily bring about any change, it is not sufficient to bring about that cultural shift. The realization that Asha and her husband are participants in a system that has existed for a significant amount of time ought to go hand in hand with the choice that Asha has made to bring change in the situation. The myth of technological disruption, the legend of work-life balance and the myth of the visionary male CEO are some of the myths that need to have their foundations shaken up before that system can be reimaged.

Interestingly, the novel has an initial critical statement by Asha Ray, "People say there's no such thing as Utopia, but they're wrong. I've seen it myself, and it's on the corner of Tenth Avenue and Fifteenth Street" (Anam, 2021, p. 1). Whose "Utopia" is it, then, one might reasonably wonder? If a woman is the driving force behind the hero's success, she deserves credit for his achievements. The fact is that the workplace has been a breeding ground for casual misogyny for too long. According to Russ's analysis, Utopias do not represent universal values but are rather reactive, providing in fiction what their authors feel society, especially women, lacks in the real world (Russ, 1995). Therefore, Asha's case in the novel is that of 'humanism,' which is a significant theme of existentialism. Humanism means that existentialism as a philosophy focuses on the individual and her quest for identity and meaning in the face of the surrounding pressures of society to be superficial and conformist. The political function of utopian writing is hinted at in *Women In Search Of Utopia: Mavericks And Mythmakers'* description of a feminist utopia, which suggests that it blames men or male institutions for the current state of social unrest and portrays women as not only the equals of men but also the sole arbiters of their reproductive functions (Rohrlich & Baruch, 1984). This contrasts with the scientific view, which focuses on scientific discovery. According to Pateman (1988), women are treated as second-class citizens by erasing the link between capitalist production and familial reproduction. Moreover, according to Mouffe (1995), sexuality should not matter in politics or citizenship. She agrees with Pateman in criticizing the liberal male conception of modern citizenship. However, she thinks a radical and plural democracy needs a different conception of citizenship and political community. So, the more Asha tries to claim what she invents, the more she becomes subsided, and this proves that it is the "Utopia" of the man and not of the woman, even if the woman is the one who created the algorithm.

## V. CONCLUSION

Through analysis of specific passages from the book, this paper demonstrates that *The Startup Wife* is a work of fiction incorporating existentialism into its narrative and character development. Since the primary focus of the existential theory in this book is on an ambitious woman named Asha Ray, it can be safely said that instances of existential and feminism are in the text. The satire on feminism used to be taken seriously in the past, but in recent years,

it has been viewed as something normal and presented by many female writers, such as in *The Startup Wife* by Tahmima Anam. The novel depicts a conflict between a woman's pursuit of self-actualization and her love for another person. It demonstrates that this conflict continues today, even though technology has advanced to its fullest extent.

The feminist satire in *The Startup Wife* is derived from the epiphany that the protagonist, Asha Ray, has toward the end of the book when she realizes that she cannot write a code to fix her marriage, let alone humans and humanity. Because she is the complete antithesis of her husband, she cannot maintain her marriage to him. The book compels readers to ponder whether Asha or Cyrus is more deserving of the title "Utopia" when considered in the context of the story. Moreover, the response to that question is that although it appears to be Cyrus' world from the outside, it is an invention of Asha's. Even though her goal is to have a better life and marriage, the overconfident nature of Asha is in direct opposition to her husband's demeanor, and this fact is a contributing factor to the break of the continuity of the love story toward the end.

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