

THE ROUTES OF THE ROOTLESS:
A Study of the Novels and Short Stories of
ARUN JOSHI

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BINDU ANN PHILIP
RESEARCH CENTRE
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
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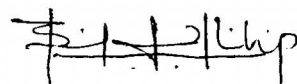
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DECLARATION

I, BINDU ANN PHILIP, hereby declare that the dissertation **“The Routes of the Rootless: A Study of the Novels and Short Stories of Arun Joshi,”** has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar title or recognition.



BINDU ANN PHILIP
Research Scholar
Department of English
Vimala College
Thrissur - 680 009

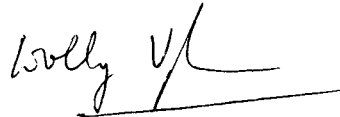
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled "**The Routes of the Rootless: A Study of the Novels and Short Stories of Arun Joshi,**" is a record of the original studies and research carried out by **Bindu Ann Philip**, Research Scholar, Department of English, Vimala College, Thrissur-680 009 (Calicut University), under my guidance and supervision and submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirements for Ph. D. in English Language and Literature.



Dr Varghese Dolly M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.
Research Guide
Research Centre
The Department of English
Vimala College
Thrissur - 680 009

Thrissur
07.07.'07

PREFACE

I chanced upon Arun Joshi's novel *The Foreigner* about eight years back. As I read the pages through and through, I found myself in love with Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist, who was imbued with a feeling of rootlessness, and a subsequent desire for a route to success. I was also impressed by the materialistic routes followed by Oberoi and the consequent turning-point in his life. In the succeeding months I found myself too preoccupied with the other novels of Arun Joshi. I was touched by the abyss of rootlessness depicted in the characters, larger than life. Nevertheless, their angst became mine in no time. Displaying the main characters on the podium, I was enthralled to find that they all had some traits common to Sindi Oberoi: an insecure sense of rootlessness, a search for personal roots, a search for worldly routes to success, a turning-point midway, and finally, the route to salvation. Need I say more about how my reading paved the way to the study, "The Routes of the Rootless: A Study of the Novels and Short Stories of Arun Joshi"?

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07.07.'07

ARUN JOSHI

(1939 - 1993)



“I seek a belief and faith beyond psychology”

INTRODUCTION
ARUN JOSHI: AN ARTIST IN THE
MAKING

Bindu Ann Philip “The Routes of the Rootless: A Study of the Novels and Short Stories of Arun Joshi” Thesis. Department of English, Vimala College Thrissur , University of Calicut, 2007

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

ARUN JOSHI: AN ARTIST IN THE MAKING

The Novel and the Short Story down the Years

Among the various literary expressions, the latest and the most dominant form in the twentieth century is the novel. Elastic and irregular, the novel is concerned directly with life, with men and women, their joys and sorrows. As a novel deals with life, one naturally expects from the novelist, the impression life made upon him. Thus, the emergence of the novel as a major literary form is mainly responsible for the increased importance given to realism in all forms of literary art. The novel clearly envisages the snappy human lives and meets the needs of the modern man more boldly than poetry or drama. It reflects both the constructive and the disintegrating phases of contemporary society.

It is commonly agreed that the novel is the most acceptable way of embodying experiences and ideas in the context of our time. It is not only the single literary form to compete for popularity with the television and the radio, but also the only one in which, a great deal of distinguished work is being done the world over.

The history of the novel is difficult to trace, because of the innumerable novelists on the way. But there does exist a cogent string of continuity between the oldest and the latest forms of the novel. The growth of the form reveals a kind of dissatisfaction with the story, merely as a story. It is even difficult to fix up the types of stories. The easiest to distinguish are the realistic and the historical novels. There are comic novels too, like the *Pickwick Papers* by Charles Dickens (1812-70), sociological novels like *It Is Never Too Late To Mend* by Charles Reade (1814-84) and philosophical novels like *Diana of the Crossways* by George Meredith (1828-1909).

The novel form has undergone a transformation in quality, quantity and complexity over the years. Anthony Trollope (1815-82) tells the story in a straightforward manner giving importance to the plot but for Loureance Sterne (1713-68) the form is more important than the plot. Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) uses the novel as a vehicle for ideas and conversations. George Orwell (1903-50) makes the novel form the satirical study of a particular political system. There are also out-of-the-ordinary novels like James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Since the days of Sir Philip Sidney (1554-86) and John Lyly (1554-1606), the novel has trod on a long path and undergone a

great change. Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) designed his novel *Pamela* as a bunch of letters, while Henry Fielding's (1707-54) novels wove together a string of episodes. Sir Walter Scott (1771-1823) nurtured the cult of historical romances in English. Jane Austen's (1775-1817) novels give a picturesque and affectionate account of English middle-class life. Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823) and Horace Walpole (1717-97) introduced the novel of terror in the Gothic tradition.

William Thackeray (1811-63), with his pictures of English life, is a contrast to Charles Dickens whose novels contain humour and sentiment along with a teeming variety of living characters. Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94) deals with stories of adventure; Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) gives a tragic vision of life in his Wessex novels; H. G. Wells (1866-1946) excels in scientific romances. James Joyce (1882-1941) revels in the stream-of-consciousness form; Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) adds the beauty of the sea to his novels; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) makes the detective novel the craze of the day and the name of Sherlock Holmes, a household word in England. Thus, the novel came of age and gained acceptance as an established form of art. *The History of English Novel* records:

Its medium is prose, not verse; as to content, it is a portrayal of life, in the shape of a story, wholly or in the main fictitious; as to its way of portraying life, though the pretence of exact reporting of indiscriminate detail is generally regarded as a mistaken kind of realism, and much latitude is allowed to plot and surprise, everything recounted is required to be credible, or at least to have a definite and consistent relation to the facts of existence.

(Baker 1: 11)

Even today new experiments are being added to the potentialities of the novel form, because it is the widest read in the world. It is an accepted truth regarding novel-reading and novel-writing that the well-made novel is the one in which the subject and the form coincide and are indistinguishable. In a good novel the matter is all used up in the form, and the form expresses the whole matter. This integral association between the matter and the form is hard to achieve in a novel, but if achieved, it makes the novel great. The masterpieces among novels have achieved this harmony in a marvellous manner.

Needless to mention, India with its uniquely glorious and glamorous, literary and literacy heritage, is the home of stories

where storytelling has been an art from time immemorial. The Indian-English fiction is a successfully established art by now, and it is still developing with justifiable confidence and pride. Novelists continue to dominate the literary scene in India. The Indo-English novelists until the thirties wrote for a readership largely Indian. The image of India as projected by four generations of Anglo-Indian novelists is far from realistic. They displayed India as a land of darkness, steeped in ignorance and superstition. The Indo-Anglian writers took it as a challenge to correct the stigma and they did succeed in a way. The triad or the 'Trimurti' of the Indo-English fiction - Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao - wished to give an insider's view of India to the outside world.

The abundant contributions of Nirad C. Chaudhuri, V.S. Naipaul, Manohar Malgaonkar, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh, C. L. Nahal and Arun Joshi are commendable. Women novelists also abound in India - Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, and Nayantara Sahgal, Arundhati Roy and so on. They use the medium of English according to their individual genius and temperament, and add lustre and freshness to the novel form.

The more recent Indo-English fiction has been trying to give expression to the Indian experience of the modern

predicament, of which the fiction of Arun Joshi is the most representative. He is, beyond doubt, one of the most significant novelists today. His reputation has won serious critical attention since the publication of his first novel in 1968. His novels are singularized by existentialist problems and their resultant anger, agony and psychic quest. He has very dexterously, handled some thought-provoking themes like rootlessness, detachment and the need for better alternatives in an ostentatious world. He focuses on self-realization, highlighting the glorious cultural heritage of India and its imperishable moral values. Arun Joshi has also made some valuable contribution to the short-story form.

The short story in comparison with the novel, has acquired an important place in modern times. It has a claim to the oldest simple narrations, because man's story-telling instinct might have given rise to some crude form of the short story in every country. Though the short story has many features similar to the novel it is different from the novel in the handling of its material. It is also different from the simple and unadorned narration of an incident. The short story is remarkable for its brevity, in general, though there are stories that exceed the limit of the short story. The spread of the magazines is the chief cause for its growth. In a fast developing culture, people find

little time to devote to aesthetic enjoyment and the present-day reader finds hardly any time for novel-reading. So, the short story satisfies him. There are stories of varying lengths, ranging from stories of half a page to stories as long as a novelette.

Edgar Allan Poe may be regarded as the maker of the modern short story. He is followed by a number of writers in America and England. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Washington Irving, Sir Walter Scott, H. G. Wells, Oscar Wilde, Anton Chekhov, Ernest Hemingway and William Saroyam are a few among the most eminent of modern story writers.

In *A History of Indian English Literature*, M. K. Naik describes the short stories written in Indian English as “mostly a by-product of the novel workshop” (247). It is sure that most of the Indian novelists from Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R. K. Narayan to Khushwant Singh, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgaonkar, Chaman Nehal, Anita Desai and Ruth Pravar Jhabvala have tried writing short stories. These authors have not taken to the short story merely to take time off from a more serious preoccupation of writing a novel but because they found the form relevant to the modern man. Arun Joshi is also well-aware of the importance and the function of the short story as an

effective literary form. In *The Sunday Statesman* on 27 February 1983, Joshi expresses his view:

Each has its own place. In my case it is the theme which determines whether it would be a short story or a novel. For example, I wrote a short story called “Gherao” which was about some students gheroaing a principal. Thematically I would not like to handle a novel about the academic world which I don’t know about; so a short story. (“A Winner’s Secret” 71)

Joshi’s short stories are used as powerful weapons against social malpractices. The strength of the stories is the deep insight they give regarding human reality and character. They are also remarkable for their beautiful way of presentation, description and expression. The stories are rooted in Indian soil and in order to keep it natural, Joshi uses unhesitatingly Hindi and Urdu words, without bothering to translate them into English. The stories capture the reader’s attention because they dovetail form with substance. The seriousness of content, the uniqueness of precision and the freshness of his language, make Joshi a leading short-story writer in contemporary Indian English Literature.

II

Arun Joshi: Life and Works

It was unthinkable for an Indian writer to hope to become a novelist in the pre-Rushdie era, when Indian fiction in English had not consolidated a reputation in the West. The chances of success at home were also indigent. A withdrawn individual, who did little to promote his books, and who refrained from entering literary circles, Arun Joshi found even more obstacles on his way to becoming a writer. He was essentially an industrialist who cultivated his love for literature, only in his spare time. Thus, it is easy to understand why he cynically rejoiced over the fact that not even his neighbours knew that he wrote books. In spite of his neighbours' ignorance, he gradually became a novelist of outstanding repute in the restricted circle of Indian scholars and critics. He was acclaimed for the depth in his novels in which French existentialism coexisted and fused with meditations reminiscent of the Bhagavad Gita. A bridge between two contrasting worlds and cultures, his life influenced his writing which stepped up an ascending line that eventually led him to receive the Sahitya Akademy Award, India's most prestigious literary recognition.

Son of a famous botanist and eminent academician, Joshi was born in 1939 in Varanasi where he lived until he was seven. He spent the rest of his childhood in Lahore, and then moved back to the Indian Punjab during the traumatic period of the partition in 1947. A brilliant student, he was awarded a scholarship to the U. S. where he obtained a degree in Engineering and Industrial Management from the University of Kansas. This was soon followed by a Master's degree from M. I. T., Massachussets. Joshi's interest and passions like that of Billy Biswas, his most famous fictional character, were aroused not by the field his University studies had prepared him for, but rather by a totally unrelated one: psychiatry. Thanks in part to the help of a psychiatrist uncle, he began a job in a mental hospital where he worked with chronic schizophrenics, an experience which left a deep impression on him, and which he also used in creating Biswas in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*.

After completing his education, Joshi came back to India and got a job on the management staff of an Indian company, before trying the adventure of establishing small companies of his own, producing diesel engines, machine tools, foundry products and automotive parts. Incidentally, it may be noted that Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist of his debut novel, *The Foreigner*,

brings back to life many of the experiences encountered in his youth. Alongside his role as an industrial manager, Joshi, however, became the administrator of a philanthropic institution, coordinating research and training, regarding the human side of industry, from workers to upper-echelon staff. This dynamic, career-minded industrialist was, at the same time, an outstanding novelist who turned to creative writing as a hobby. And this ability, to switch from one world to another diametrically-opposed one, is a peculiar trait that Joshi shared with many of his protagonists, reaching the status of leitmotif in Som Bhaskar's predicament in *The Last Labyrinth*. In the 1993 dry season before the arrival of the monsoons, Joshi passed away unexpectedly, owing to complications following an attack of asthma, an affliction he had suffered throughout his life. Curiously enough two of his main characters, Sindi Oberoi in *The Foreigner* and Ratan Rathor in *The Apprentice* also suffer from asthma. Joshi is survived by his wife, Rukmani, whom he married in 1964, and three children - two daughters and a son.

Joshi's literary career began only after his return to India with the publication of *The Foreigner* in 1968, the most noticeably autobiographical novel. At that time young Indian writers had not dreamt of fame, but the assistance of Khushwant Singh, the

renowned journalist and novelist, was decisive in promoting the fortunes of this new name. Despite the open ending, the pessimistic tale in *The Foreigner* offers its characters no chance of redemption. But the author's affable skills and his acute sensitivity in focussing on imaginary crossroads between existential motifs and ethical choices became noteworthy and popular.

Joshi's second novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) established his position in the literary scene. Critical reviews gave him a benevolent reception and scholars in India started making him the focus of new areas of research. His fascinating style, no doubt, was reminiscent of Joseph Conrad.

The Apprentice (1974), the third and the favourite novel of Joshi, exposes his highly introspective nature. This confessional tale displays a single male point of view. The father-son relationship, reverberating intensely throughout Joshi's literary productions, occupies a central position here. Nevertheless, the author makes a considerable effort to mask it behind two men who appear to be quite accidental acquaintances. Despite the exclusively male point of view, the work was not only welcomed by the male readers but also appreciated by feminist critics.

After a brief interval, Joshi wrote *The Last Labyrinth* (1980), which is considered by some scholars to be his major

achievement. The novel, which earned the prestigious Sahitya Akademy Award, develops as a painstaking search probing into the deep recesses of the human soul. The young industrial manager constantly wavering on the verge between the rational and the irrational, love and hate, living and dying, sacrifice and fancy, the wealth of Bombay and the holiness of Benaras was a live example of the human predicament. In 1975, a collection of his short stories was published under the title *The Survivor: A Collection of Short Stories*. Joshi's last work *The City and the River* (1990) published a decade after *The Last Labyrinth*, is proof of the author's search for a new literary path, perhaps enlightened by the highly successful Indian author, Salman Rushdie.

A significant anthology of the works of Arun Joshi is *The Fictional World of Arun Joshi* edited by R. K. Dhawan. The papers published on the novels and short stories are the following: "The Art and Vision of Arun Joshi" by O. P. Bhatnagar; "Double Vision of Fantasy and Reality in Arun Joshi's Novels" by Harish Raizada; "Human predicament and Meaninglessness in Arun Joshi's Novels" by R. S. Pathak; "Arun Joshi and *The Labyrinth of Life*" by O. P. Mathur and G. Rai; "The Lost Lonely Questers of Arun Joshi's Fiction" by Thakur Guruprasad; "*The Foreigner*. A Study in

Innocence and Experience” by Mohan Jha; “From Detachment to Involvement: The Case of Sindi Oberoi” by Dr. K. Radha; “*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas: A Serious Response to a Big Challenge*” by D. Prempati; “The Image of Fire in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*” by Devinder Mohan; “Vision and Technique in *The Apprentice* by Joy Abraham; *The Apprentice: An Existential Study*” by V. Gopal Reddy; “The Crisis of Consciousness: *The Last Labyrinth* by Hari Mohan Prasad; “The Two Worlds in *The Last Labyrinth*” by Sham Sunder Sharma; “The Language of the Splintered Mirror: The Fiction of Arun Joshi” by Devinder Mohan. “Foreigners and Strangers: Arun Joshi’s Heroes” by Jasbir Jain; “A Study of Arun Joshi’s Fiction” by Shyam M. Ansari, “Review of *The Last Labyrinth*” by Keke Daruwalla and so on.

Joshi has been influenced by many, especially the existentialist writers. To quote *The Sunday Statesman* on 27 February 1983 again: “I did read Camus and Sartre admits Joshi: . . . I liked *The Outsider*. I might have been influenced by them. Sartre, I did not understand clearly or like. As for existential philosophers like Kierkegaard I have never understood anything except odd statements” (“A Winner’s Secret” 71). Influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and the Bhagavad Gita, he

believes that individual actions have an effect on oneself and on others as well. He learns from life that one has to commit oneself at some point and entrust great value to the right way of living.

III

Arun Joshi's Works and the Readers' Response

The present work, "The Routes of the Rootless: A Study of the Novels and Short Stories of Arun Joshi" is based on the Reader-Response Theory.

The term 'reader-response criticism' refers not to a single theory or method but to a range of approaches in which the form of critical attention is on how readers respond to a text. Its development was a reaction against New Criticism and other varieties of Formalism, in which there is an emphasis on the text. It was also a reaction against various biographical approaches in which the author is seen as the ultimate source of meaning. In their analysis of how a reader responds to a text, the reader-response critics have drawn upon a number of theories and interpretive models, notably psychoanalysis, structuralism, and phenomenology.

Reader-response criticism may be traced back to Aristotle and Plato, both of whom based their critical arguments partly on the response of the reader. The immediate sources of the theory can be found in the writings of the French structuralists and the American critics such as Kenneth Burke, Louise Rosenblatt, Walker Gibson and Wayne Booth. Reader-response criticism became recognized as a distinct critical movement only in the 1970s. But much ahead of this movement, the ideas behind a work of art being recreated each time it is read, had held sway. For example, in *Art as Experience* (1959), John Dewey certified that a work of art is “recreated every time it is aesthetically experienced. . . . It is absurd to ask what an artist ‘really’ meant by his product: he himself would find different meanings in it at different days and hours and in different stages of his own development.” <<http://writprog.web.arizona.edu/materials/3-6.htm>>

In 1938 Louise Rosenblatt published a classic work entitled *Literature as Exploitation* which served as a model for the teaching of literary texts for more than fifty years. An individual reader engaging himself in reading a text is no doubt a private affair. His interpretation of the text has meanings internally experienced in his own consciousness and it need not be necessarily shared. Even if that text is read aloud to others, the reader’s meaning-

making remains unchanged. But if an informed adult reads aloud to a group, the quality of his reading, his tone, his emphasis, and above all, his enthusiasm and rhythmic variations while reading, may influence those listening to him. When such a group of readers indulge in reading and interpreting a text in a classroom, the group becomes an interpretive community. What happens in this context is the readers' response to a text.

To put it without scholarly jargon, it may be said that when the reading is systematized, the result is a reader-response theory, and when the interpretation is organized it becomes reader-response criticism. The theorist uses all available literary, educational, sociological and communicative knowledge to study the meaning-making situation. The task of the reader-response critic is to develop and maintain the interpretive community. The reader-response theorist will also provide ample time for experiencing the personally felt meanings, and he encourages all individuals to enter into discussion with confidence. But the critic is expected to respect both his own critical meanings and those of others. Thus the process of meaning-making, moves from the private to the public domain. Theorists and their methods vary from person to person:

Though the reader-response theorists differ on particular points there are three general principles that distinguish this methodology:

1. Reading is believed to be dynamic and interactive;
2. Meaning emerges from a transaction between readers and texts;
3. Response to texts does not equal interpretation of texts. <<http://writprog.web.arizona.edu/materials/3-6.htm>>

In the reader-response critical approach, the primary focus falls on the reader and the process of reading, rather than on the author or the text. The theoretical assumptions regarding the reader-response criticism are:

1. "Literature is a performative art and each reading is a performance, like enacting a drama. Literature exists only when it is read. Therefore meaning is an event. This is in contrast to the New Critical concept of the "affective fallacy."
2. The literary texts do not possess any fixed or final meaning or value. That is, there is no single "correct" meaning. Literary meaning is created by the interaction of the reader and the text."

<[http://www.cnr.edu/home/bmcmanus/
readercrit.html](http://www.cnr.edu/home/bmcmanus/readercrit.html)>

There are a number of interpretations to the interpretations of the reader-response theory because even subjectivity is based on the way a text is read. As stated in the *Encyclopaedia of Literary Critics and Criticism*:

. . . however subjective a response may be, we all share one indisputable element - a common language. Words, quite simply, mean - and, as a result, we have intersubjective “communities” of readers who may argue about the *interpretations* of a text, but at least they are objectifying their subjectivity by “naming” their experience of the work under discussion. This idea of language on a lynchpin of objectivity, while allowing individual readers to let their imagination wander, however subjectively, erratically, or idiosyncratically, has found favour with a new generation of reader-response critics and seems to provide a sound basis for the way that we (readers) actually read the text. (922)

There is no doubt that the reader-response theory and criticism have produced new waves in literature and criticism but the fact remains that when the jargons are removed, the essence is the same. That is, when a reader reads a text he understands only what he is able to understand, and what he wants to understand. The way in which he understands or how far he understands is different from another reader's understanding. To quote the *Encyclopaedia of Literary Critics and Criticism* once again: "Since no one can ever tell exactly what goes on in someone else's mind during the reading process, let alone his or her own, it is clear that the problematic raised by reader-response theory will be with us for some time to come" (922).

This study also aims at viewing the possible responses of the readers. For this purpose, the readers are divided into three categories: (1) the interested reader, that is, one who is immersed in the novel, and enjoys reading it and is therefore keen on finding out the details of the characters with excitement, (2) the disinterested reader, a reader who is impartial in judgement, that is, one who is neither keenly interested nor uninterested in the novel. (3) the uninterested reader, that is, a casual reader who has no special interest in the novel.

IV

The Proposed Research Work

The main objective of this research, “The Routes of the Rootless: A Study of the Novels and Short Stories of Arun Joshi” is to probe into the routes taken by the rootless characters in the novels and short stories of Joshi. The critical stages of development in the lives of the heroes appear painful and problematic, and hence they find out their routes through the path of life. They realize that they have to give up their old ways and ill-formed notions. But they are neither willing nor able to sacrifice what is outgrown. Consequently they cling to their old patterns of thinking and behaving, thus failing to negotiate the crisis. As a result, they fail to grow up and experience the joyful sense of rebirth. Thereby they are prevented from attaining a successful transition into greater maturity.

Joshi’s heroes are representatives of modern men who refuse to come to terms with their midlife crisis in the course of their lives. Being rootless they adopt varied routes for living. Thus they portray the trauma undergone by many an Indian in his struggle to live. The heroes merely exist; they cannot live. The growth spirit does not occur in them because they do not understand that in order to permit growth to take place, the old

self must be relinquished. Moreover the heroes are not ready to accept the fact that their old self and their way of life miss the mark. As their unconscious is one step ahead of the conscious they become depressed and the depression gives the signal that a major alteration is required for successful adaptation. Such an adaptation becomes impossible for them because, their desires and attitudes take different shapes. These conditions are dealt with by Joshi. This study takes into focus some of the major routes, taken by the characters, in the hope of rendering a joyful living instead of a mere existence.

The present study comprises eight chapters. Chapter One, Introduction, "Arun Joshi: An Artist in the Making" is divided into four sections. The first section, "The Novel and Short Story down the Years" traces the growth of the novel and the short story up to Arun Joshi. The second section, "Arun Joshi: Life and Works" focuses on Joshi's life and works. The third section, "Arun Joshi's Works and the Readers' Response" introduces the theory on which this study is based, and the fourth section, "The Proposed Research Work" gives the layout of the thesis.

Chapter Two, "The Route from Indifference to Involvement," is a study of the theme of indifference and involvement in the five novels. But the major focus is on *The*

Foreigner (1968), in which Sindi Oberoi, a rootless Kenyan-Indian traces his route through London, Boston and New Delhi. The rootless Sindi, like the other main characters, learns that indifference is a kind of detachment, and the real detachment is detachment from the self and attachment to persons other than the self.

Chapter Three, "The Route from Sophistication to Simplicity," is a study of all Joshi's novels with regard to the shift from sophistication to primitivism. But the major focus is on the second novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1974). The mystical urge in Billy Biswas leads him to the jungle to seek communion with nature, a route he takes up from sophistication to simplicity, but his life is terminated by the society in the usual way in which it disposes of all its rebels.

The fourth chapter, "The Route from Crime to Confession," is a study of all the novels with regard to the change of attitude from crime to confession giving focus on *The Apprentice*, the third novel (1974). This novel is different in tone from the earlier ones. Ratan Rathor, its hero, as well as its antihero, is everyman, endowed fortunately or unfortunately, with a lower intellectual calibre. He does not feel at home in the society. Nevertheless, he does not abandon it like Billy Biswas. Neither a rebel nor a

dissident, he is the victim. Yet the powerful instinct in him makes him overcome the feeling of alienation from the society. He adapts himself to the ways of the society by succumbing to worldly pleasures. But in the end he realizes the hollowness of his whole life and thereby seeks the routes from crime to confession. Tired of body and spirit, he ends up in the temple wiping the shoes of the entrants.

Chapter Five, “The Route from the Labyrinth to the Light,” throws light on all the novels, especially the fourth one *The Last Labyrinth* (1981), which won Joshi, the prestigious Sahitya Akadami Award. Basically a love-story, the novel traces the steps of Som in his quest for the joy of life. Unfortunately, he is suffocated by the void within and the void without. He fails to sublimate his animalistic desires to the spiritual. He is not able to surrender himself to conquer an unwavering faith. But he learns that the labyrinth of life can be neatly woven through intuition and the light of faith rather than through science and reason.

Chapter Six “*The Route from Fantasy to Fact,*” is a study pervading Joshi’s novels but the main focus is on the fifth and last novel *The City and the River* (1990). The novel uncovers a story set in a city by the river and governed by a Grand Master. It strikes an entirely different tone from the earlier novels. At

one level it is a parable of the times; at another, it deals with how men, entirely free to choose, create by their choice, the circumstances in which they must live.

Chapter Seven: “The Route from the Struggle to the Survival” is a study of the collection of ten short stories entitled *The Survivor: A Collection of Short Stories* (1975). There are two other stories too, “The Only American from our Village” and “Kanyakumari” which are published separately. The stories present a variety of characters, portraying a cross-section of the Indian Society after independence. They range from a college principal to an Indian physicist; from a soldier to a young prostitute; from an unemployed middle-class youth and eve-teaser to a sex-obsessed rustic servant; and from an old man searching for his lost youth to a middle-aged travelling salesman, attached to his crippled daughter. They face a crisis during which they struggle for survival.

Chapter Eight, Conclusion: “The Routes” sums up the discovery of the varied routes of the rootless characters - from indifference to involvement, from sophistication to simplicity, from crime to confession, from the labyrinth to the light, from fantasy to fact and from the struggle to the survival.

“For some years I have been wondering how I can know God. I have had the feeling that God, the Divine Ground, take its home in different degrees in different people, and it is spiritually the more advanced who serve as agents, knowingly or unknowingly, of God and bring Him to other people.”

Arun Joshi

THE ROUTE FROM INDIFFERENCE TO INVOLVEMENT

Bindu Ann Philip “The Routes of the Rootless: A Study of the Novels and Short Stories of Arun Joshi” Thesis. Department of English, Vimala College Thrissur , University of Calicut, 2007

CHAPTER TWO

THE ROUTE FROM INDIFFERENCE TO INVOLVEMENT

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English

defines “indifference” as “a lack of interest, feeling or reaction towards somebody/something” (def.). The same dictionary defines “involvement” as “the act of giving a lot of time and attention to something you care about” (def. 2). This chapter traces the routes of the heroes of Arun Joshi who move from indifference to the society to involvement in the society. They learn that real detachment is the ability to allow people, places or things the freedom to be themselves. It is giving another person ‘the space’ to be himself or herself. Towards the end of the novels, the characters learn that ‘indifference’ implies detachment from self, and ‘involvement’ signifies ‘attachment to the society at large’. A truly detached person involves himself in the lives of the people around him for their betterment and his own physical and mental well-being.

Joshi brings out the protagonist narrator’s point of view through Sindi Oberoi’s words in his maiden novel, *The Foreigner* (1968): “You had a God; You had roots in the soil you lived upon. Look at me. I have no roots” (118). These

words go deep into the reader's heart and stir his imagination. Through the character of Oberoi, Joshi presents the plight of the modern man, who is pulled off his roots because of his problems. A pervasive sense of his rootlessness, along with his loneliness, is a threat to him. He lives in a no-man's-land and is incessantly haunted by his past. He has no belief in himself, or in the society around, or on the land he is born. As stated by R. S. Pathak in his article, "Human Predicament and Meaninglessness:" "The work of Arun Joshi, reads like the spiritual Odyssey of the twentieth-century man who has lost his spiritual moorings" (Dhawan 109).

The Foreigner traces the route from indifference to involvement in the life of Oberoi who considered himself a rootless foreigner wherever he went. His indifference originated from the odd circumstances that occurred in his life. He had been seeking the meaning of life while roaming around like a lost soul to gain self-knowledge and self-recognition. His sense of rootlessness was originated from within and got spread all around him. Oberoi's very birth was the cause for his rootlessness. His parentage and early life made him a perfect 'foreigner'- a man who does not belong anywhere. He evaluated his condition thus: ". . . I am a

perfect example of an Indian who pretended to be a foreigner and behaved as one” (130). His father was an Indian, born in Kenya Septic, his mother, British, and he himself was born in Kenya. His birth offered roots in the three countries, and he was therefore perplexed: “ And what country had I represented? Kenya or England or India?” (43). Roots in these three countries made him feel that he did not belong to any country and was therefore rootless. Naturally his attitude towards birth stands as an epitome of his indifference. “Once you are born, you spend the rest of your life, getting away from your birth” (124).

Having lost his parents at the tender age of four in an air-crash near Cairo, Oboeri had an orphaned childhood which generated in him a deep sense of emotional insecurity and blurred his entire attitude to life. Being denied of the happiness of childhood he developed an indifference towards, “those strangers whose only reality was a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs” (12). After his parents’ demise, his only shelter in life became his uncle. Though his uncle was quite affectionate, he could be only an uncle to him, with whom he “rarely exchanged letters” (55). When his uncle moved out into a small house in Nairobi, it gave him the

feeling of having an anchor. But with his uncle's death his sense of security was scattered. He became a rootless alien who existed only because he was not dead. In "The Art and Vision of Arun Joshi" O. P. Bhatnagar aptly declares: "He knows he doesn't belong anywhere but his rootlessness is neither geographic nor cultural. Not even atmospheric, generated by an unhinging of collective emotions from the traditionally accepted values of life and society" (Dhawan 50).

Oberoi admits that he was quite indifferent even as a boy: "I had finished high school but I was very different from other high school boys. I had what passes for maturity" (141). At a very young age, he was tired of living and he had contemplated suicide several times. The homelessness and the loneliness he had suffered during school days added to his rootlessness. There he learnt how to abstain from relationships. He struggled to be one with his peers, but failed to develop a friendship with them. He became an uprooted young man full of despair, detachment and indifference.

Oberoi's indifference became a part of his personality wherever he went. He left Nairobi and decided to try his luck elsewhere. He joined London University with the hope

of finding something meaningful in life. But unfortunately he failed to attain it. He wanted to know the meaning of his life and searched for it everywhere, but for his surprise, all his classrooms didn't tell him a thing about it. Bored with the classroom lectures, he went for a part-time job as a dish washer. His only intention was to get engaged in life and thus escape the monotony of the daily routine. There he became friendly with Anna, a minor artist and divorcee, "who was about thirty-five years old with dark hair and finely chiselled features" (142). His indifference began to dissolve, giving way to the sprouting of a kind of involvement. For the first time in his life, he tasted the sweet bitterness of attachment and involvement. However, at the end of their six-month relationship he realized that their bond was meaningless and purposeless: "I enjoyed making love to her and her sadness attracted me, but engrossed as I was with my own self I couldn't return her love" (143). He also became aware of the fact that he could not love Anna or any one else for that matter. Engrossed in himself he could not love anybody unconditionally be it Anna, Kathy, Judy, Christine or June. Moreover, he escaped from involvement under the pretext of 'detachment'.

As a result, each affair ended in failure. Anna had given him a taste of conquest, and thus inflated his ego. But foolish and petty as he was, he left her the moment he met a married woman named Kathy. After a few weeks of intense sexual experience, Kathy too parted for good as she had to go back to her husband and she believed that, “marriage was sacred and had to be maintained at all costs” (144). These incidents left a scar on his mind and he learnt to practise a kind of indifference and non-involvement. He also revelled in the freedom given by detachment and indifference.

Oberoi’s relationships with these women exposed the pangs of human emotions and the depth of pain that relationships could arouse. As he later revealed to June Blyth: “That was the first time I came face to face with pain. Until then I had heard and read about it, but now it was real, and it seemed to permeate everything, like the smell of death in an epidemic” (144). The pain intensified his restlessness and his search for the meaning of life. That summer, while working in a village library in Scotland, he met a Catholic Priest with whom he became friendly instantly. They discussed a lot about religion and Oberoi was happy to accept the

mystery of pain. He expressed his feelings in the following lines:

One morning I had gone for a walk. I climbed a hill and sat on a weathered stone. The sun had just risen and the valley seemed strangely ethereal in the clear light. Suddenly, I felt a great lightening, as if someone had lifted a burden from my chest and it all came through in a flash. All love - whether of things, or persons, or oneself - was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion. Love begot greed and attachment, and it led to possession. (140)

With the revelation that absence of love is not equivalent to hatred and that real love is love without attachment, Oberoi was inspired to live a new life. The magic formula of detachment, he believed, would keep away possible worries in the future. The remainder of his life was an experiment and therefore he tried to be indifferent accepting pleasure and pain, success and failure, loss and gain alike. Unfortunately, his detachment was not the result of a spiritual revelation. It was a mask – the product of indifference, ignorance and egocentricity.

Oberoi succeeded in restraining himself from all sorts of commitments and involvements until he met June Blyth, an American girl, at one of the International Students' Associations. As usual, he sat away from the crowd watching others dance: "It is remarkable how you can be in a crowded room like that and still feel lonely, like you were sitting in your tomb" (22). June's 'large blue-eyes' and her 'sweet little mouth' dragged him out of his loneliness. Tapan Kumar Ghosh's comment on June's character in his book *Arun Joshi's Fiction* makes the situation more credible: "June is a memorable creation of Arun Joshi. She is the first of a group of humane, sympathetic, sacrificial women, who play a key role in the lives of heroes and catalyze their progress towards self-realization. June is aware of the inanity, pretensions and play-acting of the people around her" (48). June was a sensible extrovert who loved to be amongst people, understanding their troubles. A sharp contrast to Oberoi, she noticed a streak of sadness in him at the very first sight. Like an angel from the sky, she swooped down to strip him off his loneliness. She beckoned him to dance with her and each step they took drew them close to each other. June's charm and vitality attracted him and he met in her what he could not be

himself: “. . . she revealed to me all that I was not and couldn't hope to be. May be that's why I later fell in love with her even as I struggled to remain uninvolved” (56).

In the beginning, June was the right companion for Oberoi for she had an extraordinary power to lure others and to cure them of their pains. Her selfless concern for others was highly appreciated by him: “June was one of those rare persons who have a capacity to forget themselves in somebody's trouble. . . . June perhaps was essentially so uncomplicated a person that whenever she saw somebody in pain, she went straight out to pet him, rather than analysing it a million times like the rest of us” (97). This rare degree of empathy and the capacity to forget herself in the misery of others differentiated her from him, and the rest of the characters. Oberoi's indifference melted away and they openly discussed his indifference and loneliness. The affairs he had in the past with Anna and Kathy only infused in him an unbearable pain. But with June he experienced a novel stage of love and affection. She became an inevitable part of his life and he felt her presence even when she was away from him:

I became more fond of June with every passing day. Her thought would come to me while I was studying or putting instruments together or just crossing a road. At night when I went to bed I would find her fragrance on my pillow. Little things belonging to her lay scattered around the house. I would gather them and put them in a closet and a strange tenderness would grow within me. . . . I would fold her blouses and put them in her drawer and I would feel as if I was taking care of a deeply loved child. (74)

Realizing that he was getting involved, and that he could not save himself from being involved in the affair with June, Oberoi says: “. . . here I was pushed once again on the giant wheel, going round and round, waiting for the fall” (75). Though Oberoi was irresistibly drawn towards her like an opium addict, the sense of insecurity and the old fear of involvement, as well as the memory of his experiences with Anna and Kathy stood in the way. Moreover he could not make any commitment or accept the responsibility of love. He was under the impression that he would not be able to pay the price of being loved. Thus he held on to his false image

and deluded himself with the belief that his indifference had attained the spirit of detachment. On the other hand, June was willing to accept Oberoi, an Indian, as her husband negating her real identity and values of life. But unfortunately, the Indian whom June loved was one who doubted the values of marriage and attachment. He believed that in most marriages love ends and hatred takes its place, and that the hand that so lovingly held his hand, would perhaps some day ache to hit him. Debating on the necessity of marriage, Oberoi came to the conclusion: "I said I didn't quite know except that whatever I had seen so far in life seemed to indicate that marriage was more often a lust for possession than anything else. People got married just as they bought new cars. And then they gobbled each other up" (60). In short he did not trust the institution of marriage. Afraid of possessing and being possessed by somebody, he abhorred marriage, because marriage means both, possessing and being possessed. His unwillingness to marry June was an indirect way of escaping from the involvement, and the consequent acceptance of responsibilities.

The conflict in Oberoi is noted by Tapan Kumar Ghosh thus: "For days together Oberoi is tossed between detachment

and involvement, renunciation and passion until, in the face of June's maddening love that seems to sweep him away like an avalanche, he can no longer remain unmoved" (50). Oberoi voices his mental turmoil clearly:

When she kissed me, her mouth was warm, almost hot. It was different from the kisses she had given to the sick man; this time I was her lover. "Get up," a voice cried within me. I knew that was the last chance. Five more minutes and I would be involved up to my neck, bound hand and foot. But desire glued me to the bed. The contract had already been made. . . . Desire rose within me like water behind a broken dam. I nearly cried with the burden of my lust. (71)

Once in a café while Oberoi and June were in each other's company, the lady who owned the cafe made a casual comment on Oberoi's indifference. She had seen him, alone and lost, in the past three years and was surprised to see him getting involved with June. Praising him for the positive change in his attitude, she said, "you're getting to be a man now, a real man, An' such a nice looking' kid too." At the same time, she subtly warned June: "Hold on to him now.

Slippery as an eel, that's what he is. One of these girls here once fell in love with him and I said to her, 'Take care honey; you might as well fall in love with a shadow' " (72). This comment was taken seriously by June but she dismissed it by believing that her true involvement with Oberoi would help him to become involved. But his problem was inferiority complex too. He underestimated himself by believing that he had no soft feelings and passions to offer to June. Even love-making was a burden for him. He confessed to himself that at times he made love to her not because he desired her but because he wanted to make sure that she still loved him. The involvement deepened and he became aware that he was getting attached: ". . . whenever she was not with me I felt as if I had lost something. I even began to grow a little jealous when she talked admiringly of some other men" (74).

The arrival of Babu was a turning point in the love-affair of Oberoi and June. If Oberoi's indifference was caused by his rootlessness, Babu's innocence was wrapped in his roots. While Babu was firmly rooted in his tradition and social background, Oberoi was an orphan in terms of roots and human relations. While Oberoi was prematurely old and tired of the burden of his wisdom and loneliness, Babu was naive.

He entered the adult world like an adolescent and made a mess of his life. His ignorance of the independent and impersonal living in America led to his tragedy.

Babu, like the young generation of India, was enthralled by the high-level life in America. He liked the 'dash' of the Americans. Enthusiastically he tells June: "Indians are so underdeveloped as compared to them. Sometimes I wish I had been born in America. Not that I have anything against India, but there is nothing to beat America" (80). This sort of naiveté was an intrinsic part of Babu's character.

Though, he loved western progress and freedom, he was very Indian in several aspects, like his love and admiration for his sister, Sheila, and his dread of his father, Mr. Khemka. Babu tried to solve his problem with the help of Sheila, by writing detailed letters to her and asking for her guidance. Mr. Khemka was a business monarch in India, who was possessive and practical-minded. His love for Babu was not of warmth, but of demands. He considered his son a pawn in his hand and could not accept the idea of Babu marrying June. June confided to Oberoi: "I did not fit in his plans. He wanted Babu to marry a fat Marwari girl, whose dowry might bring him half a dozen more factories" (51). Babu's character was

formed out of these rigid and conventional ideas and so he did not possess a strong will power.

Oberoi and June realized Babu's weakness and advised him to get rid of his father-fixation which turned out to be a terrible hindrance to his growing up, and to his attaining emotional maturity. Oberoi, exasperated by Babu's callousness and excessive dependence on his father, tells him: "It is high time you ceased to be an innocent little rich-father's-boy. . . . Unless you grow up and get him out of your system, this country is going to grind your face right into its grubby trash cans and no one will even notice" (131). June too agreed with Oberoi's thoughts after her bitter experience with Babu: "This father of him seems to be an awful bully. I am sure things would be much simpler if he were not always there in the background, sending those long sermons and telling him what's wrong with him and how he should carry himself" (105). Babu's family background played a crucial role in his tragedy.

The major cause for Babu's death was Oberoi's posing of indifference. When Babu first met June in Oberoi's apartment, Babu was fascinated by her friendliness. Selfish as he was, Babu did not think of others when he wanted something. Oberoi, out of his indifference, could not muster

courage to reveal the fact that he was intimately involved with June. When Oberoi told him that he and June were just friends and that he had no desire to marry her, Babu was relieved. His loneliness and innocence endeared him to June and soon they became friends. From the very beginning, Oberoi tried to pose a kind of detachment: "I did not mind what he did, so long as he did not drag me into it" (77). He could have averted the tragedy by rising to the occasion to assert himself. Though Babu's increasing attachment to June made Oberoi worried, he allowed it to happen in order to protect his own indifference: "It was bound to happen sooner or later. If not Babu, it would have been someone else; it was bound to happen. One simply had to prepare as one prepared for death. In a way, it was like a small death" (90).

Oberoi believed that he was not capable of returning June's love. Yet his ardent love for her was expressed on some rare occasions: "She smiled softly at me and a strange sadness grew in the pit of my belly. My eyes grew misty. I got up and grasped her shoulders. I clung to her with an unusual fierceness and pressed my lips against her neck. 'Oh my darling,' I whispered, 'You don't know how much I love you' " (93). Oberoi could not keep himself detached from the

pleasures of life. He enjoyed being with June and shared everything with her but he did not have the courage to be involved. Oberoi benefited from his relationship with June, mentally, emotionally and even spiritually. Yet he was not willing to yield to her and so he refused to marry her. After his refusal to marry June, she met Babu more often and avoided Oberoi. One day Oberoi telephoned her, requesting her to dine with him. But she declined the invitation: "I am sorry, Sindi. I will not be able to see you anymore, I mean not as I used to. Babu and I are getting married soon" (111). Babu had lured her with a full heart and "a dog-like devotion" (110). The more he got involved with her, the more miserably did he fail in his studies. He was seriously warned by the University authorities, but his failure to cope up with the American system of education was symbolic of his greater failure to cope up with the ways of life in that country. S. Nagarajan comments on English education in his article, "The Decline of English in India" thus: "English education was intended to help the Indians to understand themselves better, to interpret themselves to the West and the West to themselves" (Panicker 167).

The thought of losing June made Oberoi take a new turn. He became jealous, selfish and possessive, the characteristics he had struggled against for years. It was his show of indifference towards their relationship that dragged June to Babu. In his article, "The Dialectics of Enchained Sensibility in Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner*," K.V.Surendran aptly analyzes the situation: "Shocked by Sindi's indifference and infected with materialistic entropy which renders her incapable of overcoming her aloneness, June in desperation turns to Babu Khemka, son of a rich industrialist from India, who appears to be a contrast to the cold and reserved Sindi" (Dhawan 100).

The prophet of indifference and the saint of detachment painfully watched June getting engaged to Babu. "There was nothing to be done but wait. Wait and wait and let the past determine the future" (101). Had it not been for his indifference, he could have moulded a cherished life with June. According to Oberoi, people who marry are deluded. Their delusions protect them from the lonely meaninglessness of their lives. He thought it was different with him and believed that he had no delusions to bank upon. Moreover he felt that marriage "requires one to take things, seriously,

assume that there is a permanence about things” (107). June openly told him that his ideas of marriage were foolish. “Oh, Come now, Sindi. Surely, everybody who marries is not sitting on a heap of crumbled illusions” (91). Later, Oberoi realized that June’s involvement with Babu was caused only through his own indifference, and he began to rationalize the situation:

And what if June has left me? I would speculate. Was I not supposed to remain detached under the circumstances? But I also knew that the more detached I became, the farther June would move away from me. Then I would go round in circles and start wondering once again whether I was going to lose her completely. . . . Underlying all this was an assumption that June would not leave me, not for Babu anyway. What would she find in Babu that I didn’t have? (102)

Babu’s meetings with June became frequent and their relationship, a fathomless fancy. His entire world revolved around June, and this along with his lack of discipline led to his termination from the university. Babu became irritable, jealous and possessive. He even accused June for sleeping with other men.

On the other hand, Oberoi was not yet willing to see this tragedy as a result of his indifference but he visualized that what had happened, was a logical termination of all that had gone before: "My falling in love with June because she was what I was not; her leaving me for Babu for a dream; because I had lost the capacity to dream; and now, finally, the end of her dream" (139). His new desire to relieve June from Babu, to possess her and to prove that he still held the key to her happiness, was fruitless. But he tried to make it appear a benevolent gesture. He pretended that whatever he did, he did it for June's benefit. His only aim in life was her betterment: "I had come all the way to help her. That was perhaps all I could do for her . . . and when I made love to her it was not in lust or passion but in a belief that I was helping her to find herself. It didn't strike me that she belonged to Babu and there were three -and not two- persons involved" (147). But this gesture of selfless love from Oberoi made June strong and confident. The strict orthodox Hindu morality in Babu's personality had always provoked June. Unable to bear his casual comment on her affair with Oberoi, she lost her temper and vehemently admitted that she had

been sleeping with Oberoi for a year. Mad with anger, Babu slapped June and drove off to his destiny.

Startled at the outcome of his indifference and detachment, he realized that whatever he had done for the good of others, turned out to be a curse in the end: "All along I had acted out of greed, selfishness and vanity and had hurt nobody very much. When I had come close to gaining true detachment and had acted out of goodness, I had driven a man to his death" (148). He felt the need to redefine his concept of detachment. His greatest worry was that, "The gods had set a heavy price to teach me just that" (162).

Oberoi was terribly lonely and lost after the incident and decided to have another voyage, seeking peace of mind, "I didn't know where I would go or what the future held for me, but one thing was certain; my search had to continue" (149). A brief sojourn in America made Oberoi realize that he had become status less, nameless and had lost his identity. He lost the capacity of existentialistic choice and a flip of a coin decided where he was to go. The rootless hero prophesied that his life in India would be a consolation: "I thought of the departure as a process of walking up a ramp and a day later finding myself in an enchanted land where nobody

recognised me and I could start life anew” (150). He wanted to hide himself in a faraway land where he would be able to live as a normal human being, shaking off all the traits of rootlessness, detachment and indifference.

Just before Oberoi’s arrival, he received a horrifying letter from June, saying that she was carrying Babu’s child. On the brink of despair and an impending breakdown she lost whatever courage she had, and decided to seek Oberoi’s help: “It is just that I want to talk to somebody and you are the only one I can trust, and if I may use the word, love . . . I wonder if you are coming to Boston in the near future. I so much want to see you again and talk to you and touch you” (154). He caught the very next flight but to his bad luck, he could not reach the destination before June bade bye to the world for she had failed to survive an unsuccessful abortion. This abrupt and unanticipated news almost paralyzed his mind, and he immersed himself in deep thought on a river bank. There he received the light of revelation, the knowledge that he should be normal like other human beings.

Finally Oberoi realized that he had to relate himself meaningfully to the world outside and apply his hard-earned wisdom to real life. Thereby he would find his true identity.

The experience of Boston had taught him the fallacy of his concept of detachment. The Indian exposure provided him with a new insight to commit himself selflessly to the world. To quote IACLALS Newsletter, No.10, January 1981: "The story of Babu, Sindi and June was a good enough story as stories go. I probably thought that the full meaning of Sindi's experience with June was not clear to him unless his life moved forward. That, of course, led him into the Indian hit" (Dhvanyaloka). The circumstances led Oberoi to a state of mind where he was capable of evaluating his actions and the consequences related to it:

I took a general stock of myself. In many ways the past had been a waste, but it had not been without its lesson. . . . And the future? In an ultimate sense, I knew, it would be as meaningless as the past. But, in a narrower sense, there would perhaps be useful tasks to be done; perhaps, if I were lucky, even a chance to redeem the past. (185)

The above passage clearly indicates the change that has come over him. Earlier he believed that the past could not be redeemed. Despite his realization regarding the

meaninglessness of the past he found the need to redeem it by useful tasks. He was disillusioned and sad but wise enough to look at life objectively and dispassionately. That was the first step he took seriously to get involved in the troubles of others. With the purpose of doing something meaningful, something to forget himself, Oberoi joined Khemka's business empire. This was a step in the right direction. His preoccupation with himself began to crumble. And for the first time, he came face to face with a reality which he had ignored, being preoccupied with his own suffering, and blinded by his indifference.

To his surprise, Oberoi found the upper class of Indian society very similar to that of America. Mr. Khemka and his social circle had different illusions about life. Oberoi spoke about it: "In truth it had only been a change of theatre from America; the show had remained unchanged. I had met new people with new vanities. They merely had different ways of squeezing happiness out of the mad world. And they suffered differently" (58). Sheila, Babu's sister, was perhaps an exception to this. Sympathetic and humane, she was the only person who understood Oberoi. She keenly looked forward to his visits and a feeling of tenderness grew between them and

they began to like each other. Being a sensible woman, she inquired about her brother's death, and he answered with fear: "It was nothing physical. They could not put me in prison. I feared something much worse - the abominable hands groping and probing into my soul, ripping dry scars open and dipping into old wounds" (44).

Surprisingly, Oberoi started to be a normal being, and his indifference was no longer an indifference to others. The barriers of detachment, which he painstakingly built around his soul, gradually melted away with the onset of humanism and compassion. He was shocked at the abnormal dread by which Khemka and his daughter were held by their employees. The astonishing recognition led him to identify himself with them: "They are my people, I thought" (189).

As he found happiness and peace in himself, he was ready to extend it to the people around. A chance to serve humanity knocked at the door at the right time and he grabbed the opportunity. In the wake of a crisis in Khemka's business empire, Khemka was arrested by the police following an income tax raid in his office. He was accused of swindling the Government and playing fraud with accounts. At first, Oberoi did not want to be dragged into the mess because he

was still a little hesitant to involve himself in the problems of others. He refused to go to the jail taking responsibility of Mr. Khemka's malpractices. His newly-found wisdom whispered to him that one must accept the responsibility of one's action, and that, sooner or later one had to face up to what one really was. He tells Sheila, "Your father is a selfish old man and now the laws of existence are bringing his avarice home to him. Who are you or I to stand in the way? He must suffer if he wants to stop being a jackal and become humane" (182). Mr. Khemka's attempt to thrust his crime on Oberoi became futile. Out of his anger and frenzy, Oberoi questioned him:

But why? It was not my fault. I am not afraid of going to prison but this time it's your turn . . . you cannot get rid of your sins by just turning me out. They will stalk you from every street corner just as they have stalked me. We think we leave our actions behind, but that past is never dead. Time has a way of exacting its toll and the more you try to hold out, the heavier the toll is. (181)

In the end, Oberoi had one consolation, while Khemka kept two books, one for his neighbours and the other for

Government, he could “claim the uniqueness of having just one book” (190). He was faithful in whatever he did and believed that his sincere deeds would bring him further peace and happiness. Oberoi’s visit to Muthu’s one-roomed house in the shabby slum amidst the poverty and the despair of their weary lives, with eleven members of his family, including his tubercular wife, became an eye opener. Muthu, who believed in the law of Karma, never lost his faith in life. He requested Oberoi to take over Khemka’s office. It was an uneducated man who taught Oberoi the distinction between indifference and involvement. He had explained to him that detachment was actually getting involved. Though he spoke quietly, his voice was firm with conviction. This was the culmination of the process of Oberoi’s soul-making. His entire life had been spent to decipher the riddle of existence. And at long last, after a traumatic experience, he learnt that true attachment was not in the withdrawal from the world but in getting involved in it. He became ready to take over the responsibility. Oberoi was specially chosen to handle the responsibility of the business and he got the insight into the right action through a strange sensation:

As I entered the room I had a strange sensation, something I had never before felt in life. I felt as if I had been dropped on a sinking ship and charged with the impossible task of taking it ashore. The men looked up at me unblinking, their expressionless faces reflecting neither love nor skepticism but only the accumulated despair of their weary lives. (189)

He turned to his duty not with a selfish mind but with self-knowledge. He decided to carry the sinking ship ashore, and to achieve his goal of survival. The workers of the factory could not have won this without his help, cooperation and guidance. Naturally he acquired a new strength from within to go through the difficult task ahead. For the first time he decided to rise above himself for the sake of others.

Oberoi saw the meaning of life through Muthu's struggle to survive. Muthu worked hard to provide food and shelter to his own family and the family of his brother. This taught him that the real meaning of life was being friendly, sympathetic, full of compassion and service. He was filled with the desire to serve others and this feeling reduced his loneliness, frustration and indifference. It filled him with a

peace of mind and happiness at heart. The long journey from America to India awakened his peace, within and without. He began to experience a sense of belongingness. With the reorientation of his life, Oberoi even changed his name. Instead of 'Surrinder,' he began to call himself, 'Surender Oberoi.' Indeed, he surrendered his will to the will of 'God' and learned to work for the larger interest of the people. He was happy that he had obeyed the call of his soul. The novel ends with his settling down to life and with a vague suggestion of a new relationship between him and Sheila. They had discovered each other amidst suffering. Sheila said to Oberoi, "I thought you had become too detached to get involved in the mess," and a smile played at the corner of her mouth. "I too smiled," he commented, "amused by the random absurdity of it all" (192). Like a truly service-minded and detached person, he began to see life steadily and as a whole, and smiled at its meaninglessness.

The Foreigner, thus, unfolds the story of Sindi Oberoi, a confused individual withdrawing from life and then returning to it and participating in it. So long as Oberoi was lost in ignorance and conquered by doubt, error and cowardice, he could not see his inner self and consequently, he suffered

from a sense of detachment. Unfulfilled and imperfect, he remained a foreigner to himself, to his soul, as well as to the world. In "The Concept of Humane Technology in Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner*," Shivani Vasta and Rashmi Gaur point out: "Sindi Oberoi goes on hopping from one country to another because he finds his life meaningless and rootless and thus valueless and purposeless" (Bhatnagar 34). But with the fuller perception of the self and the world, after the death of Babu and June, he was reintegrated. He also achieved a new kind of relatedness to the surroundings. All his earlier delusions were destroyed and he found his identity in the spontaneity of love and selflessness. The withdrawal from the world was only a part of his quest which was followed by a return. If the worth of an individual life depends upon its transformation, then Oberoi's life has been worthy. The transformation in him is marvellous, more so because he was willing to render the same transformation to his fellowmen.

As Oberoi confronted the terrible tragedies that resulted from his principle of 'indifference,' he willingly took up the deviation. The new route directed him to a higher status. From being a man who struggled to find the meaning of a single self, he changed into a useful person, instrumental in

making the lives of a hundred factory workers meaningful and joyful. He, who had been wandering in the wilderness of detachment, finally became attached to the service of the factory personnel. Thus, he utilized his time and energy for the betterment of the poor factory workers, a point that proves that he is in the vicinity of the Divine, working as an agent of the Divine, as the Holy Bible says: “If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest” (Matt 20: 26-27).

The phase of indifference and detachment is also seen in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, Joshi’s second novel. Billy Biswas mediates between two conflicting forces – an indifference to the modern anglicized Indian upper - class society and an involvement with the naturalistic world. His detachment led to indifference later on. The novel is significant for its insinuation that primitive life is a much healthier alternative to the corrupt and civilized modern society.

The first part of the novel gives glimpses of Biswas’s rootlessness which was not due to a negative attitude or error of judgement but due to the loss of traditional values in the upper-class Indian society. Romi met Biswas in New York

while searching for an accommodation. Tuula Lindgren, a Swedish girl, doing an advanced course in psychiatric social work, and Romi were the two persons who understood the indifference in Biswas's personality. Romi says, "What happened to Billy was, perhaps, inevitable" (8). He could not have behaved otherwise. Biswas could not enjoy his work or his work-place. For him, life's atmosphere was oppressive and bleak and he could not see a way out. The people he met were like apes copying the western ways:

I see a roomful of finely dressed men and women seated on downy sofas and while I am looking at them under my very nose, they turn into a kennel of dogs yawning (their large teeth showing) or snuggling against each other or holding whisky glasses in their furred paws. I sometimes wonder whether civilisation is anything more than the making and spending of money. What else does the civilised man do? (69)

Biswas was content and peaceful only in the primitive world and his search placed him in the path of involvement, away from indifference.

Joshi's third novel, *The Apprentice* narrates the past memories of its protagonist, Ratan Rathor, thus throwing light on the theme of indifference and involvement. Rathor's indifference is visible throughout his life. His father was a freedom-fighter who had a deep reverence for Mahatma Gandhi and under whose influence he gave up his legal profession. When Rathor's father was shot dead by a British sergeant in the freedom movement, he left his rural habitation in The Shivalik Hills and came to Delhi to establish his roots. With a lot of difficulty he happened to secure a job, as a temporary clerk in the Ministry of Defence. He got married to a homely girl and settled down. Once up the ladder of success, he joined the rat-race. By and by, he became a senior officer. At a point of time he became utterly unscrupulous, much against the reputation of his father. He was completely disappointed when he learnt that his superior officer had double-crossed him in a deal. That moment of despair gave him the feeling of being indifferent to everything he had gained so far - his high-rank job, family, and wealth. After the realization of these facts of life, Rathor makes a pledge:

Be good, I tell myself. Be good. Be decent. Be of use. Then I beg forgiveness. Of a large host: my

father, my mother, the Brigadier, the unknown dead of the war, of those whom I harmed, with deliberation and with cunning, of all those who have been the victims of my cleverness, those whom I could have helped and did not. (143)

The novelist presents the sense of indifference in Rathor and also his quest to understand the meaning of life. The narrator-protagonist became an apprentice in order to learn the method of retrieving his soul. He realized, though very late, that he had led a very indifferent life:

I was expected to behave. Instead, I had merely walked into a brothel hounded by a strange disturbance. All that I could think of was my money and the fact that I was not enjoying life or what I imagined “enjoying” life meant. The more money I accumulated, the more I was dissatisfied and the more, I was determined to “enjoy” life. And all the time I thought of death. (85)

Rathor’s aura of indifference is slipped off by his involvement in religious affairs. The novelist presents Rathor’s desire to love, and his love for life through his fear of death which haunted him day and night. His decision to mend his

life and restore his soul from lust and greed showed his belief in the power above. He became involved in his moral and spiritual reconstruction and learnt “to be of use” as his father used to say “whatever you do touches someone somewhere” (28). Each morning before going to work, he went to the temple but did not enter it. Sitting on the steps of the temple, he wiped the shoes of the people who went inside and then begged forgiveness of all those whom he had harmed. Thus he became indifferent to the worldly routine and got involved in religious activities.

Joshi’s fourth novel, *The Last Labyrinth* portrays indifference and the involvement in the essentials of life, through a series of flashbacks. The narrator hero belonged to the upper strata of society and like the protagonists of Joshi’s earlier novels, his quest for life was to unfold its meaning.

Bhaskar, a successful man, had attained everything in life at a very early age - wealth, education and a wonderful wife. He became a millionaire and inherited an empire in a plastic factory. His education at Harvard taught him the ways of life and after his return to Bombay his aspiration was to annex the failing industries to his dominion. The novelist portrays Bhaskar as a modern anti-hero, embodying chaos and

indifference. Bhaskar suffered from an undefined hunger, a kind of restlessness and a great desire. His watchword was, “I want, I want, I want” (11). Never at peace with himself, he had spent sleepless nights, drinking and taking tranquilizers. Clinging desperately to some person or thing he tried to seek satisfaction in sex, wealth and fame. But he found himself increasingly restless: “I am dislocated. My mind is out of form” (107). Overwhelmed by idleness and loneliness, he was lost in the labyrinth of thoughts. That was the sign of indifference in Bhaskar. Years back inside the caves of Ajanta, he experienced a void:

I continued to stand there until I was cooler. The walls came and went in dizzy waves, the daubs of colour dancing before my eyes. The spasms of darkness grew steadily longer. Or, so it had seemed. Finally, I could not stand it any longer. When the wall disappeared once again I dashed out. (47)

Joshi makes it clear that after Bhaskar’s childhood experience of void, he was haunted by voids both external and internal: “It is the voids of the world, more than its objects that bother me. The voids and empty spaces, within

and without” (47). The void continued till he met Anuradha in a Delhi hotel at a reception organized by Aftab Rai, her husband. Bhaskar was attracted and fascinated by her, dressed in antiques and living in an antique Haveli in the more antique environment of Benaras.

Because of his ardent involvement in this affair, he became indifferent to the world outside. He could not think of anything other than her and he neglected his business, his family and his health in an effort to win her. He made frequent trips to Benaras with the sole motive of acquiring her for himself. He tried to maintain the thread of attachment with his wife by going on a tour to Europe with her. During his travel he had a glimpse of Anuradha in his dream. Longing for an intense involvement with her, he rushed to the mountain with her to possess her wholly and whole-heartedly. The Divine intervened to show him the presence of God there.

Joshi's last novel *The City and the River* revolves round a city spread along the bank of a river, governed by the Grand Master. Though filled with contempt for the boatmen and disgusted at their ugliness and nakedness, he accepted the fact that without their support he would not be able to continue

his reign. The Grand Master was indifferent towards the boatmen. A dream gave him a hint about becoming a king in the future, and he turned abnormal. He did everything possible to attain his goal. In the dream the boatmen were getting ready to attack him. So he was angry with them and took unlawful steps to demolish their power. But the head of the Boatmen was sure of their strength as well as their role. "It is the boatmen's blood down the ages that has saved the city from annihilation. There is nothing here that the Grand Master need teach us" (21).

The Grand Master, indifferent to the people, did not serve them sincerely. He used public funds and power to cater to the whims and fancies of his family members. He straightened the road called Avenue Gnert River, just because his wife wanted it so: "This Avenue turns and twists too much. Would it not be wonderful to have a road that went straight from the Seven Hills to the very edges of the river?" he instructed the town planner (37). In the attempt to straighten the road many people lost their houses but the Grand Master and his men turned a deaf ear to their cries and pleas. It must be noted that the mighty and the powerful had the right to do anything and their tyranny went

unquestioned. Watching this, nature, the supernatural power, remained uninvolved and detached.

Joshi harps on his favourite question of faith, commitment and identity in his novels, but *The City and the River* it is analyzed from the viewpoint of politics - a theme new to Joshi. Yet the theme of indifference and involvement though hidden, is definitely there. The title, *The City and the River*, symbolizes two opposite forces - one man-made (the city) and the other natural (the river). The novelist unequivocally suggests that this opposition is not permanent and the possibility of reconciliation between the two is always there. It is the city which has not been reconciled with the river, because the city evolves out of the river and not the river from the city. In the earlier stages the supernatural power was indifferent to and detached from the lives of the people. But it became involved when it rained for seven days and seven nights continuously and then put an end to the Grand Master's rude dream and the entire life in the city. Nature's involvement in the lives of its people put an end to the Grand Master's indifferent attitude.

After reading *The Foreigner*, the interested reader is totally silent as he travels through the transitional stages of

Sindi Oberoi's life. The reader's interest helps him to experience the pain of Oberoi's indifference and detachment especially with regard to June. The reader's heart beats as fast as Oberoi's when he sees June dead in the end. And he moves swiftly to the scene with the same pace and momentum to confront Oberoi and comfort him in his dramatic sense of indifference. The disinterested reader, no doubt, sweeps along the ups and downs of Oberoi's life and stands still, trying to winnow the right and wrong in his actions. The impartiality in the reader supports Oberoi to an extent, taking into consideration his rootless past but he is slightly confused at Oberoi's remorseless action of leaving June just for the cause of detachment. The uninterested reader responds in a negative manner criticizing Oberoi for his cruel and inhumane actions. The indifference in the reader makes him ignore Oberoi's past and his resultant character and the consequent actions. The principle of detachment is also outside the purview of the uninterested reader because he has no interest in Oberoi and therefore no feelings for his thought-content.

The interested reader justifies Billy Biswas of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* for detaching himself from the sophisticated world and embracing the solace of the primitive.

The disinterested reader cannot decide whether Biswas has taken the right step, whereas, the uninterested reader resentfully waits at the gateway, criticizing him for his indifference to the successful world and his involvement with the primitive.

Ratan Rathor of *The Apprentice* is appreciated by the interested reader for being detached from the meaningless world of business, waiting at the sacred steps of the temple. The disinterested reader can digest the height of his confession and repentance to an extent but his response is a discreet silence. The uninterested reader opposes this mentality and reacts harshly.

The interested reader of *The Last Labyrinth* understands the cause of Som Bhaskar's detachment and is willing to sympathize with him for his estrangement from his wife, family and business in order to pursue the ravishing beauty, Anuradha. The disinterested reader supports him for his natural inclination, but at the same time, criticizes his unnatural involvement with Anuradha. The uninterested reader is unkind and stands totally against the unscrupulous actions of being indifferent to one's wife for a sheer infatuation.

In *The City and the River* the Omnipotent wins the heart of the interested reader for acting at the right time and showing the people that He still rules the world. The disinterested reader accuses the Grand Master for being so callous, for he finds no reason to protest against the action of nature. The uninterested reader opposes the omnipotent's indifference and the final episode in which nature annihilates an entire city.

Of all Joshi's heroes Oberoi is the most spiritually inclined. If the mark of the spiritually advanced is their awareness of their responsibility towards fellow men, then Oberoi is spiritually advanced. If the purpose of life is to be God's agent, and to spread goodness, then Oberoi is God's agent. He could give up the pleasures of life at a particular stage and search for a route to make his life worthy.

“Some people had faith and some people did not have faith. And both were having trouble because those who had faith were often let down and those who did not have faith got mixed up. Faith was like the angle at which you set your telescope if you wanted to see a star. If you did not know the angle you could not see the star.”

Arun Joshi

THE ROUTE FROM SOPHISTICATION TO SIMPLICITY

Bindu Ann Philip “The Routes of the Rootless: A Study of the Novels and Short Stories of Arun Joshi” Thesis. Department of English, Vimala College Thrissur , University of Calicut, 2007

CHAPTER THREE

THE ROUTE FROM SOPHISTICATION TO SIMPLICITY

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English

defines “sophistication” as the “quality of being sophisticated” and “sophisticated” as “having a lot of experience of the world and knowing about fashion, culture and other things that people think are socially important” (def. 2). The same dictionary defines “simplicity” as “the quality of being natural and plain,” and the example given is “the simplicity of country living” (def. 2). In the novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, Arun Joshi portrays the “strange” and “strong” urge of Billy Biswas to discard the sophisticated standards of the modern society, and accept the solace of a simplistic living in the primitive world.

In the introductory lines of the novel, Romi, the narrator roaming about among the bhils of the Satpura Hills sings: “I came a thousand miles to see your face, O mountain, A thousand miles did I come to see your face” (7). Biswas’s American host introduced him to Romi, as an engineer, anthropologist and anarchist who was “thoroughly crazy” (8). Biswas belonged to a rich and respectable family, his father, being a judge of India’s Supreme Court. He was sent to

America to take up engineering as a career. Against his father's wish he earned his Ph.D. in anthropology because that was his secret obsession and his first love. Moreover, he thought that the field of engineering was just a status symbol in the sophisticated society, whereas the subject of anthropology was a study of the primitive and the simple. As he studied the tribal attitudes and customs and was deeply interested in the places described in the books, he desired to return to India, travel through the wilderness and learn the life of the aboriginals: "Travel, travel, travel. A little bit here and there but mostly in India. You have no idea what fascinating societies exist in India" (12).

Another striking element that reveals Biswas's love for simplicity was the place he chose to stay in America. Though most of the American societies were sophisticated and stylish, he preferred Harlem, one of the worst slums of New York, as his residence. The description of the place clearly envisages Biswas's craze for simplicity and primitivism:

Such paint as still remained on the walls peeled day and night; falling in pinch-sized heaps of powder. The shutters hung loose; so did the mail boxes in the hall. Nearly all the glass in the front

door had been knocked out. . . . At night you could hear the rats scampering among the garbage drums. Inside it used to be terribly hot so that, as far as possible, everyone stayed out on the stoop. (9)

However, Biswas did not find a meaning in life either in White America or in the upper-class Indian society. He tells Romi that he decided to live in Harlem because White America was too civilized for him. His constant effort to identify himself with the primitives was reflected in his strange behaviour, his way of living, eating, dressing and even thinking. Romi's description of Biswas's strange behaviour at a party without moving, without drinking, just beating the bongo drum, reveals how culturally alienated Biswas was at New York. Not interested in the jubilant party atmosphere, Biswas ate little and talked even less. He sat alone in a corner producing a musical experiment that was as unique as himself. It was nothing very skilful or sophisticated from the view point of music, but what it had "was a mesmerised pull that held us by its sheer vitality" (17).

Conscious that the purpose of his arrival to the foreign land was education, Biswas worked day and night without any

sort of diversions. He worked at the type-writer for long hours for his PhD in anthropology. His determination is well exhibited when he says, "I am itching to be back, to tell you the truth. But I must finish this wretched Ph.D." (21). Romi was with him as a good friend and in each other's company they did not feel that they were far away from their home country: "In spite of a longish stay in America, neither of us had lost our roots in India or in the city of Delhi" (20).

At the age of fourteen Biswas had experienced the urge to live like a primitive man in a primitive world. He and his mother decided to spend a few weeks in Bhubaneswar at his uncle's house. As they emerged from the railway station, a curious fascination began to work in him, but he could not figure out what exactly it was. Later he realized that the strange fascination led to a sudden interest in his own identity. He was smothered by questions regarding his identity and the existence of his self, "Who was I? Where had I come from? Where was I going?" (89). His uncle's bungalow, situated in the out skirts and surrounded by old temples, pure coastal vegetation, a rough and rocky terrain, low green hills, and innocent, unadorned 'Adivasis' attracted him. He was dominated by the "magical glow" of the whole place (90). He

began to realize: "I remember saying to myself, even though I was only fourteen, Something has gone wrong in my life. This is where I belong. This is what I have always dreamt of" (91).

Another evidence of Biswas's strong obsession for the simplistic way of life lies in the letters he has sent to Tuula. A Swedish girl who had come to America for Advanced Training in Psychiatric Social Work, she was the second person who had any clue of what was going on in Biswas's unsmiling eyes, the first being Romi. Once when Romi had spent some private time with Tuula, she expressed her anxiety over Biswas's strange love for primitivism, "A great force, *urkraft*, a . . . a primitive force. He is afraid of it and tries to suppress it. . . . But it is very strong in him, much stronger than in you or me. It can explode any time" (18). She was eager to have an open discussion with Romi, hoping that Romi would be a guiding light to Biswas even after returning to India.

When Biswas acquired a job as a lecturer in the University of Delhi, he tried his best to escape the call of primitivism by getting married. Though he was not in the habit of giving importance to other people's advice, he did ask

Romi about his opinion on marrying Meena. When Romi wondered why Biswas asked his opinion, the reason gave was touching, "I trust you, which is more than I can say for others" (31).

Thus hoping to settle down leaving behind his strange obsession, Biswas married Meena, a sophisticated and beautiful girl, the daughter of a rich industrialist of his own Bengali community. He was awfully discontented with his life even after his marriage. His unfulfilled yearning for the primitive life continued to beckon him, beyond his calculations. His marriage to Meena was an impulsive action, and the result was drastic as she turned out to be a down-to-earth girl, pleased with a sophisticated life, where money was the centre of happiness. He realized that both of them did not have the same attitude towards life and that they were not made for each other. He could not find the simplicity he was looking for in her. Her interest in money matters was exorbitant. Completely disappointed at her incapacity to hold the reign of his gallop, he fell for the lingering urge for the simplicity of primitivism.

Once, the couple attended a performance of the Odissi along with Romi. The performance was surfeited with

traditional music and he felt that the modern auditorium was transported to an age of wilderness. Even though Biswas was with Meena and Romi, he was mesmerised by the show, and he ignored their presence. Romi was astonished “to find him sitting virtually on the edge of his seat” (42). This incident throws light on the point that Biswas’s family commitment was not a hindrance to his longing for primitive simplicity. His failure to maintain a good relationship with his wife led Biswas into the arms of Rima Kaul, only to understand that neither Rima’s body nor her sentiments could help him realize his identity and give him an inner joy and satisfaction. He became ashamed of their affair which was adulterous and corrupt:

It gradually dawned on me that a tremendous corrupting force was working on me. It was as though my soul were taking revenge on me for having denied it for so long that Other Thing that it had been clamouring for. “Here, you swine, if you haven’t the guts to break away from this filth, well then, I am going to wallow in it until it makes you sick. (135)

According to Romi, Biswas seemed duller than most dull men

he usually met. He knew that whatever it might have been, the Billy Biswas he had known was finished, snuffed out like a candle left in the rain” (51).

In the mean time a son was born to Biswas and Meena but still Biswas did not return to the family. Meena sadly realized that he was growing a stranger to her with every passing day. She did not know how to win his heart. If she had possessed a rare degree of empathy or even a sufficient idea of human suffering only, she could have possibly prevented his escape to the wilderness. She failed to maintain the relationship, because she could not understand him, as she disclosed to Romi, “How is one to know when he doesn’t even care to tell me what is bothering him. . . . Perhaps I just don’t understand him as a wife should. I thought may be you could help me to understand him” (55). Moved by Meena’s open confession, Romi agreed to discuss the matter with Biswas and help them to retain their bond. Biswas’s instant reply was like a thunderbolt to Meena: “I thought you were something other than what you are.” Hearing this, she “fluttered like a crushed butterfly as she wrestled with her emotions” (59). The scene ended like an epilogue to

their relationship.

Biswas's uncontrollable obsession with the simplicity of the primitive world, forced him to leave his wife, his only child and his aged parents, for good. On one of his anthropological excursions to a hilly region of Madhya Pradesh, he vanished mysteriously. Greatly startled by his disappearance, Romi visited the probable place himself and was wonderstruck at the voluptuous beauty of the place, "It was on the banks of a shallow stream. . . . Beyond the stream there was a deep *saal* forest, and beyond the forest one could see the hard granite face of the low hills that divided this part from the plains beyond" (62). Romi understood that Biswas could have been sucked in by the enticing spot, being a lover of simplicity and primitivism.

Tuula helped Romi to investigate Biswas's whereabouts by sending him the letters Biswas had written to her. She was under the impression that those letters would expose his strange obsession. The letters proved that Biswas did not want to belong to the civilized world where civilization was not anything more than the making and spending of money. In another letter he described the details of a dream he had had about a strange woman. He had also written about the dream

crossing his mind frequently and giving him a fearful disturbance. His visit to a temple was narrated in yet another letter which exposed his existential meditations:

It seems, my dear Tuula that we are swiftly losing what is known as one's grip on life. Why else is this constant blurring of reality? Who am I? Who are my parents? My wife? My child? At times I look at them, sitting at the dinner table, and for a passing moment I cannot decide who they are or what accident of Creation has brought us together. (70)

Biswas's disappearance remained an intricate lore for ten years. There were curious speculations about his absence. Some said he had become a spy, some others thought he had eloped with Tuula, and yet others suggested that he could have been eaten by a man-eater. This last conjecture was ultimately adopted as the truth by the majority.

Romi, being the district collector, visited a lot of drought-affected areas in order to extend necessary help to the victims. On his tours, he confronted several kinds of human miseries and astonishing truths of which the most painful was his meeting with Biswas. Romi could not resist the

inclination to be with his old friend and to share with him the hallucinations of his life. When Romi offered a change of clothes, Biswas who was dressed in an old loin-cloth, refused to accept it and insisted on to his dream of simplicity and primitivism.

Romi noticed with pain that ten years had transformed Biswas completely both outwardly and inwardly. As for his love for the typical wilderness, he had possessed even the minutest knowledge of things around the place. He could describe the phase of Chandtola and he claimed to know the routes of stars. He proudly predicted that it would rain after twenty days. Out of his excitement, and in order to bridge the gap of ten years, Romi told him all about the economic situation of the country, the death of Nehru and the recent drought. But Biswas was least concerned about those matters. Instead, as expected of him, he described the life in the forest with singular enthusiasm, "Nobody here is interested in the prices of food grains or new seeds or roads or elections and stuff like that. We talk of the supernatural, violent death, trees, earth, rain, dust storms, rivers, moods of the forest, animals, dance, singing" (83).

Dhunia entered Biswas's life as a guide to the primitive

world and became his “mahaprasad,” that is the noblest friend that one could have on earth, as explained by Biswas. He described the strength of their friendship thus: “I suppose we shall gladly die for each other” (82). Dhunia stayed at the right hand of Biswas and led him everywhere he fancied to go. Even his passion for a tribal beauty was first revealed to Dhunia. Though the police officers questioned Dhunia about Biswas, Dhunia was determined not to ditch his ‘mahaprasad’ but protect him by all means.

On his second visit to Dhunia’s house to fetch some rope, Biswas waited for half an hour as Bilasia was not there. That short span of time played a significant role in Biswas’s life. “I wonder if all this would have happened if I had not waited for Bilasia, to return home from the forest. It was as though, during that half an hour, it was not Bilasia I had been waiting for but my future, my past, indeed the very purpose of my life” (83). Biswas, on his first visit, had provided some antibiotics to Bilasia and saved her life. That very moment their fascination for each other was aroused. He felt that something unusual was happening to him. As he was watching her, he was conscious that the world around him had a new meaning: “I had changed, and I knew that. But more

than that, I knew that I was very near the brink. Very, very near. I knew I could go over the brink any day now, any moment, and I was terrified. God, I was terrified. I had never been so terrified in life” (85).

The strange old dream of the tribal girl visited him again and he woke up sweating. It upset him all over again and he became a victim of confused thoughts. He could no longer imagine himself as Bimal Biswas, a graduate of Colombia, the only son of a Supreme Court Judge, husband of Meena Biswas, and the father of a handsome child. On the contrary, he felt that he was the first man on earth facing its first night. Everything of his own seemed unfamiliar and distant and he was ardently moved by the pull of nature. Shaken by the dream, he knew that he was being beckoned by the primitive world:

Come, come, come, come. Why do you want to go back? This is all there is on earth. This is the woman waiting for you in the little hut at the bottom of a hill. You thought New York was real. You thought New Delhi was your destination. How mistaken you have been! Mistaken and misled. Come now, come. Take us. Take us until you have had your fill. It is we who are the

inheritors of the cosmic night. (88)

It was after meeting Bilasia, the untamed beauty that Biswas discovered his life force and that bit of himself that he had searched all his life without which his life would have been nothing more than the poor reflection of a million others. Bilasia, at that moment, was the essence of that primitive force that had called him night after night, year after year. The thought of forsaking his life force gave him a sense of insecurity.

Biswas easily identified himself with the primitive tribals. He was just one among them, learning how to live like them through and through. On an expedition with four of his students he described to them all about that primitive area, like the geography, the people, their origin, their livelihood, and their customs. During this time, he had a very odd sensation: "I felt I was a tribal myself, that I was one of the primitives to be investigated and not one of the investigators" (94). This truly revealed his oneness with the world of simple primitivism. As Biswas attended the tribal dance in the night without his students' knowledge, he had a terrific experience that gave him the strength to embrace the world of his choice. In the beginning, all of the tribals were waiting for

the moon, and soon Biswas discovered that he was also waiting for the moon. That was a tremendous change that had fallen upon him, "Earlier he had waited for degrees, for lectures, for money, for security, for a middle-class marriage, for the welfare of his child, for preserving the dignity of his family, for being just, for being well dressed, and for being normal and all those things that civilized men count as their duty or the foundations of their happiness or both." (99). Nothing he had waited for in the past sophisticated society, gained importance in his present life. His prime attention fell on the rising of the moon which symbolized his new life in the simplicity of the wilderness. Biswas' cry for primitivism is manifested clearly when he pleaded to Dhunia to hide him in the wilderness. He boldly proclaimed that he was even ready to kill mankind in order to preserve a place in the simple style of living. His disregard for civilized people is stressed when he said: "I am fed up of those slimy bastards who are camped across that river and I am fed up of the millions who surround me in that wretched city where I come from. I do not propose to go back" (105). Biswas mustered the courage to overcome the resistance and entropy prevalent in the modern society. Thus he chose a way to serve and grow, and

to grow and thus serve the community.

When Biswas narrated to Romi the happiness he found in the forest, which comprised, “the rainbows, the liquor from the ‘*mahua*’ an occasional feast, a lot of dancing and love-making and, more than anything else, no ambition, none at all,” he was convinced to the core (107). He observed the life around to register what Biswas had experienced, and commented that he marvelled at the intense beauty of human relationship that was born out of so much love. Though Romi could not follow Biswas’s path, he could contain his new ambition and discernment. Though Biswas’s personal talents and his family background had favoured him and helped him to achieve the comforts and luxuries of life, his aspiration soared higher still, at a different angle. He wanted to be a refugee from civilization, sitting in the shadow of a *saal* tree, a thousand miles away from home. Romi was shocked to see the metamorphosis. The ten years of life in the wilderness had completely transformed him physically as well as spiritually. His hair had grown lighter and longer than Romi could imagine. His complexion faded as a result of his excess exposure to the sun.

To add spice to Biswas’s fascination for the primitive, he

married Bilasia, the essence of the primitive force. The marriage was a kind of realization of his quest. He fathered two sons, and led a contented life without any sort of disagreements, quarrels and arguments. Therefore he considered Bilasia, a part of his own self and enjoyed a life of peace and harmony. With great happiness he realized: "In spite of all that had happened to him, it came to him as a big surprise that he had no ambition, none at all; not even for becoming a good primitive"(107). The tribals believed that Biswas was the incarnation of their mythical king and possessed many divine gifts as Chandtola, the white-faced cliff of the village which started glowing because of his presence in the village. The ignorance of the primitive people became an advantage to him and they established him on a pedestal. There were many stories to prove his superhuman powers. Dhunia boasted of his greatness, "A tiger had been roaming the jungle for a week killing our cattle. Billy Bhai went into the jungle and spoke to the tiger, and the tiger went away" (114).

Another example of Biswas's superhuman power was displayed when he cured the migraine of Situ, Romi's wife. Once when he visited Romi, he found Situ suffering from

migraine, an illness that had seriously affected her for a long time. Biswas went to her room without any herbs or medicines, and by the time he left, she was completely relieved. Both Situ and Romi were surprised; so also Dhunia and the tribal, for whom he was like rain on parched lands, and like balm on a wound: "These hills have not seen the like of him, since the last of our kings passed away," they agreed (115).

Romi and Biswas could not prevent the tragedy. One day, Romi approached Bilasia with the intention of helping Biswas to escape. He introduced himself as a friend of her husband but she hurriedly replied, ". . . my husband has no friends" and then doubting the purpose of his visit, she said, "I know you have come to take him away" (163). As a confirmation, she asked Romi to promise by touching her child's head that he would not take Biswas away, a simple primitive gesture. The child looked deep into Romi's eyes and that confused him, "How did I know that there wasn't a god, a god apart from the gods of civilized India, a god who had lured Billy away, and who would not now hesitate to smite this child dead for a Collector's lie" (163). Romi tried his best

to convince Bilasia but he did not succeed.

Aware of the danger awaiting him, Biswas warned Romi not to disclose his whereabouts to anyone. But Situ sent the news of his reappearance to Meena and Mr. Biswas, who got the whole government machinery into action. During one such raid on the tribal people, a constable was killed and it was reported that Biswas had speared him to death. Rele, the superintendent of police, was determined to catch the murderer of the constable, dead or alive. Though Romi tried his best to avoid the tragedy, Biswas was killed.

When Bilasia heard the heavy tramp of the police boots, she became an epitome of strength and vitality as against an ordinary woman of the sophisticated society, "Had she been an ordinary woman she would have immediately capitulated. But she was the child of the mountains, and the cold hardness of granite returned to her face" (165). The superintendent of police ran a step ahead of Romi and thus ended the strange case of Billy Biswas. Even while dying, Biswas showed his contempt for the civilized world by uttering "You Bastards" (167). No one understood him and his problems. Nobody cared to fathom his thirst for 'truth'. Deeply grieved by the tragedy, Romi reflects: "What we had

killed was not a man, not even the son of a 'Governor', but someone for whom our civilized world had no equivalent. It was as though we had killed one of the numerous man-gods of the primitive pantheon (169). Though he succeeded in tracing his route and finding his roots in the simplistic world, his life was ripped in the budding stage.

Joshi draws a line of distinction between the two worlds, the sophisticated world of corruption and the simple world of primitivism. The primitive people, though uneducated, are sincere in their words and deeds in comparison with civilized people. Situ's betrayal caused the death of Biswas whereas the primitives were ready to risk their lives for the life of Biswas. The constable was killed by Biswas, the son of the Governor, and Biswas was killed by the Governor's Government. The saddest fact was that Biswas's case was disposed off without investigating the reason for the tragedy. Romi recollects: "It had been disposed of in the only manner that a humdrum society knows of disposing its rebels, its seers, its true lovers . . ." (172). Thus the son of simplicity was killed by the slaves of sophistication. Out of his affection towards his friend, Romi could not forsake Biswas's family in the forest. He invited

them to the civilized society. But the strength of Biswas's world was with his wife and Bilasia firmly replied, "The forest has looked after me until now. The forest will look after me for what little remains in my life" (170).

When Romi met Biswas's son he understood that the son had taken over the strange passion from the father. Moreover he was the young "replica of Billy: proud, intelligent, and unflinchingly brave" (161). Joshi hints that the world would not be free of people who have a secret obsession for simplicity in the midst of sophistication. Hari Mohan Prasad writes:

Billy is like those saints of India who want to realize unity with the divine through awakening of their senses. Like Sadhakas of Tanta, Billy hankers after self realization, the experience of identification with the cosmos, the divine. He gets a taste of it and he cannot return to Meena or Mr. Biswas. For him Bilasia is Prakrti and he is Purush (Male) and the cosmic whole can be experienced in their union. (60)

As Biswas wore the garb of the primitive, he was transformed into a modern prince Siddhattha, who left behind the princely

status and pleasures of life to seek simplicity and attain the Divine Buddhist glory. When Biswas gave up the pleasures of life and embraced the barbaric primitive culture, he found himself free from the troublesome thoughts of rootlessness. As he identified himself with the savage men, and sacrificed his life to preserve its simplicity, he imparted the message of Buddhism, and reached the threshold of divinity:

Thus Siddhattha, the prince, renounced power and worldly pleasures, gave up his kingdom, served all ties, and went into homelessness. He rode out into the silent night . . . Darkness lay upon the earth, but stars shone brightly in the heavens. (20)

The route from sophistication to simplicity is found in the other novels too. Sindi Oberoi in *The Foreigner* is also an uprooted character in a sophisticated world. Born of an English mother and an Indian father who died when little Sindi was only four, he was brought up by his uncle in Kenya. Young Sindi was educated in East Africa, London and America. As he grew up, he was full of contempt for the busy and sophisticated life of America. When Mrs. Blyth bragged about the longer life-span of the Americans, Oberoi ridiculed the state of the contemporary society in the

following words, “And what use have you made of your extra height and extra years? You carry heavier guns and have a longer time to make each other unhappy, that’s all. Can you call that an achievement? (88) Though America was rich, clean, and optimistic he found it empty. He knew that the robot-like life there had made people artificial. He noticed how the participants at the ball arranged by the International Students Association pretended to be courteous even when they did not care for one another. At the time of parting they promised to meet again though they knew it would not be possible: “Strangers parted on the doorsteps promising to meet again, knowing fully well they didn’t mean it. It was the American way.” (23). He tried to unmask the triviality prevalent in the sophisticated society, and searched for a meaning in life.

Notwithstanding the sophisticated norms of civilized America, Oberoi decided to go to India where he expected to enjoy the simplicity of a primitive life. He was like the other foreign students in America, most of whom were lost in the sophisticated societies. While they were attending Professor White’s talk, Sheila interrogated, “Is it true, professor . . . that many Indian students in America feel very lost. . . .

Some of them even commit suicide?” (44) Though White was able to give her a common answer, the question of the lost Indian youth lingered in Oberoi’s mind, and he was greatly worried about Sheila’s brother Babu. Babu, being the son of India, with a number of simple primitive beliefs and tradition, failed to survive the sophisticated style of America. Oberoi once told June that their change of attitude towards many things were rooted in the difference of their culture. “The Statue of Liberty promises you this optimism. But in my world there are no statues of liberty. In my world many things are inevitable and what’s more, most of them are sad and painful. I can’t come to your world. I have no escape, June, I just have no escape” (108).

Oberoi also was fed up with the irrelevant existence in the modern society. Facing some of the terrible consequences of his detachment, he decided to live in India, and hide himself in the simplicity of an ordinary man’s life. He had witnessed the stylish way of living in America and when he witnessed Muthu’s way of life he was totally taken aback and decided to be a part of a simple crowd of people around him. He took over the management of the imprisoned Mr. Khemka’s business and became fully devoted to his task at



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hand. He hoped to carry the sinking ship ashore, and to achieve the goals which the workers of the factory could not have won without his cooperation and guidance. Forgetting his self-interest, he worked day and night, for the benefit of the workers in the factory. He also followed their simplistic lifestyle and found pleasure in it. Thus Oberoi attained the meaning of his life he was searching for and regained his mental tranquillity and emotional security. There is an apt comparison of the novels, *The Foreigner* and *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* in the book, *A Critical Study of the Novels of Arun Joshi, Raja Rao and Sudhin N Ghose*:

The major aspect that differentiates *The Foreigner* from *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is the plane in which issues are involved. In the latter, it is raised some measure above the earthly one and effects a delicate balance between this world and the one beyond. In *The Foreigner* the novelist scrupulously confines himself to this world only, to validate it, as it were, as a test case."

(Abraham 35)

In *The Apprentice*, the route from sophistication to simplicity is portrayed in the life of Ratan Rathor, who struggled against

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the two worlds. His father, a freedom fighter, lived a simple life and dedicated it to the betterment of his country. In contrast to this, was his mother, for whom money was the most important in life. V. Gopal Reddy, in his article, "*The Apprentice, An Existential study*" aptly comments: "It is the story of a young man who out of sheer exhaustion of joblessness and privation is forced to shed the honesty and the old world morality of his father to become an "apprentice" to the corrupt civilization" (Dhawan 223).

Rathor did not care for his father's values or for the martyrs who had sacrificed their lives. He had observed that their values and principles were easily forgotten by the people. In the article, "Crisis and Confession," Tapan Kumar Ghosh says: "Sacrifice was replaced by self-interest, courage and honesty were replaced by cowardice, fraud and deception and ideals by deals" (91). The country, for which his father had squandered his life, appeared to Rathor only as "a nation of dreamers . . . of frustrated men sailing about in a confused society, a society without norms, without direction without even, perhaps a purpose!" (73-4). At the initial stage of his life, Rathor was confused between the clutches of two lifestyles. He wondered whether his destiny awaited him in the

heroic land of freedom-fighting or in the midst of the materialistic gains of the money-centred society. He maintained the idealistic values of his father for a short while. But as he experienced a heartbreaking disappointment while seeking a job in an insensitive city, he was shattered. According to his calculations, he would easily get a job with the influence of his relations in Delhi and thus would be able to make a responsible lifestyle. He was a man of high hopes, but at this stage of life, he struggled hard to make a source of revenue for his existence. As soon as he arrived in Delhi he became a shrewd and cunning man and learnt the crooked ways of the world.

Rathor got accustomed to the sophisticated norms of the society and managed to procure the job of a temporary clerk in the department for war-purchases with the help of a fellow inn-dweller. From then on, he did not look back. Devoting himself wholeheartedly to the build-up of his career in utter defiance of the basic human values, he advanced rapidly in his career. Gradually the distinction between right and wrong, good and evil, became totally blurred in his conscience.

Influenced by his colleagues, a month before the Chinese invasion, Rathor cleared a huge pile of useless

military materials lying in Bombay. He was offered a bribe for this and he accepted it with no proper reason. It was a plot designed by the scheming Himmat Singh, popularly known as the Sheikh. This incident marked the lowest point of his downward movement and he realized the meaninglessness of his life spent in the sophisticated society:

Twenty years earlier I had come to this city, just as you have come now: to learn, to work and in the process to make my mark. I had come full of hope, ambition, goodwill; and all that was left was a pile of dung. The grey evening stretched back twenty years until it seemed to me that there had never been sunshine, that for two decades I had lived only in smog: confused, exploited, exploiting, deceiving and now deceived. (133)

Rathor sought the remedy for his soul's solace neither by fighting with the treacherous society nor by detachment. That was how he began his apprenticeship: "Each morning, before I go to work, I come here. I sit on the steps of the temple and while they pray I wipe the shoes of the congregation . . . Then, when they are gone, I stand in the doorway" (142). Thus, he learnt the simple way of cleansing sins through the

humble service at God's feet.

The Last Labyrinth brings out Som Bhaskar's route from the labyrinth of a modern society to the light of a primitive mountain god. The novel upholds the present-day Indian society with its cynicism, loss of faith, confusion of values, and anxieties. Bhaskar was unable to come to terms with life because of his failure to come to terms with himself. Bhaskar, an immensely rich young man who owned a huge plastic manufacturing industry which he had inherited from his father, was initially a scientist but later turned to a businessman. Sophisticated and smart, Bhaskar apparently led a happy life with an educated and trust worthy wife, two children and an expanding business. He had been to one of the world's finest universities, and had observed the different phases of the different societies. A quarter million had been spent on his education. He was acquainted with the western way of life, its pursuit for sophistication and materialism. Yet he knew that "money was dirt; a whore. So were houses, cars, carpets" (11). He suffered from an indefinable hunger that disrupted the harmony of his life. He held the cup of happiness, but he could not drink a drop of it. In the midst of wealth and sophistication, he felt a void within and yearned for simplicity.

As Bhaskar sat with, Aftab and Anuradha, in the Haveli, he was reminded of the insignificance of his existence, “If someone, man or god had watched my life from a great height, would I have appeared to him like an ant threading through a maze, knocking about, against one wall, then another” (53)?

Bhaskar felt himself an insignificant part of the world, in comparison to the huge and hilarious Haveli, and its inhabitants. He was influenced by Azizum’s music, “It was husky, a little nasal, and it reminded you of that core of loneliness around which all of us are built. It must have emerged from the slums of Benaras but centuries had gone into its perfection” (55). The sad songs of Azizum, taught Bhaskar the fact that all the struggles to climb up ladder of success were futile. Only a simple life led with faith matters in the long run. Anuradha noticed Bhaskar’s expression and saw the streak of sadness in the depth of his eyes. It terribly surprized her that a man of such an affluent family should be so sad for an unknown reason. At that moment he went through a tremendous experience: “At that hour, the grounds of Aftab’s Haveli looked like the wilderness that surrounds

of Aftab's Haveli looked like the wilderness that surrounds abandoned tombs" (59). The silence and the strangeness dragged Bhaskar towards Anuradha.

In one of their intimate conversations Anuradha told him of a God in the mountains. Bhaskar showed no interest because he had grown with his eyes closed to the world of faith, God and mysteries. But later when he was deprived of all the pleasures of life, including his lady love, Anuradha, he was eager to seek the mountain-God hoping to attain self-complacency and peace of mind. As he climbed the mountain to get united with the mountain God, he is supposed to have traced his route from sophistication to simplicity. Aftab's life also declined from a high level sophistication down to base simplicity. Anuradha referred to him as a man of 'make-beliefs'. He made himself believe that Anuradha was his wife, and that they were leading a peaceful and joyful married life, and that nobody could harm them in their sophisticated Haveli. He considered Haveli a labyrinth from which no one could drag them out. However his beliefs were shattered when a strong bond of relationship developed between Anuradha and Bhaskar. Aftab lost his self-control and wrote a

letter cursing Bhaskar: “. . . how I hate you . . . curse you . . . you escaped to the hotel that night . . . but how long . . . your time will come . . . while you live you will rot . . . when dead you shall not find peace . . . from one graveyard to another you will wander . . . a million years” (222). As the novel ends, the sophisticated description of the Haveli, the moghul empire and the Ajanta rock give way to the simple narration of the mountains.

The City and the River, set against the primitive backdrop of nature’s dominance, reflects the sophistication of the Indian ruling system and also the cult of simplicity in the Indian people. Harish Raizada in his article “Double Vision of Fantasy and Reality in Arun Joshi’s Novels,” comments: “Joshi has placed his book in a ‘temporal setting which is deliberately confused. Actually, the novel is a meeting of different societies - one with Hermits, Yajnas, sacrifice, primitive people co-exist with electronic surveillance, ultra modern lasers, helicopters, videos, spying and inquisition” (Dhawan 69).

The Grand Master, the descendent of many Grand Masters, possessed an ancestry of riches and sophistication. He grew up in the place where his family had lived for

seventy years. As a ruler he visited his subjects but had never attempted to familiarize himself with the people around. He was not aware of the simplicity of the lives they were living in. He believed that he loved the city and the people but there was no certainty about it. He was doubtful about their fidelity towards him. He tried to improve his governing power by instituting various organizary boards. Overwhelmed by the dream he had, he tried to visualise himself as the king of the city and asked the grand father to name a new rose 'king'. In comparison with the sophisticated life of the Grand Master, the simple life of the boatmen was nothing. Though they did not pose a threat to the Grand Master, they were many in number and that was an element of danger. None of the sophisticated norms of the modern society hindered them from their natural growth. He dreamt that he had become a King, enthroned on top of a hill surrounded by the water of the river. The Astrologer interpreted the dream as a warning of the rebellion of the people. The boatmen posing a threat to the King and his throne formed the opposition Group. Their strength and number posed a threat to the city and the palace as well. As the Astrologer says, "The danger posed by their numbers, not only to the city but also to the palace

itself. As their numbers grow so does the discontent and so much easier does it become for the spark of rebellion to ignite” (16).

The simplicity of the boatmen’s life filled the Grand Master with contempt for them. He was disgusted at their ugliness and nakedness. All the same, he knew that without their support he would not be able to continue with his reign. So he sent the Astrologer as his mediator to speak on behalf of him. On the bank of the river, the Astrologer addressed the public: “My children, “God has sent the Grand Master to be your servant. Looking after this city is like *Yajna* for him and his life is the *Abuti* (17). The Astrologer’s speech was a little too much for the simple folk. Most of the people did not comprehend what he said, but out of their innocence and simplicity they applauded him. They did not understand his hints at the increasing treachery and rebellious behaviour among the people when he said, “A large number of asuras have taken human form and have descended to disturb the *Yajna* (18).

The Grand Master’s powerful hands extended all over the city and he employed several means to crush down those who were not with him. This continued and the poor people

of the river had no one to turn to. It was at this juncture that nature came to the rescue of the human beings. It rained continuously for seven days and seven nights. On the eighth day the sun rose and from a clear sky stared down at a vast sea of water. "Of the Grandmaster and his city, nothing remained" (260). Thus the simple power of nature overruled the entire sophisticated symbols of man's power. The very title of the novel *The City and the River* includes the themes of sophistication and simplicity. If "the city" stands for sophistication, "the river" stands for simplicity. The mechanized modern city failed before the great primitive force, the river.

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is a fascinating novel to an interested reader, who experiences the thrill of an exciting high-level life with Biswas and later shares his bitterness. The interested reader understands that Biswas is suffocated by the sophistication of the society and believes that it is high time he accepted the simplicity of a primitive life. The disinterested reader raises several questions of significance for he does not agree with the idea that going to the forest is the only way towards a simple life. Being impartial he wonders how Biswas could be relaxed and peaceful when denied of all

the familiar luxuries of life. Meanwhile, the uninterested reader is shocked to find Billy descending to the level of a primitive. He cannot accept such an action from the son of a High Court judge, who has a doctorate to his credit and the honours of a civilized life. An uninterested reader also blames Biswas for his instant and unmeditative decision of moving into a jungle.

The response of the readers regarding the heroes, vary from person to person, group to group. The interested reader rejoices with Sindi Oberoi of *The Foreigner* for forsaking the sophisticated norms in America and accepting the simplicity of his land. If Oberoi finds his roots, the greatest dream of a foreigner is fulfilled. On the other hand, the disinterested reader is not so eager about Oberoi's return. In fact he is unconcerned about it because he believes a person and not the place is the point. The uninterested reader accuses him for preferring the primitive to the sophisticated.

The interested reader of *The Apprentice* is happy to watch Ratan Rathor on the steps of the temple polishing shoes, free of all the troubles and tribulations of life. The disinterested reader partially agrees with the action and partially wonders whether such a repentant step is possible

for a man of Rathor's background. The uninterested reader is not convinced that a person like Rathor can stoop to shine shoes at the doorstep of a temple. But he swallows the statements as they are.

Som Bhaskar of *The Last Labyrinth* is a credible character for the interested reader who is conscious of Bhaskar's success. The disinterested reader approves of his lack of interest in the glamorous world but disapproves of his infatuation for Anuradha. The uninterested reader protests against the relationship as a shameful one. He also disbelieves Bhaskar's final action.

In *The City and the River* the interested reader applauds the interference of nature at the right time to make everyone believe in the omnipotent. The disinterested reader is not willing to accept the power of nature pervading over human beings. At the same time, he confirms that the Grand Master's monopoly is unacceptable. The uninterested reader refuses to confirm the idea of nature overpowering man. He also dares to criticize Joshi for concluding the novel upholding the primitive concept of nature's domination over man.

“We think we leave our actions behind, but the past is never dead. Time has a way of exacting its toll and the more you hold out, the heavier the toll is.”

Arun Joshi

THE ROUTE FROM CRIME TO CONFESSION

Bindu Ann Philip “The Routes of the Rootless: A Study of the Novels and Short Stories of Arun Joshi” Thesis. Department of English, Vimala College Thrissur , University of Calicut, 2007

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ROUTE FROM CRIME TO CONFESSION

Arun Joshi traces the route from crime to confession in his novels, especially in *The Apprentice* (1974). A confessional novel, *The Apprentice* portrays the protagonist, Ratan Rathor as a product and victim of the debauched social values. Though Rathor is determined to keep himself away from crime, he is forced to yield to it. Temptations conquered him, and he surrendered. The route from crime to confession is traced through three periods in Rathor's life: the period of his early life when blatant circumstances moulded him for the crime, the period that made him a criminal and the period that brought out his repentance.

Conscious of the crime he had committed, Rathor unfolded his story to one of the National Cadets towards whom he had an affinity. He disclosed his life story and confessed his crime to this unknown student companion and listener. During this period, Bhaskar who was an officer in the ministry of Defence, introduced himself as 'a servant of the government.' His words proclaimed that he perceived the values of life seriously, and considered honour as the greatest achievement of a human life. Feeling ashamed for having

committed the crime, he admitted later: "I have been a government employee for twenty years. What I meant was that it is difficult to retrieve honour once it is lost" (6). Rathor said that he was encouraged to reveal the secrets of his life to a stranger, because this young cadet resembled his father. As the pangs of intimacy became stronger, Rathor's confessions became more revealing. Fully aware of the consequences of his confession, he mustered courage over the thought that there were greater things in life than justifying one's own unmeditative deeds:

I grew up in the foothills and that was where my father was killed. You look like my father, if I take the liberty of mentioning. Fifty years younger, of course, but grave and clear-eyed. Not a wash-out like me. I imagine you sleep well, without dreams. I embarrass you perhaps but believe me, to sleep is a privilege not given to all. As long as you can sleep, all is well. (7)

The criminal phase exposed the public life of the apprentice with all its pretensions, cowardice and corruption, and the confessional phase revealed the criminal traits in him, his realization and his repentance. At the same time, there are

occasional glimpses into the past innocent and private life of his early days when he was full of childhood innocence and enthusiasm in the company of his Brigadier friend: “What meaning is there in cycling ten miles, towards the setting sun, your hand on another man’s shoulder or swimming across a river before dawn or going to village fairs to look at the girls, or laughing at nothing until tears roll down your cheeks (16).

The cause for the crime could be traced back to Rathor’s double inheritance: the Gandhian revolutionary world of his father on one side, and the worldly sermons of his mother on the other. According to his mother, it was not patriotism but money that brought respect and security. She firmly believed that money made friends and money succeeded where everything else failed. In contrast to this, his father believed in the values of life. For him, self-discipline was the ultimate achievement in life. Rathor was split between the two worlds, a world of heroism and righteousness versus a world of business and materialism. Rathor always tried to compare his life with his father’s and felt ashamed to see the degradation of his life. He realized that he had taken shameful routes that would startle his father if he was alive. His depression is well-announced as he said: “One thing that

they had all said of my father was that there was a man. A very good man. And all my life I had waited for someone to say that to me. None had. And waiting I had descended, come to these desolate streets (135).

Rathor was disillusioned when he learnt that being the son of a freedom fighter was of no use. When his father died, he had left only three things behind: “a starving and cynical widow, her illness and Ratan, living on patriotic fervour but no funds” (19). The greatness of that freedom fighter and all his efforts soon slipped into oblivion. The worthy son of a great father, tight in the stomach, no doubt, but full of hopes, Rathor underwent a humiliating experience while hunting for jobs. He narrowly escaped starvation and death through the generosity of his kind room-mates. Rathor recollected the colourful days of his youth when his father was alive:

I went regularly to college and did better than many. I was in perfect health. If I was occasionally ill, there were people to look after me. I was the fastest sprinter our college had known. I had won an award for poetry, something which athletes seldom did. There was nothing in

the present that explained my disquiet. Indeed, it was not the present that haunted my dark dreams. What clouded my horizon was the future, my friend, the unknown ominous FUTURE. (17)

His experience of being bullied while hunting for jobs, stood as a contrast to this lovely period of time. He could not acquire a job as easily as he had imagined. His embarrassment after each interview is expressed in the following words “... for me the rejection would be an almost unbearable torment. The blood would rise to my cheeks and to my ears and I would not be able to lift my eyes from the ground until well away from the office. It would seem to me that the whole world knew of my shame” (29).

After a heart-throbbing session, he secured a temporary placement in the department of war-purchases as a result of the chance introduction by a stenographer. Rathor was polite, humble and ready to do anything. He was also shrewd and quick to pick up details. So he climbed the ladder of success in no time. As an after-effect of his sudden success he refused to recognize those who once saved him from death and he came to the conclusion that he was somehow different from the ordinary lot: “I was a different cut: educated,

intelligent, cultured, and it was my right that I should rise in life, to levels higher than the others aspired for” (31). Joy Abraham, in his article, “Vision and Technique in *The Apprentice*” rightly comments:

And he does rise through corrupt practices, making a compromise with his ideas, keeping an appearance and by discarding the world of ordinary decency and friendship. He believes that he has the power of a gospel before which the highest will freeze. He turns to be a black sheep in the mutiny of his colleagues who desire an additional allowance for the extra loads of work put on them. He thinks of himself as a dark horse who has yet to show every promise of becoming an officer. (212)

Rathor worked hard to please the officers. Whenever a duty was entrusted with him that he could not finish in the official working-hours, he would work for it day and night instead of leaving it half way. He longed to move up and attain a position, and then retire at fifty-five. He imagined the day when he would leave his horrible room, and live in better rooms, then occupy a house, get married, own a car, and be

included among those who assume a name and fame.

Rathor gained his first promotion through an illegal attempt.

The three clerks in the section, including Rathor were loaded with work and so they decided to ask the authorities for an extra allowance. The oldest one met the officers and put forward his demand. Suddenly Rathor was called in for a confidential meeting with the officers and they influenced him to stand for them. They told him that they were very disappointed to see him with the other two clerks for a demand like that. They said they were shocked to realize that such a potential employee like Rathor could indulge in such a shameful task. They brainwashed him by saying that it was a great sorrow that their best man put them down:

For me, he said, it was a question of career. A CAREER. Those other two were finished. They had reached whatever levels their abilities could take them to. Soon they would be retired. For me, he said, it was different. I was young and showed every promise of becoming an officer. The position for an assistant was soon to be created. Did I or did I not want to be considered for it. Rewards in government service, he said, were not

always made through allowances. There were promotions, too. (38)

In his mad pursuit of career, he ditched the other two clerks but gained the reward for himself from the authorities. He soon became an assistant superintendent and had a dozen clerks working under him. The phase of crime started off with his callous attitude towards his colleagues. For his personal benefits, he threw away their friendship and intimacy. Rathor knew that he was not justified for his action against his colleagues. The incident gave him some sleepless nights during which the argument between right and wrong haunted his mind. To make the situation worse, one day he overheard the two clerks saying that “Rathor is a whore” (47). His mind reverberated with these words, and he was upset. At the same time repercussions of the case made him thick-skinned. Notwithstanding the stumbling block, he got married to a relative of his superintendent. He did not think of the background of his fiancé. The fact that she was his superintendent’s relative made her eligible for marriage. He proclaimed his intention: “I had become a man of ambition. Not the vaporous ambition of adolescence that is soon dissolved but the cold, calculated, ambition of a hardened

man” (49). Though his ambition paved the way for careless crimes, he was haunted by a streak of self-analysis and purification side by side.

Rathor inherited the love of his land from his father. As his mind wobbled with confusion, he found solace by participating in the war. He suddenly became kind-hearted and patriotic and was the first to give a donation. He even tried to communicate to the public by writing letters to the editors of various newspapers expressing his anger at the treachery of the enemy. He donated blood to the Red Cross and insisted on being called again. He brought out a document with quotations from Mahatma Gandhi and the Bhagavat Gita. He attacked all those who were corrupt, devoting several pages to describe all aspects of corruption. He not only tried to encourage the people around him but also played the role model.

Rathor was well aware of the crimes and corruptions that had formed the dark phase of his life. His article “Crisis of Character” reveals this fact: “I wrote, there was no elevation of the spirit. Instead, there was only corruption. Corruption! I had at last hit upon the ugly word. And did I flog it! . . . I attacked them from every side, devoting several

pages to describe all aspects of corruption” (56). One of his colleagues introduced him as Mr. Crisis of Character. He was criticized for his foolish sincerity side by side with hypocrisy. He lacked the moral courage to put into practice what he preached. That ultimately led to his crime and later on, his confession. M. K. Bhatnagar points out in *“The Novels of Arun Joshi: A Critical Study”*: “Ratan is not shown as eagerly pouncing on all tourists to ‘confess’ so that he can have the perverse pleasure of proving that all are guilty, he more than once admits to a pathetic need for an audience to whom he can unburden himself” (13).

A situation arose when he was trapped into becoming the indirect murderer of his Brigadier friend. He accepted a bribe not because of any need for money but because of the confused values of the society in which he lived: “What was right? What was wrong? We liked to believe, was a matter of a little adjustment. (65). In the end his moral decency was completely at stake and he found it difficult to confess in order to save his friend who was more than a brother to him.

Rathor was arrested because of his involvement in the crime and put in the lock-up for a while. His horrible experience in the lock-up made him think of the

meaninglessness of his power, position and money in life. He was taken to the jail to be questioned on the issue of clearing the defective war materials. He sat among pimps, prostitutes, burglars, pick pockets and murderers. The inspector questioned him thoroughly and forced him to tell the truth. But Rathor was determined not to confess. Only after he was released, he thought of confession.

Rathor's visit to the Brigadier's house on New Year's Eve gradually paved the way for his confession. As he entered the house of the Brigadier he saw him sitting on the veranda, gently rocking in his rocking chair. Rathor was taken aback when the Brigadier's wife stopped him as he moved forward to hug his friend. Rathor was advised to observe his friend from an inner room to find out the abnormality in his behaviour. As he rocked, the Brigadier muttered and laughed occasionally. Rathor watched him with a sense of doom, and slowly realized that his friend was on the brink of madness. Rathor described this rare and honest moment of his life as follows: "If ever I had been an honest man, a man deserving to walk upright, it was then. It was the second time in my life that I had felt the pain of another as my own, the first being the time when my father was shot" (100).

When Rathor thought of good and evil, he felt the need for confession. He approached the superintendent to know the ultimate truth, and he told him that the contractor had offered him ten thousand rupees and that he refused it. Rathor asked him what he knew of the incident. Philosophically and frankly, the superintendent replied: "You know, Rathor, he said, nothing but God exists. You can be certain only of him . . . there is no point in looking for truths aside from the truth of God" (42-43). Rathor recollected the various stages of his life and the experiences he had gone through and realized that he was cabined in a world of illusions.

Rathor was worried about his sins and limitations: "To be a slave and not know it is tolerable. To know of one's bondage and yet seek freedom, that is what gets you down, knocks the wind out of you. As I sat in my well and watched I felt choked, oppressed; rebellious but tied up totally in knots" (63). These words reveal the process by which the ultimate truth of life led a man through the routes of crime to the possibility of confession. The contrast between the earlier Rathor, the apprentice, who had been climbing the ladder of success having regard to none, and Rathor, the apprentice who passed through the darkness of his soul, ready

to be at everyone's service, is brought out effectively in the narrative.

Contemplating over the crime he had committed unknowingly, Rathor was depressed: "But let me tell you something that a colleague of mine used to say, 'Life is zero . . . you can take nothing away from a zero,'" he ruminated. (142). Even though he longed to be of use to the people around, he reached a state where he was of no use. The moment he realized that the people above had used him as an instrument for their selfish goals; he lost his belief in the materialistic success of life. He even lost the capacity to be shocked and asked his imaginary listener: "You are shocked? I suppose the young have a right to be shocked. And, in a way, it was shocking (13).

Rathor wanted to kill Himmat Singh to revenge his friend's death, but fortunately he realized the absurdity of the whole thing. He did not want to kill him because it was too primitive a solution: "There are many sorrows in the world, but there is nothing in the three worlds to match the sorrow of a wasted life. All else, thoughts of revenge, of pleasure, of pain, pale before it, are made pointless" (135).

Finally, to restore his mental peace, Rathor decided to turn to serve God, through serving the humanity around. Everyday he beg forgiveness at the doorstep of a temple, of a large host, his father, his mother, the Brigadier, the unknown dead of the war, of those whom he harmed. That was the route he selected for his escape from his crime. Crime as well as confession, was a favourite topic for Arun Joshi who successfully handled it in the novel. He surprised the interviewer when, after receiving the Sahitya Akademy Award in 1993 for *The Last Labyrinth* he said about *The Apprentice*: “This novel still remains my favourite” (“A Winner’s Secrets” 83).

Rathor gave up the pleasures of life in the permissive society and started to live a life of penance. Though his route differed naturally from the routes of the spiritually advanced persons, Rathor achieved the fulfilment of life by being God’s agent in the later stages of his life. At the end of the voyage, after Rathor had indulged in worldly pleasures, he reached the shrine of ‘good hope’ for purification. The death of his Brigadier friend had paved way for such a deviation on his way. This time Joshi’s hero had gone a long way to reach the entrance of a temple. While he sat there,

stricken with confessional grief, he surrendered himself and his accomplishments at the feet of God, a point that proves his self-realization. Rathor's posture in the soil, at the entrance of the temple, reminds the reader of Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali.

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee! He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil. (6)

The route from crime to confession is clearly seen in *The Foreigner* as well. Here Sindi Oberoi became a passive criminal by being indirectly responsible for June's and Babu's death. His principle of indifference is the cause of his tragedy. It is true that Oberoi was estranged from the society. He used indifference as his defence mechanism to avoid pain and suffering and moral responsibility. Life had appeared

absurd to him because it held no meaning and purpose for him. However, his indifference or detachment was not permanent, but a transitional phase (route) that led to his self-realization, (root) a phase which directed him from crime to confession.

Oberoi began to look upon the world as a heap of crumbled illusions where nothing was real and permanent: "Nothing ever seems real to me, leave alone permanence. Nothing seems to be very important," he told June (107). Subsequently he began to wander aimlessly to find peace and identity and to seek for his roots. He journeyed along the routes of life, and encountered the different aspects of life, but his search led him nowhere because his adventures were not guided by any definite direction or purpose.

Oberoi's lonely search for identification originated from his inner fear or insecurity. His feeling of strangeness and his failure to relate himself meaningfully to the world outside resulted not only in anguish and loneliness but also in a quest for emotional wholeness. In the first phase of his life, his crime began with his relationships with Anna and Cathy, and ended with a confession through a Catholic priest. According to Meenakshi Mukerjee, "Alienation in all cases

necessitates sentimentalization of all objects one has been alienated from” (*Twice Born Fiction*, 84). In the course of a candid conversation with Sheila in Delhi, Oberoi pointed out what bothered him: “There were things I wanted, only I didn’t know how to get them. I wanted the courage to live as I wanted; the courage to live without desire and attachment. I wanted peace and perhaps a capacity to love. I wanted all these. But, above all, I wanted to conquer pain” (120).

When he went to London as part of his search for his roots, he joined London University to study engineering. But he soon became tired of classroom lectures. Unknowingly he was committing the crime of self deception. Even though he attended the classes, his mind was not there. In order to gather first-hand experience about life, he took up an evening job as a dishwasher in a night-club. He did not work to earn money; he only wanted a different kind of experience to sort out his ideas. In this bar Oberoi met Anna, a minor artist and a divorcee. Their relationship led him to indulge in more and more worldly pleasures and further to a stage of crime as he left her.

The experiences with Anna and Kathy created a lasting impression on his life. As he later confessed to June, “That

was the first time I came face to face with pain. Until then, I had heard and read about it, but now it was real, and it seemed to permeate everything, like the smell of death in an epidemic” (144). The pain intensified his restlessness and his quest. That summer, while working in a village library in Scotland, Oberoi became friendly with a Catholic priest. They discussed a lot about religion, God and mysticism, and gradually through a silent confession, he could find out the root of his crime. The simple experiences of life made him aware that he messed up the lives of the people who were related to him. The self- realization paved way for the acceptance of crime and then confession:

You said you wouldn't leave her. But she knew you would. And what was worse, you knew it, too. You leave her and many months later you find her dead drunk in a bar. At last you know what it is to break a heart. But the knowledge leaves you only puzzled. Fear of retaliation from an unknown power grips you. You have generated pain. To create pain, is crime. (69)

If the philosophy, 'to create pain is a crime' is acceptable, then Oberoi can be considered a criminal in all the senses.

He did everything possible to intensify the relationship with June. He forgot himself in the love affair and did not care for anything else in life. But in between he was pulled down by his illusions on detachment and indifference. With all her sincerity June loved him and was ready to marry him any time. The transformation of love in June was clearly visible. First she cared for his sickness but later on her love sought a different tone. When she kissed him he realized that it was different from the kisses she had given to the sick man. He also knew that she wanted to develop a more sincere relationship between them.

June gave all she could to win the heart of Oberoi, keeping in mind all his negative attributes. She even pleaded for his attention and kindness. When he watched her getting attached to Babu he pretended to be indifferent and detached and closed his eyes at their intimacy. He knew very well that a gesture of love from him could bring her back to him. But he tried to perceive life from a different angle and analyzed the situation in a positive way, "But you wanted to be of use and you wanted to feel that you were needed. And since you thought I didn't want you, you chose to be of use to Babu, even though it meant you had to sacrifice yourself" (146).

Oberoi willingly gave up June to Babu even though he was sure that, months of struggle to satisfy Babu's whims and innocence would leave her depleted. He was sure about what June wanted, and he denied her the desire of her soul, and thus caused a lot of pain. Inflicting pain on her was the indirect crime he committed.

The spiritual relationship with the catholic priest inspired him to be of use to others and he stood up as a fortress for the factory workers. His repentance over his crime is reflected in the tone of his confession and he was able to tell Mr. Khemka, "I have sinned and God knows, I have paid heavily for them" (81).

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas also clearly exhibits the theme of crime and confession. The discontent among the westernized Indian youth like Billy Biswas was that they belonged to two cultures. They were intellectual, artistic and sensitive and yet frustrated. Their lack of self-confidence and deep rooted trust in anyone or anything led them to different sort of crimes. The description of the effect of Billy's music on the youth talks about the darkness and the criminal traits that spread over the present youth:

Little packages of sound detonated in the smoke-filled air in quick succession, falling in one rhythm or another, creating patterns of sound that deep down I knew were not merely that, but carried a more fundamental message although what it was I, or Billy for that matter, could not have said. They blazed through out liquor stimulated sensibilities, like little meteors through the astral night, lighting up landscapes, hills, and valleys, gaping chasms of the mind that are otherwise forever shrouded in the black mist of the unconscious. (17)

Crime, corruption, the materialistic outlook, and the tendency to imitate the western world generated in Biswas a true love for the primitive world. He detested the modern society that was devoid of all traditional moral values and beliefs.

Biswas, a misfit in civilized America, soon found himself longing to be back in India. His longing was symbolic of his hatred towards crimes and craving for the deeper values in life. He returned to Delhi, only to understand that reality in Delhi was almost the same as in White America. In fact, the upper crust of the Indian society in Delhi to which he

belonged was as spiritually dead and emotionally empty as the materialistic America. Jasbir Jain, in his article “Foreigners and strangers: Arun Joshi’s Heroes” rightly remarks: “Billy like Sindi, is in search of a human world of emotional fullness - a world of meaningful relatedness” (*The Journal of Indian Writing in English* 54).

Biswas found himself an odd man out in the westernized Delhi society. He was lonely and obsessed with his loneliness: “There was little contact between his world and theirs” (63). His decision to marry Meena was an attempt to settle down in life and get rid of his obsession. Actually this was the first step he took towards committing a crime. Meena, as any other young girl, was shocked to see the rare personality of Biswas. She entered his life with a lot of expectations, but she did not attempt to understand him and know what troubled him inwardly. She acknowledged to Romi that she could not rise up to Biswas’s expectation as a wife. The failure to establish a meaningful contact with his wife and with the society she represented; enhanced Biswas’s inner restlessness and his sense of isolation. He was gradually led to a state of confession when he openly admitted that he was

selfish to risk a girl's life, being aware of the strange areas of his character.

The insensitive and corrupt society with its artificiality and phoniness suffocated Biswas's sensibility and drew him apart. He felt as though he was being "pinned down there, like a dead butterfly" (47). His sense of disgust at the civilized society found expression in outbursts like "Oh! how dreamy, how dreamy, how dreamy!" (47). In the modern society, Biswas was surrounded with crimes and was forced to be a part of the criminal environment. His mind aspired for tranquillity that he could find nowhere in the hustles and bustles of the cities. People were interested in making money and living a life full of luxuries. In contrast to this general flaw, Biswas was in search for the richness of mind. By forsaking the modern social life, he gained the dream of his heart.

As the difference in the society calmed him down, the disparity of Meena's and Bilasia's character also provided a great change in his life. His life with Meena was always quarrelsome, noisy and boisterous. Meanwhile Bilasia offered him a life full of passion, compassion and quietness. Bilasia, was what he struggled to encounter in Meena. But the

process of becoming a primitive was only a means to an end for him. He was concerned with the quest for something beyond simple primitivism. He sought reunion with the divine through a calm phase of confession. Finally he found himself in the midst of foresters where he was content and complacent. His self-justification is explained as follows:

I had gone through a trauma that had only left me suspended in the air. The experience had been severe enough to cut me off from the thirty years of my past, but not strong or coherent enough to provide me the basis of a new one. I was afraid that after all this upheaval I may still not have found the place where I really wanted to be. What helped me more than anything else was Bilasia. Girls like Bilasia are a whole more independent than our own girls. (106)

After undergoing the regenerative process himself, Biswas came out in a new role, that of a healer and a priest who cared for dying children and helped the primitive people with their worldly problems and spiritual troubles. Thus, being a comforter for the primitives, he lived happily a life of penance. He strongly believed that his good deeds in the

present would be in atonement for his past and therefore he rejoiced in the present. But as crimes pay off at the end of life, Biswas was hunted by a group of police officers and shot dead.

The route from Crime to Confession is laid bare in *The Last Labyrinth* too. Bhaskar's obsession with Anuradha was one of love, a love that could not make him free. Egocentric and possessive, he took a route similar to that of Biswas. He abandoned his wife and family for a union with Anuradha. The affair with her led him through different paths during which he encountered the reality of life and death and the mystery of a God in the mountains.

Bhaskar was conscious of his infidelity to his wife, Meena, but the pursuit of Anuradha took hold of him. A woman of obscure origin and age, Anuradha had a life of deep suffering and haunting experiences that affected her physically and mentally. An illegitimate child of an insane mother, Anuradha was molested in her childhood. She had witnessed murders, suicides, and a lot of evil. A woman of crime, she possessed the power to attract people towards her and mesmerize them with her beauty. As a child, she had witnessed the unpleasant sight of her mother selling her body

to strangers in the evening. Her mother did not marry anyone as she believed that she was married to Krishna.

Anuradha's name was Meera then. After her mother was murdered by one of her lovers, her aunt brought her to Bombay, changed her name and sent her to the film-field where she continued to be a victim of insult and loneliness. Anuradha's aunt managed to put her on the screen and probably made a good profit for herself in the bargain. She became successful in the film industry and was known to many men. Aftab saved her from there and she became an integral part of Lal Haveli. She was drawn to Aftab by Gargi, a deaf-mute mystic, with profound compassion and insight, and who acted as his spiritual guide. She was happy for some years, but Aftab lost his eyesight. As Anuradha had witnessed suffering, she naturally had an affinity for crime. In fact, Aftab was not her husband because she was not married to him. She believed that it was better not to marry anyone because it was not possible to marry everyone one loved. The mystery behind her attracted Bhaskar and he hoped that she held the answers to his unanswered questions. He shuttled between Bombay and Benaras with a determination to possess

her. He reached a stage when he realized that he could not live without her.

Bhaskar revelled in the world of Anuradha, Aftab and Gargi, and in that mysterious labyrinth, he could not turn back. The scene of Haveli was entirely different from his own city, Bombay, the city of concrete, commercial transactions and crimes. He was tired of the whims and fancies of Bombay city and the material pursuits of the people. What Bhaskar wanted was not Anuradha or Aftab's shares, but the life beyond materialism and malpractices.

Bhaskar and Anuradha were very different emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. Yet he succeeded in possessing her wholly:

I was fated to return to that Haveli over and over. We possessed each other with singular ferocity, neither willing to loosen the clasp. Yet each meeting far from cooling my passions, served only to fuel them. I lived on the nourishment of the shades thrown by her naked body under the chromatic shower. (121-122)

Bhaskar's days were fulfilled only with his meetings with Anuradha. All his efforts to forget her, to remove her out of

his routine, proved ineffectual. He tried to shake her off as a 'dream' but he became conscious of the futility of his quest and his craze for her love (83). Moreover he was dominated by an acute sense of loneliness. As Indira Bhatt and Suja Alexander testify, "Joshi's *The Last Labyrinth* differs from his earlier novels as Bhaskar, the protagonist fails to resolve his dilemma. He is committed in his anguish of alienation in his existential problems and in his questing" (*Arun Joshi's Fiction: A Critique* 71).

Bhaskar was not completely void of spiritual strength. He did make an attempt to get rid of his obsession with Anuradha. He spent a few days with his wife Geetha in Europe but unfortunately he could not relieve himself from the thoughts of Anuradha. His affair with her was so strong that he lost his grip on his own life. Bhaskar got fed up of his chaotic mind and soul, and decided to knock at the religious door as part of the confession of his sins. He visited Gargi, a radiant and rosy woman of forty with a charming, generous but enigmatic smile. Being a mystic, and full of compassion, she miraculously cured Aftab's blindness. She communicated her insight only through signs, gestures and writing because she was a deaf-mute. Bhaskar pleaded to her:

“I am fed up of this restlessness so absolutely fed up. Can you help me?” Deeply touched, Gargi wrote on her pad: “God will send someone to help you” (58).

The mysterious disappearance of Anuradha from Lal Haveli gave Bhaskar the shock of his life. All the attempts to retrieve her proved unsuccessful. She had gone to the Krishna temple on the night of ‘Janmashtami’ but had not returned. Even the police, could not find anything except a piece of antique clothing. Bhaskar was left alone to cry, but his tears were the tears of repentance. He thought about an odd incident in the past and Anuradha’s words echoes in his ears to make him realize his mistakes:

“There is a god up there. In those mountains. . . There is a temple there. On a hill lined with lepers. You must come with me . . . God will cure you.”

Cure me of what? A bad heart? Fears?

Disappointments?”

She said she could not explain. I looked into her drunken eyes and, in a way, I understood. Deep inside my heart I knew I was a leper, that I needed a cure. But I refused to yield ground. (126)

Thus, Bhaskar's cry of confession paves the way for his repentance and hopefully his salvation.

The route from crime to confession is also found in *The City and the River*, in which the Grand Master's new rule was adopted by the people. The Grand Master stood for power and the River stood for the poor fishermen and boatmen, and the ordinary people who protested against the rule. The people of the city were betrayed by the Astrologer in the guise of sacrifice and public interest. He told them that the Grand Master and the River were identical: "He and the great river are one" (164).

The city represents a slice of modern society filled with crime and corruption. Spiritualism was supposed to be practised by the people and not the ruler. The citizens met with untold suffering in general:

The Canon was swivelled to drop the next two shells in the centre and the extreme right of the building. In an instant Grandfather's house turned into a heap of burning rubble. . . . The fourth shell neatly blew Shani and his little hut into the river. . . . One shell fell in the middle of the rose garden spewing a fountain of earth and rose

petals. The other fell behind the house destroying the outhouses. The first shell left a crater thirty feet wide. (247)

The introduction of the 'Triple Way' for the development of the city was simply meant for killing the poor, helpless, honest and innocent boatmen. "The Era of Ultimate Greatness" plainly meant the spread of awe and terror in the city. The Minister for Trade made an under head dealing with the Education Advisor to remove the Grand Master from power and to acquire it for himself. This is called "A Deed of National Partnership." The politicians used such ambiguous words when they were with the people. But when they were alone or with those who were their close allies, they spoke in clear, unambiguous terms. When the Astrologer showed his fear of God, the Grand Master told him: "And God - what is God? Does he even exist? He must surely have other things to worry about than intervening in the affairs of this city, where we, in any case, now rule" (219).

The headman who had faith in God asked the Astrologer, "You think an ant is born on this earth without God's will?" (19). Trying to save the people from greater crimes, the Hermit of the mountain believed that the world is

the manifestation of God's power upon the earth. God helps his devotees whenever they are in trouble. But the question of the periodic destruction of men and his civilization was a significant one. Yogeshwara was sure about the possibility of man's freedom from the bondage of crimes. His parting words to the Nameless One proclaim it:

“Yes, the city must purify itself if it is not to dissolve again”.

“Purity itself of what?”

“Of egoism, selfishness, stupidity.”

“But how shall I succeed where the Hermit failed?”

“The question is not of success or failure; the question is of trying. And it is not your success that we are speaking of but the city's. The city must strive once again for purity. But the purity can come only through sacrifice. This perhaps was the meaning of the boatmen's rebellion.” (262-63)

Nature reacted powerfully against the crimes committed by the authorities by sending rain. The city is finally destroyed by continuous rain for seven days and seven nights.

Through this act of purification, the omnipotent pardoned the crimes.

The reader's response to the novels with regard to the theme of crime and confession is varied and, of course, significant. The interested reader of *The Apprentice* sympathizes with Ratan Rathor for his self-punishment and confession. The pathetic plight of Rathor is convincing to the interested reader and when Rathor turns to self-purification, the interested reader is overwhelmed with joy and tends to give him a pat on his back. It is Rathor's capacity to laugh at the past that wins the interested reader's heart. On the other hand the disinterested reader supports Rathor for the firm steps he has taken in his life but, at the same time, criticizes him for bribing his countrymen and cheating his own country more so, because he is the son of a patriot. The disinterested reader does not justify Rathor for his actions that lead to purification of his soul. The end need not justify the means always. The uninterested reader blames Rathor for the shameless act and declares harshly that he does not deserve any sympathy. The uninterested reader goes further ahead to suggest that Rathor could have been more wise and shrewd and tried to find out the truth behind the deal.

The interested reader of *The Foreigner* is pleased with Sindi Oberoi's decision to turn to the religious door after all the troubles and tribulations of life. The disinterested reader is surprised at Oberoi's turning point and wonders whether he would succeed in living a life with the worldly gates completely closed, whereas the uninterested reader does not find any fancy in Oberoi shunning himself from public gaze. Again, an uninterested reader expects a confession from Oberoi, hoping that he should maintain a balance between worldly pleasures and spiritual purification.

Billy Biswas in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is admired by the interested reader for his escape to the simplicity of the primitive world. Though the retreat is unbelievable it is ideal. Moreover, the interested reader is pleased with the confessional part of the novel. The disinterested reader may be tempted to suggest to Biswas that it is possible to look back and find out a better means of living than just simply accepting the primitive way of life. The uninterested reader opposes the simplistic living because he knows that, it is not the only way of attaining self-realization.

The interested reader of *The Last Labyrinth* is awestruck by the passionate life of Som Bhaskar and he moves happily

along the rare realms of love and satiety. The disinterested reader observes the eccentric movements of Bhaskar with interest but the thought of his crime and the total outcome of his passion are shocking. The uninterested reader points out his finger at Bhaskar's thoughtless actions and is pleased with the fate meted out to him.

The interested reader of *The City and the River* is glad to witness the city being saved from crime. He considers the rain of seven days and seven nights as a purification of the city. The disinterested reader rejoices at the transition but is not able to digest the Grand Master's monopoly. The uninterested reader finds the final episode a superficial act. He attaches no special significance to nature's absolution of the crime.

“You have to sacrifice before you are given. You can’t have your cake and eat it too. . . . You want to have faith. But you also want to reserve the right to challenge your own faith when it suits you.”

Arun Joshi

THE ROUTE FROM THE LABYRINTH TO THE LIGHT

Bindu Ann Philip “The Routes of the Rootless: A Study of the Novels and Short Stories of Arun Joshi” Thesis. Department of English, Vimala College Thrissur , University of Calicut, 2007

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ROUTE FROM THE LABYRINTH TO THE LIGHT

“The route from the Labyrinth to the light” concentrates on the route from the labyrinth of love to the light of love in the novels of Arun Joshi, especially in *The Last Labyrinth*. The protagonists in Joshi’s novels, conscious of their rootlessness, search for the meaning and purpose of their lives. They find themselves on the route leading them from the labyrinth to the light, from their negative tendencies to the positive.

The word “labyrinth” is defined by the *Revised and Updated Illustrated Oxford Dictionary* as “a complicated irregular network of passages” or “an intricate or tangled arrangement” (def. 1 & 2). Tapan Kumar Ghosh explains vividly the meaning of the word “labyrinth” and the stories related to it in his article, “The intricate Labyrinth: *The Last Labyrinth*” in the following way:

The word “labyrinth” has been used in its literal and metaphoric senses by various writers before Joshi. It can be traced back to the story of Minotaur in Greek mythology told by Ovid and Apollodorus. Daedalus, a great architect, was

ordered by Minos, the ruler of Crete, to construct a place of confinement for Minotaur, a monster, half-bull and half-man. Daedalus built a labyrinth which was famous throughout the world for its intricate structure. Once inside, one would go endlessly along its winding paths without ever finding exit.” (*Arun Joshi's fiction* 119)

Som Bhaskar in *The Last Labyrinth* is portrayed as a young, intelligent, educated, millionaire industrialist who though filled with chaos and uncertainty, possessed a passion for knowledge and belief. Throughout his life he had been suffering from an undefined hunger, “the hunger of the body” and “the hunger of the spirit” (10). Years back he had begun to experience a kind of restlessness marked by the strident song he sang, “I want, I want, I want” (11). Obviously he experienced a strange, dizzy and dark feeling about him. Once in the cave of Ajanta, a peculiar void seized him: “It was cool inside and dark. Then the walls started to float in trembling, shimmering, daubed here and there with colour. The colours were faint, as they are in dreams” (47). Since then he had been haunted by a void both external and internal. Hari Mohan Prasad rightly remarks:

“Bhaskar’s dilemma has crystallized the sociological, psychological and metaphysical dimensions of human existence into Joshi’s unique vision of modern man’s predicament. Som Bhaskar is an archetype of the new man and *The Last Labyrinth* is a fictional tour-de-force on the chaos of existence and crisis consciousness” (*Arun Joshi* 89).

Bhaskar’s journey from the labyrinth to the light had its roots in his parentage. His grandfather was a man of the town, fond of women and drink. His father, a scientist, was a different sort trying to delve deep into the truths that lived at the heart of the Universe. His dialogue with Bhaskar throws sufficient light on his personality: “Who knows the truth? Who can tell whence and how arose the universe? The gods are later than its beginning: who knows, therefore, whence comes this creation? Only that God who sits in the highest heaven; He only knows. Or perhaps, He knows not” (155). Though Bhaskar was a womanizer and a boozier, his mother and wife were emblems of endurance and they possessed the capability of perceiving the inner light of life. His mother died of ‘cancer’ and ‘Krishna’, to quote his own words. His wife, Geeta, intelligent and sophisticated, had an

instinctive trust in him. He believed that his marriage was a happy one and he could not imagine a life without his wife.

All the same, Bhaskar indulged in affairs with several women frequently, and among them Leela Sabnis was a special person. A scholar's daughter, trained in philosophy and a believer in love, she was the clear spirit of reason. She embodied the Cartesian principle, "I think therefore I am" and asserted that, intuition or faith or even the soul could be reasoned through (80). However, Bhaskar's affair with Leela Sabnis fizzled out because he did not have the clarity of thought and the certitude of values which she possessed. Leela's world of reason and mystery could not satisfy him. What he needed was, "something, somebody, somewhere in which the two worlds combined" (82).

At a reception for the Plastic Manufacturers Association, Bhaskar met Aftab. There he chanced upon Anuradha, and noticed her as one would notice a monument: "tall, handsome and ruined" (12). He felt an intense attraction towards her, but he did not suspect in the least that she would turn out to be a labyrinth of love, in which he would be trapped. He expressed his admiration thus: "She had the features of women one saw in Moghul miniatures. I was fascinated" (19).

Aftab's Haveli became a labyrinth for Bhaskar. As Aftab took Bhaskar around his house, he was amazed by the intrinsic structure of the building, "We climbed and came down meaningless flights of stairs. Passages twisted and turned, ran through uninhabited rooms. There were terraces covered with moss, and courtyards so airless that no one could ever have sat in them" (34). Aftab later explained that his Haveli was a labyrinth, where his ancestors tricked their opponents. He told Bhaskar that there were rooms in the Haveli where he could lock a man up and he would never be found. He also clarified that the last labyrinth is nothing but death, where the light of one's life would be burnt off.

In no time, Anuradha became the centre of Bhaskar's life. In order to pursue her, he constantly made trips to Aftab Lal's Haveli and its labyrinth which became the microcosmic labyrinth of his life. He found her a mystery by herself: "There was a mystery about Anuradha. That I had yet to crack. . . . Why should she appear mysterious unless, possibly, there was a mystery within me that, in her proximity, got somehow stirred, as one tuning fork might stir another" (89). Longing frantically for her, he experienced an indefinable and agonizing hunger in the blue-room of Lal Haveli at Benaras.

Aware of the labyrinth he had fallen into, he was ashamed to realize that whenever he was with Anuradha, his enthusiasm for anything else waned. He became agitated at his own idleness, and could not be involved in anything. He was half asleep all the time, unmindful of the days passing and could not care for his family:

I had failed to make Geeta happy, or be anything more than a stranger to my children. My friends thought me a nut. I had been neglecting my companies. I had not got over my mother's death. . . . Then, there was the greatest sorrow of them all - that no one guessed: There was the sorrow of idleness. (109)

In *Arun Joshi's Fiction: A Critique*, Indira Bhatt and Suja Alexander divulge the secrets of Bhaskar's labyrinth as follows: "He cannot think of anything other than her and he neglects his business, his family and his health in an effort to win her. He makes frequent trips to Benaras with the sole motive of acquiring her for himself" (60).

On the other hand, Anuradha's life experience was a voyage from one labyrinth to another where she was denied of the real light of happiness. Apart from being an orphan at

an early stage, with a lot of troubles, Anuradha was misled by her aunt who took undue advantage of her by throwing her into the world of films. Anuradha became a prey for the producer's lust. It was Aftab who saved her from that labyrinth and gave her a new life. She began to live with him, but without getting married to him. Her opinion of marriage was also strange: "I can imagine I am married to Aftab. I can imagine I am married to you. My mother used to imagine she was married to Krishna" (128). Though Anuradha was not born of a high family or well-educated like Bhaskar, she possessed a higher sense of worldly wisdom than him. She was fond of him, and so yielded to him on many occasions, but she did not want to be possessed by him or anybody else for that matter. In one of their personal meetings in the blue-room he declared in utter despair that what he wanted in life was Anuradha and nothing else. Her reply revealed the philosophic content of her thought: "You don't want me. You don't know what you want. You don't know what is wrong and you don't know what you want" (106).

With every meeting Bhaskar and Anuradha became closer to each other, and they reached a stage when he realized that he would not be able to live without her. Their relationship

attained a metaphysical height and he was submerged in the complicated realms of the labyrinth. Bhaskar explained the mesmeric power of Anuradha: “That gaze had been forged for carrying out transactions of the soul. Looking at you like that she seemed to put her hand on your shoulder and invite you to open your heart, promising you all the while that there was nothing that would surprise her”(41).

While the trio - Aftab, Anuradha and Azizun- enjoyed a concert together, Bhaskar felt silly and isolated and wondered if the blue-room was also a part of the labyrinth. Thus he was reminded of the lifelong plea: “If only one knew what one wanted. To know, just that. No more. No less. This, then, was a labyrinth, too, this going forward and backward and sideways of the mind” (53). Bhaskar made a futile attempt to escape from the labyrinth by going on a tour to Europe with his wife. But while in Tokyo he had a trance-like flash of Anuradha in her erotic moods, and rushed back to Gargi, the daughter of the Sufi. Gargi told him that Anuradha was his ‘Shakti’. He returned to Lal Haveli and both he and Anuradha indulged in a possessive sexual union. Again, he went to the hills and possessed her wholly, throwing on her, his entire desperate weight. One day while they were under the

influence of whisky, Anuradha informed him that she believed in a God up in the mountain. Though he loved her he could not accept the idea of a God in the mountain.

The transition from the labyrinth to the light occurs in the last part of the novel. When Bhaskar regained his health after a heart attack, he went to the mountains to collect the shares of Aftab's company which had been transferred to the possession of the temple. On the way, he learnt from his doctor that Anuradha had forsaken him in order to win a miracle from Gargi to prevent him from death. He climbed up the hill, and met an old man who had come there to die. When he reached the temple he found a man-size blue flame as the deity. There he was awakened to the light of the soul. It gradually occurred to him that it was time for him to seek God. He then remembered that people who had stared into such flames, enjoyed eternal bliss. He became restless contemplating his own death. He consulted Gargi once again about the shares he had grabbed out of revenge. Gargi wrote on the pad: "God does not work in this simple manner. God does not seek revenge (213). Bhaskar got the reconfirmation about God's power through Gargi and the transformation of Bhaskar was effected instantly.

Bhaskar came back home and was happy to see his wife, Geeta. His mental transition was vivid when he smiled at Geeta. Unusual for him, he found a rare beauty in his wife. The eyes that perceived beauty only in Anuradha, could grasp the beauty of his wife as well: "In her nightie and dressing gown she looks good, very good." It clearly establishes Bhaskar's escape from the labyrinth of Anuradha to the light of a peaceful family life with Geeta.

Bhaskar revelled in success till his life took a turn with the appearance of Anuradha. Though their relationship was illegal, Anuradha introduced the light of the Divine to Bhaskar and fuelled it to the extent possible. She continually inspired him with the thoughts of the Mountain God. However, he was so satiated, by her beauty that he did not bother about God or God's grace. Her disappearance jerked him mentally and spiritually, and as a result, he directed his steps to the mountain to see if there was a God there to console him. He attained the true knowledge here as stated in Bhagavad Gita:

However, for those living beings whose ignorance of Self, shrouding and deluding them, has been destroyed by the discriminative knowledge of the

Self, that very knowledge, like the sun lighting up all objects, illumines all that is to be known, even that Supreme Truth. (200)

Thus he naturally drifted away from the labyrinth of his dark desires to the light of God's love. His transformation is effected because of his plea for mercy. Bhaskar became God's agent because being an agent means sowing love in the human hearts where it does not exist, watering human minds with love, nurturing human lives with God's love.

The route from the labyrinth to the light is also seen in Sindi Oberoi's life in *The Foreigner*. Oberoi's experiences in life dragged him to the light. His parentage and early life made him an ideal 'foreigner,' the man who could not belong anywhere. He was not an African because neither of his parents belonged to Africa. He was not an Englishman because his father was an Indian. To America, he was not in anyway attached: "It was much too sterilized for me. Much too clean and optimistic and empty" (89). Moreover, he had not seen India until he was twenty-six. Even his coming to India was not deliberately done. "It was decided by the flip of a coin" (175-76). He was trapped in a labyrinth of

detachment and foreignness because he did not have roots anywhere in the world:

Perhaps I felt like that because I was a foreigner in America. But then, what difference would it have made if I had lived in Kenya or India or any other place for that matter! It seemed to me that I would still be a foreigner. My foreignness lay within me and I couldn't leave myself behind wherever I went. (61)

Deprived of love and care in his childhood, Oberoi's life was bound to be in darkness and he could not perceive things in the proper light. His rootlessness caused the darkness of labyrinth around him. He was blind with the sense of foreignness. He was an alien who could not belong to any place and his words and behaviour created the same impression in others. June had once remarked: "I have a feeling that you'd be a foreigner anywhere" (33). Sheila had told him sometime after he came to India: "You are still a foreigner, you don't belong here" (141). Most of the characters in the novel too have commented upon Oberoi's indifference and cynicism. Mrs. Blyth once told Oberoi "you

are just a cynic, my boy” (102). Babu too wrote a letter to Sheila, saying that Oberoi was terribly cynical.

Throughout his life Oberoi was encaged in the labyrinth of darkness moulded into a distinct shape by his indifference. Even as a boy he had thought about suicide. His indifference balanced with his incapacity to laugh. When his flat mate, Karl remarked, “I don’t know you could laugh . . .” Oberoi replied: “I can if I’m drunk enough,” an answer as thought-provoking as the remark (72). Then he sadly admitted the truth that he was not a happy person as other human beings, but an indifferent one. Sheila understood his inner state and said to him, “You are the saddest man I have ever known.” Oberoi was confused when he owned up: “I was cynical and exhausted, grown old before my time, weary with my own loneliness” (152). To him nothing ever seemed real or significant. His self-hatred is exposed in the words, “Twenty-five years largely wasted in search of wrong things in wrong places” (92). The worst of all was Mr. Khemka’s remark that he was “living, but as bad as dead” (137). These comments throw light upon the fact that Oberoi’s foreignness had webbed the labyrinth around him. Oberoi had a very successful academic career at the London University and at

Boston from where he took his Ph. D in Mechanical Engineering. He did not care for Mechanical Engineering a bit more than any other subject. Actually, it was not only Mechanical Engineering that he did not care for, but for most of the factors of his life. Having no courage to hold on to life, he confessed to Mr. Khemka, "I don't even have a reason to live" (78). This reveals the purposelessness of his life, a point that intensifies the labyrinth of his life.

Oberoi had never tried to distinguish between right and wrong, and see the light of his life. He had, as he says, "no system of morality" (54). He was not willing to know the distinction between morality and immorality. One day he asked Sheila while they were talking about June, "so you think one of those Marwari girls is really superior merely because of a silly membrane between her legs" (57). He believed that marriage "was more often a lust for possession than anything else. He believed that people got married just as they bought new cars. This attitude kept him detached from June who sacrificed her life. So did Babu Khemka. These incidents touched the core of his heart and on his way to India, he began to realize his mistakes. He had a love affair with Kathy and he could never forget the consequences of his

relationship. When he narrated the whole incident to June, he became emotional and said: “Even after several years, somewhere in the labyrinth of my consciousness the wound still bled” (61).

In India Oberoi visited Muthu, a low-paid employee in Khemka’s office, who requested him to take charge of Khemka’s business and save him and others like him, from starvation. As Oberoi was unwilling to get involved, Muthu had to convince him by saying, “sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved” (225). Finally he sought a way out of the labyrinth of indifference and detachment, and decided to get involved. Subsequently, he took charge of the business of Mr. Khemka. With the cooperation of the staff, there was considerable progress. Thus, votary of detachment became a man of involvement giving light to his own life and that of others. Oberoi’s searchlight was transformed into a spotlight for people around him. Joshi hints that it might not be long before Oberoi would find a loving and compatible wife in Babu’s sister, Sheila. There are indications of mutual tenderness sprouting between them, and an attraction that promises a closer relationship between them which would prepare the way for the light of happiness in the years to come.

The route from the labyrinth to the light is also portrayed in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, where the labyrinth is Biswas's love for primitive life. Though he tried hard to overcome the force, finally he chose his soul's call for the wild life. Biswas hated the corrupt upper-class Indian society he belonged to. Born as the son of a judge of the Supreme Court of India, he did not care for the respect that position and wealth brought him. While searching for his roots, he got entangled in a labyrinth, as the narrator says:

Perhaps as he once said, before the eye of each one of us, sooner or later, at one time of life or another, a phantom appears. Some, awed, pray for it to withdraw. Others, ostrich-like, bury their heads in sand. There are those, however, who can do nothing but grapple with such faceless tempters and chase them to the very end of the earth.

These last, he might have added, run the most terrible perils that man is capable of. (8)

Throughout Biawas's life he yearned to hide himself in the wilderness. But at every stage of his life, he had to discard the thought of it because of his commitments to his family and society. He struggled to divert his labyrinthine thought, by indulging in an affair with Rima Kaul. He used

her for his satisfaction but later on he was ashamed of himself. But Rima stood steadfast in her love. His self-disciplined life was on the decline: "It gradually dawned on me that a tremendous corrupting force was working on me. It was as though my soul was taking revenge on me for having denied it so long that it had been clamouring for" (189). In the article "A Study of the Corrupting Influence of the Technology: *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*," Shivani Vatsa and Rashmi Gaur opine:

Of all the protagonists, Billy alone is able to overcome the predicament of modern man successfully and convincingly. He is thus presented in the form of a rebel while others are depicted as helpless compromisers. Billy, in order to engage himself for the exploration of the essence of human living renounced the outer world of physical attractions and temptations.

(Bhatnagar 77)

The light that Biswas was searching for, he found in the wilderness. He was trapped in the labyrinth of the primitive forces. His urge was so powerful that he thought he needed to travel much ahead from where he was, to conquer much more than what he had conquered already. He said to the

narrator: "I don't want to sound too pompous old chap. Becoming a primitive is only a first step, a means to the end. Of course I realized then that I was seeking something else. I am still seeking something else" (189). Biswas was determined that he would seek what he had longed for and would surely reach his goal. Being a man of ultimate vitality for whom rest and rust were impossible, he was not willing to make any compromise on his choice:

Sometimes I think the human mind is equipped with a built-in apparatus for compromises. As soon as you are faced with a difficult choice, this apparatus is switched on. It runs about here and there, brokering between various parts of man, nationalizing this, postponing that, until what is left is the conventional expedients of the age and hardly a choice. Deep down we are afraid that the price of making such choices is terrible, not realizing that the price of not making them is even more terrible. (190)

The route from the labyrinth to the light is also traced in *The Apprentice*, wherein Ratan Rathor was forced to give up his honesty to become an apprentice in the corrupt society.

He struggled in the labyrinth of corruption and crime and finally embraced the divine light. In spite of his initial hesitation, he managed to thrive on corruption for he was the child of a double inheritance: the patriotic and courageous father and the worldly-wise mother: "It was not patriotism but money . . . that brought respect and bought security. Money made friends. Money succeeded where all else failed. There were many laws . . . but money was law in itself," said his mother (20).

The Labyrinth in Rathor's life occurred in his middle age when he became overambitious. In his youth, he was an embodiment of idealism and truth, and aspired to uphold the principles of human kindness and love. But enveloped in a corrupt and materialistic society, he was forced to throw away those principles. As a result, he suffered alienation from the society. Though well-educated and well-brought up, he struggled to find a job for himself. Every rejection was a humiliation for him. In the end he got a job with the high recommendation of one of his friends. The difficulty in getting a job changed him thoroughly. His only motive in life was the growth of his career. So he indulged in corruption to gain his end. Thus he found himself in a labyrinth of

overambition. Overcome by corruption, Rathor's greed crossed all possible boundaries. He accepted some bribe in order to clear some inefficient war equipments. It filled not only his pocket with money, but also his life with self-remorse. His callous disregard led to his friend's death in the battlefield. This incident awakened his self-realization. Sitting on the steps of the temple polishing the shoes of the temple-goers, he probably contemplated over the route that guided him from the labyrinth to the light.

As Oberoi in *The Foreigner* was trapped in the labyrinth of non-involvement, Rathor in *The Apprentice* was entangled by the labyrinth of careerism. Oberoi learnt that real detachment was involvement in the life of others. In the same manner, Rathor's sense of alienation made him understand that humanism and religion should be the saving grace of man. Amidst all sorts of material comforts, Rathor was discontented. Later, immersed in the labyrinth of corruption, he was restless and feared death.

But fortunately, Rathor realized his mistake at the zenith of his glorious life. He became aware that in order to get rid of the evils in the society, there should be a change, a

change on the part of the individual. That is, every act of the individual should adhere to the principle of responsibility, or to put it simply, there is need for every individual to be a responsible member of the society. As a symbolic act of repentance, he sat at the lowest step of the temple, and dusted the shoes of the congregation. Thus he hoped to wipe off his sins of dishonesty, corruption, crime and indirect murder. Rathor also exhorted the young to lead a life of responsibility. According to him they should be ready to make a new beginning: "One must try and not lose heart, not yield, at any cost, to despair" (149).

The route from the labyrinth to the light is very curiously delineated in the novel *The City and the River*. The whole city was in a troublesome labyrinth, where the people were tortured under the Grand Master's rule. The novel is the story of the world, corrupted in every way, politically, economically and socially. The modern society is caved in the labyrinth of defective leadership. The city by the river was ruled by the Grand Master who had a dream in which he saw himself as the king of the city. In the dream he was surrounded by boatman ready to attack him. His Astrologer interpreted the dream as follows: ". . . there exists a

prophecy that speaks of the coming of a king” (23).

Determined to be the king of the city, the Grand Master, at the advice of the Astrologer, introduced “The Era of Ultimate Greatness” (23). As was expected, The Headman of the boat people did not agree to abide by the new rules made for the city and thus made the labyrinth more intrinsic.

The era of darkness began with the arrest of a boatman and a clown who had laughed at the Grand Master. The incident filled the citizens with “fear and foreboding” (23). Later, when Bhumiputra, better known as Master Bhumi, was not found, his teacher, the Professor, took up the responsibility of finding him out. He was assisted in his search by a ten-year old nameless child whom he called his Little Star. The Little Star helped the Professor to discern matters clearly. Standing as a ray of light, he guided the Professor through the right path. The police-report informed him that a group of armed men had attacked the jeep and, after a short fight, carried the prisoner away. This proved Bhoma’s involvement in the outrageous conspiracy against the Grand Master. The people of the city were so clever that they did not believe the report.

Encased in the labyrinth of the Grand Master's rule, the people struggled a lot. For example, when the Grand Master heard a piece of music as he went for his night watch, he ordered that all the musical instruments of the boatmen should be destroyed. It was in such an atmosphere of terror that the festival of the Great River had to be celebrated. There was to be a boat race, but according to the new rule, the boatmen were not allowed to race bare bodied. Moreover, they were supposed to wear the sports-shirts supplied by the Astrologer and to salute the Grand Master. The problem was that they did not, "know how to salute a man, be he a Grand Master" (90). So they had to practise it. Amidst the joy of the festival they did not want to take up any more burden and they became angry and frustrated. The people retaliated and the retaliation itself became a labyrinth. The more the people tried to retaliate, the more complicated the labyrinth became.

During the festival, the Astrologer performed a Yajna "in the tongue that none understands" (96). What the Astrologer did was to substitute the hymn of the river with a song, singing the greatness of Kings and their indispensability to the earth. The Hermit of the Mountain became angry and informed the Astrologer that he had committed a sacrilege.

After the Hermit departed, the son of the Grand Master was crowned. But the public remained cold and inactive because they were confused. During the oath-taking ceremony, most of the people were silent, especially Dharma, the Professor, and hundreds of boatmen. They were all arrested instantly and sent to the Gold Mine where they were tortured. The Master of Rallies was also jailed because of his failure in presenting the live-telecast of the oath-taking ceremony. Afraid of the torture, he committed suicide.

The true picture of the political situation in the city was revealed as the Minister for Trade and the Education Advisor involved the boatmen in another conspiracy against the Grand Master. They also decided to assist the boatmen with the Education Advisor. Ignoring Bhumi's advice, the boatmen accepted the conditions of the shock brigadier, and burnt the schools, shops, telephone exchanges and railway station. The very next day they broke open Gold Mines and set the prisoners free in the night. But during the following night, two hundred sleeping boatmen were brutally killed and thrown into the river.

There were open clashes between the boatmen and Grand Master's forces. Shailaja's brother, one of the true sons

of the city, was so much shocked by the brutal killings that he committed suicide. The Hermit of the Mountain performed a 'Yajna' for the departed souls. With the boatmen he recited some mantras in compensation for the wrong done by the Astrologer on the inaugural day of the New Era. The truth of the prophecy dawned on him that the end of the city was imminent. As the river consumed the whole city one child was left behind to tell the story of the City and the River to posterity. In the final episode, the purification of the city was wrought by the river. The labyrinth created by the Grand Master and all the people around him were wiped off by plenty of water. The ruin of the city was significant for two reasons. The oppressors were punished on one side, and on the other, the suffering rows of the river were redeemed from the labyrinth to the light.

The reader's response to the routes from the labyrinth to the light is varied. The interested reader of *The Last Labyrinth* is overwhelmed with Som Bhaskar's transformation from the labyrinth of lust to the light of love. Though he satisfies his sexual desires through his relationship with Anuradha, he finally attains the light of realization. The disinterested reader supports Bhaskar in his ambition for

progress, but at the same time, opposes his infatuation for Anuradha. The uninterested reader thoroughly protests against his involvement with her and firmly believes that his behaviour causes the tragedy of his life. The uninterested reader is not enlightened about the fact that Bhaskar has attained the light of life.

The interested reader of *The Foreigner* is startled at Sindi Oberoi's route through labyrinthine paths. But finally he is relieved to find Oberoi attaining self-knowledge and the light of self-realization. The disinterested reader is not sure whether he should justify Oberoi or not. The reader is not convinced about Oberoi's detachment or indifference. The uninterested reader, for that matter, does not agree with the opinion that Sindi has ever achieved anything in his life.

In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, the interested reader finds Billy Biswas gradually coming out of his labyrinth of life and entering the world of light and happiness. As far as the disinterested reader is concerned, Biswas's route to primitivism is incredible. Nevertheless, he supports him for his search for self-realization. To the uninterested reader, Biswas's desire for happiness in the primitive world is an unacceptable route. He wonders how Biswas would ever find the light of life.

The route of Ratan Rathor in *The Apprentice* is admired by the interested reader who understands and appreciates Rathor's willingness to leave behind all his dark desires. The disinterested reader wonders how Rathor could have taken such a deviation from a point of self-degradation to a point of light. The uninterested reader is shocked at Rathor's bold step but is cynical about its possibility.

The route from the labyrinth to the light in *The City and the River* is interpreted with a lot of variations by the readers. The interested reader is thrilled at the pathetic plight of the Grand Master and his people who are entangled in labyrinthine paths. The disinterested reader justifies the death of the Grand Master but does not agree with the ruin of the entire city because of what the Grand Master and his people have done. The uninterested reader challenges nature for acting so suddenly and destroying the whole city, but does not agree with the ruin of the entire city because of what the Grand Master and his people have done. The uninterested reader challenges nature for acting so suddenly and destroying the whole city. Thus the route from the labyrinth to the light is portrayed in all the novels of Joshi.

“There is hope as long as there are young men willing to learn from the follies of their elders. Willing to learn and ready to sacrifice. Willing to pay the price.”

Arun Joshi

THE ROUTE FROM FANTASY TO FACT

Bindu Ann Philip “The Routes of the Rootless: A Study of the Novels and Short Stories of Arun Joshi” Thesis. Department of English, Vimala College Thrissur , University of Calicut, 2007

CHAPTER SIX

THE ROUTE FROM FANTASY TO FACT

As Arun Joshi moved on from one novel to the other, he realized that fantasy appeals to the reader as it gives scope for imagination, dreams and fancies. Joshi enriches the reader's experience by reproducing a fanciful reflection of life instead of a mechanical copy. In other words, he tries to hide facts under fantasy. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* defines "fantasy" as "the act of imagining things" (def. 2). The novelist imagines and creates fantasy in such a way that it serves as a sugar-coated pill that drills facts into the reader. Harish Raizada's article, "Double Vision of Fantasy and Reality in Arun Joshi's Novels" notes, "Although fantasy is intended to entertain us - to charm with freedom and fancies - it is often the source of deepest truths about the inner life, its desires, fears, and imaginings" (Dhawan 71). All novels of Arun Joshi trace the route from fantasy to fact but it is most evident in the fifth and the last novel *The City and the River*.

The City and the River is a change from the familiar Joshian ground, but the novel falls in line with his earlier novels in its rich texture. This novel deviates from the earlier

theme of the singularity of the heroes to a very universal and political crisis in the society. Joshi indulges in his favourite thoughts of faith, commitment and identity but it is analyzed from a political point of view - a theme new to him. All the same, with his keen understanding and expertise, he successfully manages to give shape to a capturing novel, based on modern politics, corruption and greed for power. *The City and the River* is a story set in a city situated by the river and governed by the Grand Master. It is a parable of the times and at the same time, it deals with how men, create the circumstances in which they ought to live. The novel reverberates with political issues rather than private matters. It is neither private nor autobiographical, but a clear-cut political novel. With a politico-historical background, it examines and exposes the day-to-day problems of life.

The novel is presented as a tale narrated by the Great Yogeshwara, for educating his disciple, the Nameless-One. He is the one who spent thirty years under his master, learning under his apprenticeship, matters like “the secrets of the body” and “the secrets of the spirit” (10). The traits of fantasy can be seen even in the names given to these characters: “The Nameless-One” suggests “anyone,”

“Yogeshwara” stands for “the Lord of Yoga” which refers to the union of the body and the spirit. The Grand Master is referred to as the Grand Master itself, a title significant in many ways, at the same time, creating a realm of fantasy.

The element of fantasy is projected in the celebration of the Nameless-One’s birthday. Yogeshwara and the Nameless-One sat together in a world of fantasy and shared the episodes of a strange story: “The Yogeshwara poured the elixir from the pitcher into two beautiful tumblers and the colour of the elixir was the colour of peacock’s feathers. And it warmed the Nameless-One as it went down his throat and made him feel nice because the nights were still quite cold” (11).

All the catastrophes narrated in the story reflect a dream the Grand Master had one night. He dreamt that he had become a king, and sat on the throne. Then arose a man from the river followed by a number of them, dark and naked, and climbed towards his throne. As per the order of the Grand Master, the Astrologer interpreted the dream as a prophecy of the future, where the Grand Master, the king, would be attacked by the boatmen. The Astrologer warned him of the increased population of the boatmen as well.

Immediate steps were taken in order to prevent the attack. The fact that the Grand Master's dream was the basis for the new situation and all the problems related to it, adds to the element of fantasy in the novel.

The Astrologer spoke to the gathering on the river bank and declared the "law of compassionate righteousness" and the new policy of "one child to a mother and two to a home" (18). Living in an innocent world of ignorance and fantasy, the people of the city did not understand anything. So they decided to ignore the speech. In opposition to the world of fantasy in which the people of the city lived, stood the intelligent Head boatman who was actually a woman. She lived in the world of facts and reason: "Not only did she believe that the speech had been made she felt it had a meaning which was not apparent on the surface" (18). When the Astrologer met her the next day she proclaimed boldly of their "allegiance only to the river" (19).

After seven days, a decree from the palace announced the beginning of a new era, "The Era of Ultimate Greatness." It provoked the people to beware of the enemy within and the enemy without, and reminded them of the Astrologer's Three Beautitudes. The new era was established with the

arrest of a boatman and a clown. The boatman's wife was arrested because she had borne an illegal child, and the clown was arrested because he was heard laughing. With this incident Joshi makes it very clear that the Grand Master lived in a world of illusion and fantasies where he thought he could do anything he fancied.

Bhumiputra and Dharma Vira are introduced as two special young men in the story. Bhumiputra used to be a teacher and he was ever willing to teach, hence the name, Master Bhoma. Dharma Vira was a police officer who was known for obedience and perfect adherence to duty. Again there is a note of fantasy when the novelist speaks about his grandfather, "Dharma's grandfather lives on a rose farm. His roses are the finest in the city and are said to dance to the sound of music" (23). Dharma Vira and Bhumiputra are presented as natural human beings whereas there is an aura of fantasy in the names given to some characters like Nameless-One, Hermit of the mountain and the grand father. As Sudhin Ghose's article "The Flame of the Forest" denotes: "The boundaries between the natural, between the divine, human and even animal creatures on the one hand and the vegetable and the inanimate world as the other are singularly vague and

undefined.”(Michael Joseph 263) Dharma Vira was given the black card for Bhumiputra. Because he could not find him in his hut, Dharma arrested a ninety-year-old man named Patanjali. In fact, Dharma could not find Bhumiputra because he had already been arrested by another police officer.

Master Bhoma’s sister sought the help of the Professor to find the vanished brother of hers. In spite of everyone’s protest including Dharma’s, the Professor searched for the vanished. Once when he was a student, he felt that the great river had spoken to him, a point that proves the element of fantasy in the environment. The Professor heard the river whisper: “Isn’t it this that you want? Something like me, peaceful and infinite and free?” (29). That was the only time the river had spoken to him and he hoped that the river would speak to him again. The Little Star who accompanied the Professor is also a part of the world of fantasy because he seemed to know many things that even the Professor did not know. When the Professor asked him who he was, his reply was hazed in fantasy: “I saw you looking at me through your telescope that night. . . . you looked so troubled I thought I would come down and inquire what the matter was” (40). About his age also he fantasies, “I am thousands of

years old” but a moment later he uttered in a serious tone a mystery of life, “Everyone is thousands and thousands of years old, tied as we are to the wheel of Karma.

Unfortunately, we forget this. Kings and Grand Masters forget this the most. This is the world’s misfortune” (42).

Later on in the story, the incident of building a straight road from the Grand Master’s palace to the river is narrated. Through the selfish act of the Grand Master, Joshi points out the facts of modern life, where the political leaders are in pursuit of selfish goals. Though the setting and the characters are steeped in fantasy, factual life is well represented in the novel. One day, the wife of the Grand Master looked at the twisty roads and wished that the road had run straight to the river. This queer wish was granted the very same day. As a result, many of the ordinary people became homeless and rootless.

The description of the mud people’s locality is also done with fringes of fantasy. The professor is surprised to see their lifestyle:

And now the professor noticed the strange sight of people, whole families, sitting on the pavement, under the bright lights, carrying on operations that

people normally undertook within the four walls of their homes. Women cooked, husbands sulked, and dogs chased children. (38)

Indicating their rootlessness the Little Star said: “They have no roof above their head, but they carry on as though they had”(39). The peaceful atmosphere created here exposes the dreamy, fantasized life they enjoyed. It is far away from the ‘factual’ life in a modern society where men seem to be extremely busy. The Professor and the Nameless-One carried on their search for Bhumiputra and for that purpose they met the Headman. The Police Commissioner presented a report regarding Bhoma’s disappearance. It said that he simply disappeared from a place between his house and the first lock-up. These reports did not satisfy the Professor. He was determined to find out Bhoma’s whereabouts. As he moved on, he saw the Grand Master’s procession of helicopters. When the Grand Master was on his night watch, he was irritated to hear the boatman’s music. To strike the element of fantasy it says, “The Grand Master’s antipathy to music is considered surprising in a man who possesses the sweetest, the most hypnotic voice in the city” (48). The Grand Master gave the orders and in five seconds every musical instrument

was reduced to ashes.

The Grand Master's visit to the grandfather's rose farm reveals another episode of fantasy. He landed on the farm with another five helicopters and walked through the farm with the grandfather's permission. He asked the grandfather to name a newly-bred rose as 'king' indirectly hinting at the arrival of a new king in the city. On his way back, he noticed a rose bush withered at their feet. The grandfather revealed the mystery in the following words: "A little while back I was standing here and this bush was hale and hearty, enjoying the music, swaying herself to sleep when suddenly there came over the radio, a great lament . . . And right before my eyes . . . this bush withered and fell at my feet" (51). Though the scene is woven into fantasy, it conveys 'facts.' The sudden withering of the flower is a pointer to the momentous life of man.

Simultaneous with fantasy, Joshi presents several facts of the modern world, one of them being how the people are put to death with the latest technological advancements. The Grand Master had a dream again. After the initial amazement, most people might have simply put such a dream out of their minds. But the Grand Master always considered himself the

chosen man to rule his city. It is worth noticing here that while he talked about the facts of life, the Grand Master was in a swirl of fantasy: “The little room was always full of incense smoke and darkness. Amidst the smoke antique idols of bronze, ivory, stone and wood stood in their appointed places. Some of them had been exhumed; it was said by archaeologists from the bed of the river” (59).

Another fact unknown to the people and the city is that, at one time, the Astrologer and the Hermit of the Mountain had studied under the same person, the Great Yogeshwara. When their studies were over the Great Yogeshwara gave both of them not only his blessings but also a copy of the prophecy. Later, the Astrologer came to his position while the Hermit continued to live in the city to teach. In due course, The Minister of Trade visited the Hermit with a hope that “the kindly sage would himself provide him with all the necessary help and guidance” (66). In one of their conversations, the Minister tried his best to extract from the Hermit, a clue about the king. Being very clever the Hermit replied, “The world belongs to God, Minister. Let him be the King of what is His” (264). This can be taken as the message that Joshi imparts through the novel. Wrapped in a layer of fantasy, the

facts of life are hidden in different parts of this novel.

Day and night, the Professor accompanied by Little Star, hunted for Bhumiputra. He hurriedly searched along the banks of the river, the hills and the mountain, forgetting to eat and sleep. He visited the Commissioner who asked him to try different designs of handcuffs: "What we have to do, is to decide on a standard interchangeable design that might fit all hands" (80). Fascinated, the Professor moved forward but did not dare trying any. Instead they entered into an intimate conversation whereby the Commissioner opened up his personal grievances. Though the people of the city regarded him as a happy, powerful man, he revealed some painful facts:

These people do not realize that there are thousands of the low whom I too look down upon. I am not a cobbler or a boatman or a pimp or a thousand other things. But these people don't realise this. Just because the Educational Adviser is the high of the high he refuses to note that there are hundreds with whom, I too, do not eat, with whom I do not drink, who dare not look at my wife and daughters. But this little

understanding is beyond his high brains.” (81)

The society is broadly divided into high and low classes; nevertheless, it is further subdivided into higher and lower classes. There are many low castes in the upper class and vice versa. These facts of life in the modern society were vividly brought out by the Commissioner.

Finally the day of the annual festival of the river arrived. All the people of the city attended it along with the people of importance. As the Astrologer began his usual prayers, the Hermit noticed that he took some deviations. The Hermit protested and left at once. The Astrologer continued his speech addressing the gathering as “my children.” Through the example of Master Bhoma, the Astrologer warned the people not to protest. To everyone’s surprise the crowning ceremony of the Grand Master’s son also took place. Even though the Astrologer demanded a loud applause there was only a slight response because “the multitude was either confused or unwilling” (102). Immediately after the meeting, Dharma, the Professor and hundreds of boatmen were arrested by the captain. The reason for the arrest was simple - “their lips during the oath-taking ceremony had not moved at all” (102). Though this sounded absurd, it is a fact in

relation to the present-day society.

The Professor decided to put up a stall and broadcast the truth about Master Bhoma. After they put the banner up, Little Star insisted on knowing the facts: “But the citizens would want facts. The Commissioner and newspapers have given them facts. What are your facts?” (121). The Professor stuck on to the truth and the people lost interest. At that time, a young man claiming to be Master Bhoma’s student, proclaimed, “I am a witness and I have facts” (123). The young man, who was Shailaja’s brother told the crowd, the parable of the naked king very elaborately. Through the story he persuaded everyone to be sensible and strong. But, “None of the boatmen had the luck to win the lottery but their laughter was the loudest” (128).

Bhumiputra’s return gave the boatmen a new life in the absence of the Headman. Staying with the grandfather, he started to work for the boatmen, where he met Shani, Dharma’s sister’s son. Shani underwent a transition in his life, from an atrocious young boy to a decorous boy with the intervention of music. As he listened to the music of the boatmen, he felt a mysterious flower open inside him and he was filled with joy. This experience of Shani is an element of

fantasy in the novel. The incident that sent Bhumiputra to the police, also is a part of fantasy. He was arrested because he narrated the parable of the naked king in the university. The situation in which he delivered the speech is as follows: “In another class, he apparently once again fell asleep and related the parable all over. Once again he awoke with the applause. He was amazed but also filled with dread” (153).

The description of the Gold Mine is fantasy mixed with fact. It is an underground dungeon where not a single ray of sunlight could go in. Once a man is trapped there, “the night enters the man’s soul, blotting out the light behind his eyes” (162). The Headman was taken to this dungeon because of her reluctance to swear allegiance to the Grand Master. Straightforward in the matter of allegiance the Headman says: “My fate is my own, Astrologer. And your fate is yours. The wheel turns and as we have sown so shall we reap. My reply is as before: I spit on you and I spit on the Grand Master” (164). As a punishment to this the guards fell upon the Headman and carried her away. They pierced her eyes and poured acid into the perforations. The Professor refused to eat after that and he put forward two demands. But after seven days, with a guiding message to the Little Star and the

Headman, the Professor passed away, saying: "There will be a new world, a new race of men will be born" (167). That was the piece of optimism he handed over to them, from the world of fantasy to lead them towards facts.

Immediately after the Professor's death, a new decree was declared. Dharma's father completed the documents and began searching for his brother. But nowhere, he could gather information about the Professor. Only Bhumiputra realized that the new decree was an 'eye-wash' (174). Every night he travelled in an oarless boat and reached the boatmen who depended on him for their future. Bhoma's humble withdrawal was not allowed by the boatmen. He politely told them: "Brothers and sisters, I do not deserve to stand where you have made me stand. As I said before only a boatman knows a boatman's sorrow" (177). But, Bhoma was again under the spell of a fantasy and his tongue moved in spite of his will. Finally he got them all ready to utter the vow:

Oh my mother, I am a nameless boatman of this city of gold. Oh, my mother, I have become the plaything of my oppressor who is blind and who is deaf. Look at me, my mother, my back is broken. And now with all that is sacred, in you

and in the Kingdom of Varuna, I vow that until my oppressor opens his ears to my lament not a boat, not a leaf not even a piece of straw shall pass down your sacred waters. So the great river be my witness. (178-179)

The council considered the ill-advised boatmen's strike to be the action of traitors, and immediately ordered for Bhoma's arrest. Meanwhile the Minister for Trade and the Advisor formed a separate alliance to protect themselves and the Advisor's brigades, by not getting hold of Bhoma. To the boatmen, now the shock-brigades offered an unconditional alliance. And as their fate would have it, much against Bhumiputra's advice, the boatmen accepted the offer.

Within no time the uprising spread from the great river to the pyramids systematically burnt shops, schools, buses and railway station. And it turned the Gold Mine "into a heap of rubble" (183). A battle started between the police on one hand, and boatmen and shock-brigades on the other. The police party arrived at the boat work at night, and charged them with machine guns, and cabinned them in the hall. Two hundred dead men were taken to the river in four trucks. The newspaper report said the boatman went back home. At the

end of the novel nature annihilated everything. It rained continuously for seven days and seven nights, and washed off everything and everyone except one man to retell the story to the coming generations. As it is seen, though fantasy incidents abound in the novel, it is not devoid of facts.

The title itself indicates the opposing powers of fantasy and fact. The city is made and ruled by the fantasy of man, whereas the river stands as a monument of fact, originated from nature. Man creates the city gradually. He puts within a certain boundary all that he needs, and names what is within the boundary, a city. Thus the city becomes a symbol of the growing civilization. In course of time, it turns into a place of corruption, and the corruption is effected by those very people who inhabit the city. This city and this river in *The City and the River* also undergo the same change. They are inter-related. The city depends on the river, for it is the city that is born out of the river and not the river that is born out of the city. G. S. Amur's words are quoted in *The Novel of Arun Joshi: A Critical Study*:

. . . as an affirmation of India's wisdom and the value of the fable as a mode of comprehension, *The City and the River* has a unique place in Indian

Fiction in English. But he expresses his doubt about the future of Joshi as a novelist - 'where can he (Joshi) go from here?' The answer to this question is now quite clear but probably Joshi knew that after writing this novel he had to go nowhere else but to the abode of Great God, leaving behind his search for rootlessness.

(Bhatnagar 129)

In this novel Joshi's individual concern gains wider vision as he deals with community as a whole and individually to an extent. When the people of the river were no longer strong enough to fight back, with the Grand Master, the Divine intervened and showed His might, proving that He is the ruler, and that he can create and he can destroy in order to purify for creating further. The strength of nature here, is a reproduction of the words of The Holy Qur-an: "Nature proclaims the glory of Allah. Lightening and Thunder are signs of his might as well as his mercy" (Surat 13: 1-18).

In *The Foreigner* the elements of fantasy and romance intermingle in the depiction of the personal life of the protagonist, Sindi Oberoi. When he was a child, Sindi lost his parents and he was completely deprived of their love and

care. Left with his uncle and friends, who considered him a grown up, Oberoi missed his childhood innocence: "I saw myself as a child listening to the conversations of my uncle's friends. They had all treated me as a grown up" (69). At the same time, his uncle passed on to him a personal message before he died, "To love", is to invite others to break your heart." Consequently, Oberoi created a world of fantasy out of these words, and became incapable of loving anyone selflessly. An intelligent boy at London University, Oberoi performed very well in his examinations, but soon he was trapped by a fantasy-world. Losing interest in the school subjects, he hunted for a meaning in life: "I didn't have any trouble with my courses and I passed the exams creditably enough when they came, but the question that bothered me was very different. I wanted to know the meaning of my life" (71).

His love affairs with Anna, Kathy and June also reveal the route from fantasy to fact. Anna's love was a reality in Oberoi's life and he embraced it as though he was in a world of fantasy. He liked Anna, and she, in turn had fallen in love with him ever since she saw him. The reason behind their later separation, has a tinge of fancy, "She knew it and

thought it was her age that discouraged me. She couldn't have been further from the truth. The thing I liked most about her was her age" (143). Oberoi's attraction towards her age is a matter of curiosity for the readers. Foolishly enough, he left her the moment Kathy showed interest in him. They just imagined that they were in love with each other. Again, the facts of life knocked at the door of her consciousness and she turned back to her husband. These incidents scarred the fantasy-world of Oberoi, "But at the same time it marked a new beginning in my thinking" (144).

Oberoi's contact with a Catholic priest encouraged him to read about God, and was awakened to a truth of life: "All love - whether of things, or persons, or oneself - was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion" (170). Talking to June, he further elaborates his fantasy:

Absence of love does not mean hatred. Hatred is just another form of love. There is another way of loving. You can love without attachment, without desire. You can love without attachment to the objects of your love. You can love without fooling yourself that the things you love are indispensable either to you or to the world. (170)

Oberoi followed strictly the principles of indifference

and of detachment until he was overpowered by June's love. He bluntly owned how he had become a prey to her love.

I received a pretty bad beating at your hands. You don't know how hard I struggled before making love to you that evening we came from the beach. That night you had set off an avalanche that I had no means of stopping. I was lucky you left me. I was miserable when it happened, but I would have been completely bankrupt if you had not done so. (146)

His views on love were more of fantasy than reality, and his outlook on marriage was more strange than serious. He did not believe in marriage as he says: "marriage was more often a lust for possession than anything else" (67). His world of reality was different from June's. It was strange that though he was not willing to marry June, he was deeply depressed and agonized when she was engaged to Babu.

The tragic deaths of Babu and June helped Oberoi to perceive the facts of life. The fantasy of his love, indifference, detachment and relationship, in the final run, did not rescue him at all. He was a different person on his way back to India. He observed Muthu's life and realized the

ultimate fact of life that one lived not only for himself but for those who needed him. Though he was a poor labourer, Muthu looked after his jobless brother and a dozen children. They all shared a one-bedroom hut with joy and peace. With new concepts regarding facts of life, Oberoi took up the responsibility of Mr. Khemka's business and tried to be of use to the workers around him.

The route from fantasy to fact is also found in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. Living in the heart of Delhi's smart society, Biswas had an extraordinary obsession for a life in the lap of nature. Consequently, he shifted to central India and lived among the primitives there. The description of the house he lived in, recreates the fantasy of the Arabian Nights: "I went inside the house. Even though it was day the bungalow seemed not a structure of brick and mortar where a hundred collectors had lived before me but some cardboard creation out of the pages of the Arabian Nights" (152). Romi narrated the story of Biswas's life in New York and Delhi from his own observations. They were both around twenty-two when Romi met the inhumanly sharp eyes of Biswas in New York and stayed with him during the period of his higher

studies there. He was also impressed by Biswas's "poise without pose" (11).

Biswas had a royal family background, his grandfather having been the Prime Minister of a famous princely state in Orissa. His father who was the judge of the Supreme Court of India, had earlier been the ambassador to a European country and Billy who was fifteen then, had studied for some years at an English Public School. In New York he was busy completing his Ph.D degree in Anthropology though his father believed he was studying for a degree in Engineering.

Biswas loved distant places, and was attracted to the subject of anthropology, because as he told Romi: "All I want to do in life is to visit the places they describe, meet the people who live there, find out about the aboriginalness of the world" (14). His obsession for distant lands and primitive man led him to the wilderness. He explained to Romi the glimpse of the other world: "Most of us are aware only of the side on which we are born, but there is always the other side, the valley beyond the hills, the hills beyond the valley" (18-19). This other side was the primitive life, untouched by the sophistication, inhibition and restraints of the civilized world. That world of fantasy was his haven of peace.

Romi, perceiving a rare combination of intelligence and wit in Biswas, appreciated him deeply:

His conversation was not clever or brilliant but it was full of surprises. It twisted and turned like a firefly in a garden lighting first this flower, then that, revealing not only the mind of the speaker, but also the dark unknowable layers of the mysterious world that surrounded us. It stretched the ordinary in to cosmic, pulled the ethereal down to the tangible and infused everything with an intelligence that was easily the sharpest that I had ever come across. (20)

Tuula, the Swedish lady of thirty years, describes fantasy in Billy as follows: “A great force, urkraft, . . . a primitive force. He is afraid of it and tries to suppress it . . . But it is very strong in him, much stronger than in you or me. It can explode any time” (23).

Biswas surmised that the tribals held the answer to his quest. Even as a boy he was deeply concerned with the problem of his identity. He asked himself questions like: “Who was I? Where had I come from? Where was I going?” (122). When he was fourteen, he visited Bhubaneswar and

while watching sculptures there he felt: "If anyone had a clue to it (the spirit) it was only the 'adivasis' who carried about their knowledge in silence, locked behind their dark inscrutable faces" (124). When Biswas got an opportunity to watch the dance of the tribals there, he experienced, "a great shock of erotic energy" (125). He said to himself then: "Something has gone wrong with my life. This is where I belong. This is what I have always dreamt of" (125). Such hallucinations continued to haunt him as he grew up.

On his last expedition to the hills of central India with his students at Delhi University, Biswas met Dhunia, the headman of the village, who became very close to him because he had saved the life of his niece earlier by giving her antibiotics. Biswas met this niece, Bilasia, now grown into an untamed and voluptuous village beauty. As he left for his camp, Dhunia invited him to watch their community dance the next day. He was not sure of going to the village the next day, but as he slept he had a dream, "a dream so erotic, the like of which I did not know could still be conjured up by my unconscious" (120). The fantasy world of the hilly forest seemed to beckon him and he stood motionless at the

voluptuous beauty of the place, thinking of its contrast to the civilized society:

Had he not known that every four weeks there was a moon like this, that there were hills as blue as these, and people in the hills that were all that he had ever wanted to be. Why did it take him thirty years to discover this. For all his so-called courage, he thought, even he, had been afraid and foolish, squandering the priceless treasure of his life on that heap of tinsel that passed for civilization (102).

Biswas yielded himself to the fanciful temptation and enjoyed taking alcohol with the primitives in the moonlight. At that time, Bilasia just looked up into his eyes with a smile on her lips, and his fancy was aroused: "Her enormous eyes, only a little foggier with drink, poured out a sexuality that was nearly as primeval as the forest" (102). He watched their dance till it turned into a sort of 'orgy' with the feverish beats of the drum. His fantasy-world became a reality as he married Bilasia and had a son by her. He liked this new life, the fantasy-world of the primitives in contrast to the factual

world of the modern society. His scorn towards the civilized world is explicated in the following lines:

I don't think I have ever met a more pompous, a more mixed-up lot of people. Artistically, they were dry as dust. Intellectually, they could do no better than mechanically mouth ideas that the West abandoned a generation ago. Their idea of romance was to go and see an American movie or go to one of those wretched restaurants and dance with their wives to a thirty-year-old tune (128).

In the final episode of the novel, Biswas appears as a sage or magician who is capable of curing illness, a knowledge he gained by his communion with nature.

In *The Apprentice* the story itself is an imaginative tale. The reader finds the smartly dressed middle-aged Ratan Rathor with an expensive limosine waiting to take him to his office and towards the end, the same Rathor is engaged in the manual work of a shoe-shiner on the standway of a Delhi temple. While wiping the shoes of the devotees he talked to a young student who had come from the fort hills of the Punjab to Delhi to rehearse for the N.C.C. parade on the Republic Day. They grew intimate and Rathor told him the

tragic-comic tale of his life. Telling his life story to a stranger also has a touch of fantasy.

Rathor was full of wonder for his dad. He considered the world of freedom fighting a heroic deed. When his educational career came to an abrupt end, Rathor decided to follow the path of his father, by joining Subash Bose. But his mother tried to shake off the fantasies out of his mind, by advising him about the facts of life: “Don’t fool yourself, Son. . . Man without money was a man without work. Many things were great in life, but the greatest of them all was money” (20). She further tells him: “It was not patriotism but money . . . that brought respect and bought security. Money made friends. Money succeeded where all else failed. There were many laws . . . but money was law unto itself” (20). Upholding his mother’s advice, Rathor cycled towards the town gloating over his glorious future but halfway ahead his enthusiasm waned and fantasy gave way to facts and he cycled back to his village. Then he landed in Delhi in search of a career.

When Rathor acquired a job as a temporary clerk in the department of war-purchases, he began climbing up the ladder of success. Attuned to the ways of the world, he shrewdly

manipulated his success. He became accustomed to the 'docility' of the job and was willing to do anything that pleased the boss. In no time, Ratan was confirmed and upgraded as an assistant with a dozen clerks working under him. He pleased his superintendent and was made an officer in the department. He was not aware of his awkward situation though his colleagues mocked him and called him "a whore", and "an upstart" who shamelessly kowtowed to the bosses. But he was hardened as he disclosed to his young friend, how he mixed up facts with fantasy-desires:

I am a thick-skin now, a thick-skin and a washout but, believe me, my friend, I too have had thoughts such as these. But what was to be done? One had to live. And, to live, one had to make a living. And, how was a living to be made except through careers. Thus the turbulence always died until it ceased to erupt altogether. (41)

Later on, Ratan came into contact with Himmat Singh, a prince of the underworld, who was popularly known as the Sheikh. He gave an enormous bribe to Rathor and ensnared him into a shady bargain which later on ruined the life of his best friend, the Brigadier. This brought about a sudden change in

Rathor's own life. The incident helped him to descry the strained world of foolish fancy which he had created for himself out of his inordinate ambition. Finally he was willing to face the facts of life.

The strangeness in Singh's character, not only surprised Rathor but also subdued him. The Sheikh "conducts his operation for neither money nor power but in order only to destroy" (81). According to him, there were two types of people- the rulers and the ruled: "The rulers were a fraud . . . phoney people who knew only how to make speeches, be cruel, and feather their nests, people who made a mess of things, then went off without knowing how, to clean it up, the ruled were brainless" (84).

Singh hated both these groups. He set Rathor at rest by telling him that fools like him believe that there is a law book laid down by God which they must follow: "There was no such law book, Rathor . . . What existed . . . was not written by God but by a silly society that would do anything for money" (76). While leaving for Bombay, Rathor had been "engrossed in fantasies of pleasures that awaited him there" (78). Now with enough money in his hands he fell an easy prey to drinking and whoring. On returning home Rathor

learnt how the Brigadier had had a nervous breakdown and was on the verge of a mental and physical collapse. He was so deeply affected by the pathetic condition of his best friend who was an honest and brave army officer, that he wrote his confession. But later he decided not to send it. Two weeks later he learnt that his friend had killed himself.

This incident moved Rathor considerably and he longed to take revenge on the Sheikh. On reaching his house, he found him dying. To his utter surprise he learnt from him that he alone had not been responsible for the deal. The secretary and the Minister too had had their hands in it. They had made use of Rathor's overambition to reach their personal goals. The revelations that Sheikh had made use of him, created a strong impact on Rathor's life. He dragged himself out of the frivolous world of fantasy to learn the facts of life. He understood that the ultimate reality of life is God and he devoted himself to the service of Almighty God by visiting the temple every morning and wiping the shoes of the worshippers.

The *Last Labyrinth* also traces the route from fantasy to fact through the narrator-protagonist's life. His world of fantasy was created around a woman Anuradha, who made him

forget his family, his business and everything else. His world of fantasy turned out to be the labyrinth of his life from which he escaped narrowly at the end of the story. The novel reads like a fantasy tale because of the intriguing juxtaposition of the sensual and spiritual locales, the Haveli and the summit of the hills.

At the age of twenty-five, Bhaskar became an immensely affluent man when his father, a rich industrialist of Bombay, died leaving him his entire business. He married an extraordinary woman, Geeta, by whom he had two children. Bhaskar's father had spent a quarter of a million on his education by sending him to the world's finest universities. He had therefore grown into a clever and successful businessman who expanded his empire and made a name for himself in the industrial world of Bombay. He was an egoist, stubborn by nature, and always trying to have his own way. These are the factual sides of his life.

The element of fantasy strikes the reader as he learns about the mysterious and undefined 'voices' Bhaskar listened to, "mostly of the dead" (68). Bhaskar understood his problem of restlessness and he disclosed it to Leela Sabins, a scholar, with whom he had had an affair for six months. He told her

that he used to hear the song, “I want. I want. I want” in the void, all the time (78). She considered these voices to be his fantasies and told him: “You are much too high strung. Without reason. You are a neurotic. A compulsive fornicator” (80). She even attributed them to his problem of identity” and made him conscious that what he wanted was “a mystical identification, with a god head, as most Hindus want, sooner or later” (113). She tried earnestly to help him understand the power of his self and the meaning of his life. Being a sceptic, Bhaskar had no such divine yearnings. A friend of him gave another explanation for his life and predicted when it would come to an end:

A soul might also imagine that his wants, desires are best met through another soul, if that soul is the right one. That, no doubt, is a big if. Until he meets this right, Som there is no peace. When you meet the right soul then, of course, things might be peaceful, may even more on towards a higher goal. (74)

His health deteriorated because of a minor heartattack which he had at a young age. Along with this, his hallucinations also added to his gloom. It is at the age of thirty-five that he

encountered Anuradha and Aftab on whose business he had an eye and whose shares he had been buying for quite sometime. In the beginning he was fascinated by Anuradha's antique model of dressing. Later he was attracted towards her by "the unquenched fires that constantly burnt in those haunted eyes (13).

Bhaskar perceived fantasy-world when he visited Anuradha and Aftab in Benaras at the latter's Lal Haveli. He was bewitched by Anuradha's dark, sexy eyes and her body, the grace and sensuousness of which she seemed to be unaware. Aftab sensed that it was to see her and not to negotiate for the shares that Bhaskar had really come there. He got deviated from his purpose only out of his attraction for her. He forgot the fact that he had come there for business. Unknowingly he was enthralled by her beauty and was relieved to learn that she was not married to Aftab.

Later while sleeping in Aftab's Haveli, Bhaskar was restless, and haunted by the mysterious voices again. When he woke up suddenly, he found Anuradha standing by his bedside. He told her about his dream of the undefined voices pestering him, and further added, "May be, its you I want" (106). He succeeded in having her that night. He found

Anuradha indispensable to him and realized the significance of what Gargi had once said: “Don’t quarrel. She is your Shakti” (121). From then he was led to Haveli over and over again. They lived in a world of fantasy by possessing each other with unlimited strength each time they met.

On returning to Bombay, Bhaskar had a massive heartattack which nearly killed him. When he recovered he contacted Anuradha who expressed her inability to see him anymore. Dr. K. told him not to hound Anuradha because she had suffered more than any other human being: “Illegitimate child, insane mother, no home. Molested as a child, witness to murders, suicides every conceivable evil of the world can you imagine what a childhood she must have had” (190). The description of Anuradha’s childhood could not have proved that she was capable of alluring a person like Bhaskar out of his world of fantasy. Aftab allowed him to meet Anuradha who entreated him to go away for his life would be in danger: “You don’t know these people. Anything may happen to you in this Haveli, and none would ever know” (219). He left the Haveli, that night only to return and claim Anuradha, the next morning. He was, however, shocked to learn that she had disappeared by then. Suspecting a foul play he reported

against Aftab to the police who made a thorough search of his house to trace her but in vain. Bhaskar was thoroughly depressed to find that the centre of his fantasy-world had vanished. He decided to search for facts of life, that is the God in the mountain as Anuradha had once told him.

The interested reader of *The City and the River* is extremely delighted when the good wins over the evil. He deliberately warns the Grand Master against the consequences of living in a fantasy world. When reality dawns, the interested reader's expectation comes true and he rejoices in it. The disinterested reader is carried away by the different phases of fantasy and enjoys the different realms, but is not willing to believe any incredible aspect of life. The uninterested reader does not agree to the supernatural interference in the world of fantasy which winds up in a tragedy.

The interested reader of *The Foreigner* observes closely Oberoi's life, full of fanciful thoughts and deeds. The interested reader also perceives the beauty of the turning point in his life wherein he begins to assess life through a realistic perspective. The disinterested reader watches Oberoi's detachment and then his attachment to June, but he does not

agree to the story-ending where things go wrong for Oberoi. According to the uninterested reader Oberoi is not capable of starting a new life with Sheila. The uninterested reader is also not ready to accept the fact that Oberoi is capable of living outside the world of fantasy, accepting the facts of life.

In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, Billy's transformation from the world of fantasy to reality is appreciated by the interested reader. The disinterested reader keeps track of the happenings in Billy Biswas's life on the rungs of the ladder of success. But he does not accept his journey to the primitive world because he (the disinterested reader) does not believe that, it is the only world of reality. The uninterested reader criticizes the novelist for the sudden twist in the character of Biswas from 'a creature of fantasy' to a falsely realistic being.

The interested reader of *The Apprentice* responds positively to the transition of Ratan Rathor from a world of fantasy to reality. Rathor struggles to do everything possible to build his own world of fantasy-ideas. But finally when he makes recompense for his sins, the interested reader is with him, nodding his head in approval. The disinterested reader keeps himself on a par with Rathor in all his endeavours but

does not agree with him finally when he decides to descend to the level of a shoe-shiner. The uninterested reader sternly opposes the ultimate change in Rathor because he considers the act of shoe-polishing as a fantastic idea far removed from reality.

The interested reader of *The Last Labyrinth* is tickled by Som Bhaskar's fancy for Anuradha. His passion had driven him so crazy that Bhaskar is pitied by the interested reader even when he knows very well that the alliance is unacceptable. The disinterested reader blames Bhaskar for the infatuation and is not willing to accept the fact that Anuradha can instil the idea of God in him. The uninterested reader does not believe in Anuradha's disappearance thus breaking the fantasy-shell. Reality dawns on Bhaskar but not on the uninterested reader.

In *The City and the River* God's power had fallen down on the people of the river at the time of their struggle for survival. God's intervention helped not only an individual's evolution but also the evolution of the community thereby indicating the evolution of the human race.

“To be respected. To be of use. Who has not wanted them? Yet how few manage it. Simple things like that. Things as basic to life as air and water. And so difficult to get.”

Arun Joshi

THE ROUTE FROM THE STRUGGLE TO THE SURVIVAL

Bindu Ann Philip “The Routes of the Rootless: A Study of the Novels and Short Stories of Arun Joshi” Thesis. Department of English, Vimala College Thrissur , University of Calicut, 2007

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ROUTE FROM THE STRUGGLE TO THE SURVIVAL

Arun Joshi published a collection of ten short stories entitled *The Survivor* (1975), and two other stories, “The Only American from Our Village” and “Kanyakumari” separately. The stories present a variety of characters - a college principal who was a victim of Gherao, an immigrant Indian physicist who conveniently forgot his dear ones when he became successful, a soldier who felt rootless and homeless when he returned home after the war, a young prostitute whose only aim was to be accepted by the rich upper class society, an unemployed middle-class youth and eve-teaser, a sex-obsessed lusty servant, an old man desiring to regain his lost youth, a middle-aged traveller salesman who sacrificed his career because of his special affinity for his crippled daughter, and so on. These characters have one element in common, and that is their acute sense of loneliness and frustration. They desperately hunt for the meaning and purpose of their lives. Amidst their depressing experiences, they do sense a kind of hope and so they struggle to survive. The transition from the struggle to the survival is the route dealt with in this chapter.

“The Gherao”

The route from the struggle to the survival is clearly seen in “The Gherao,” the first story of the collection. It describes the struggle of Ravi Mathur a college principal whom the students gheraoed and defeated. The story is narrated by Mr. Chatterjee, a young lecturer in the department of English where the incident took place. The method of “gherao,” one of the powerful weapons of trade unions and political parties, created physical and psychological struggles for the victims. The story focuses on the declining sense of values among the post-colonial youth of India. From time immemorial “gurus” had been treated with high reverence in India. But with the influence of western culture and the interference of politics, the Indian situation has been adversely affected.

When the students of the college gheraoed the principal and made some demands, he promised to fulfil them in order to survive the struggle. The president of the students’ Union, Chiru Pandey and his supporters chanted slogans, used indecent words to abuse him and even denied him a glass of water. The struggle continued for a long time causing great mental agony and physical strain for the principal. Joshi

clearly and challengingly reveals the arrogant attitude of the present generation. The principal was a freedom fighter in his youth and had overcome a lot of difficulties including a long-term stay in the jail. But these incidents never ached his heart. When his students gheraoed him in his old age, it broke his heart. The disrespect and the negligence of his disciples crushed him down.

The student representatives appeared very cruel and indecent by not giving their victim a chance for survival. They created an atmosphere of tension and bewilderment. While the principal struggled for his life, the students celebrated his defeat with “wild cries of jubilation” (28). The principal died of heart attack on one side, the students on the other, got their demands approved. The sad state of the principal did not bother the students who survived the struggle. But “I must admit I have found it difficult to sleep tonight. When I could not bear it any longer I decided to write all this down, hoping thereby to ease my own oppression. But the night seems endless and, I am afraid, I do not feel all that young anywhere” said the narrator (29). The principal survived the struggles of life forever by his death.

The interested reader is shocked to observe the pathetic plight of the principal and accuses the young generation for their arrogance. The uninterested reader pities the principal but at the same time, considers a gherao as the true weapon for success and believes that the youth has the right to fight for their rights. The disinterested reader justifies the student-community for their apt action in order to get their demands approved.

“The Frontier Mail is Gone”

“The Frontier Mail is Gone,” a reflection of the theme of rootlessness, is a first person narrative, narrated by a worker in a factory at Faridabad. Living in a hut near a level-crossing, he had developed the habit of sitting at the level-crossing every morning. Members of his family, Leela, a young widowed girl of seventeen and her brother, Surrinder, also used to watch the Frontier Mail pass. Shy and young, Leela’s imagination was stirred by the ‘Frontier Mail’ as she saw it moving on to an unknown destination. Wide-eyed she would watch and think of the rich passengers and the world beyond her poverty-stricken hut. Her wonder is beautifully presented by the narrator: “I watched her gaze with

unrestrained wistfulness at the swaying carriages, the air-conditioned coach, its tinted glass reflecting the morning sun, the diving car. Her girlish face was lighted with wonder and as I was later to recall, a suppressed passion that none of us suspected her to possess” (35).

Leela was under the careful scrutiny of her father and brother because they knew what was in her mind. She could not resist her passion for the unknown world outside. So one morning she slipped out of the hut without their knowledge and got into the mail. The long journey took her to Bombay, where she was picked up by a pimp. Subsequently she was brought to a brothel where she became the victim for many men’s desires. Leela tried earnestly to overcome the struggles of her hut-life, but she landed in a worse situation where she had to confront an unknown dirty world.

The interested reader, at the initial stage of the story, hopes that Leela should not escape the careful vigilance of her father and brother, for he foresees the dangers awaiting her in the rich upper-class society. But when she was in the trap, he sympathises with her and hopes that she would find her way out from there. The disinterested reader observes Leela’s actions with curiosity, and traces her route with

interest but when she caters to her whims and fancies, he loses his interest. The uninterested reader believes that Leela deserved the fall as she was herself responsible for the tragedy.

“The Eve-Teasers”

“The Eve-Teasers” is a successful handling of the age-old problem of eve-teasing. Ram and Shyam, two teenagers, who had passed matriculation in the third-class, acquired admission in a university because they were rich. They had all that money could buy. Naturally, morality was a coin of less currency for them. The university days were memorable for them because of the forty-minute ride in the bus to and from their homes. They enjoyed the trips because they got chances to pull the clothes of women, block the entrance just to feel the female flesh that rubbed against them. Not once did they think of their mothers or sisters who would have had the same plight. The latter half of the day is even more refreshing for Ram and Shyam, in a perverse way, though. They would sit together and recollect the sweet memories of the day.

As fate would have it, one day Ram gave a horrific description of his latest victim - a girl in a blue Kamiz. As he turned to Shyam for an approval or a reaction he realized that Shyam had disappeared. He just walked away amidst the on-coming cars, like a mad man. He wanted to reveal the identity of the girl in the blue Kamiz, but he just could not. He was full of shame, and that shame turned into a kind of terror. It was the terror experienced by a man whose sister's fragile flesh had been torn by a decaying mass of flesh. He was moved to tears. He struggled hard to withstand the tears but the tears survived the struggle. He did not have the guts to turn back and look at Ram for reasons quite obvious.

The interested reader applauds the writer for handling daftly the theme of eve teasing, an evil practice prevalent in the modern society. He is happy about the fact that the predator understands the pain of the prey at the end. The disinterested reader looks at the eve-teasers with contempt, but believes that no one can root out these evils from the society. The uninterested reader has nothing special to offer as he believes that Shyam deserves the shame he faces at the end.

“The Boy with the Flute”

“The Boy with the Flute” is about Mr. Sethi, a successful businessman, “wealthy beyond calculations” and one among the thirty richest men in the country” (50). In his boyhood, Sethi’s mother had taught him a familiar prayer: “From evil lead me to good; from darkness lead me to light; from death lead me to deathlessness” (49). He took refuge in the prayer often and recited it frequently till he became fifteen years old.

The adult Sethi became a successful and busy business man and consequently indulged in all sorts of worldly pleasures. Gradually he forgot the sacred hymn that his mother had taught him. With the accumulation of wealth, he became tensed and over-excited. He also lost his peace of mind as a pervading fear of death overpowered him. Strange thoughts and dreams disturbed the harmony of his normal life. Though he tried to ignore it in the beginning he was not able to contain the anxiety and fear that haunted him.

In an attempt to overcome the gloom, Sethi took a mistress hoping that the touch of female flesh would keep off his obsession. But the girl did not satisfy him for long. Very soon he realized that the girl’s only motive was making

money. Disgusted and displeased, he left the girl one night, but unfortunately he was robbed of his belongings at gun point and dumped in an unknown house. He struggled to escape and in that state he was tormented by fearful images: “Chaos filled his head. And through this chaos marched the songs of his childhood, the nursery rhymes and hymns, the fables” (67). At that juncture the words of his mother’s hymn rallied to his thoughts and he began to recite it with fervour: “Asato ma sadgamaya; Tamaso ma jyothir gamaya; mrithyoma amritam gamaya” (67).

With the chanting of the prayer he lost his consciousness, only to recover and find himself rescued by a boy. This angelic messenger sent by God, perhaps, had a face covered with soot and a flute in his hand. Sethi could not identify him but he was very friendly: “The boy smiled in the fearful darkness, a smile of such unutterable sweetness that it reminded Sethi of his childhood, his mother, indeed all the goodness that he had ever known and somehow lost” (68). No efforts to trace the boy became successful. The whereabouts of the boy remained an enigma. Whether he was a simple village boy or Lord Krishna who answered his prayer on that fateful night, was not known. The words he chanted

throughout his childhood came to his rescue in the desperate hours of his life. Sethi's failure to trace the boy echoes Som Bhaskar's failure to trace Krishna in *The Last Labyrinth*. It is Sethi's childhood faith that saved him and supported him to survive the struggle of life.

The interested reader is awakened to the realm of faith and belief after reading this short story. He is convinced that the supernatural power will intervene to protect human beings in the hour of need if they have faith. The disinterested reader is enchanted with the interference of godly power but the uninterested reader is not convinced with the black boy's identity.

“A Trip for Mr. Lele”

“A Trip for Mr. Lele” is about a commercial salesman, Mr. Lele, who is a victim of the new socio-economic concept in which the individual is exploited. Mr. Lele, the second highest paid vendor of toothpastes, was admonished by his exacting and insensitive boss for the dwindling sale of toothpastes in the market. Lele wanted to resign his job but withdrew, when he thought of his demanding wife who stood as a cultural wasteland between western emancipation and

oriental indolence like some Indian women who have so majestically claimed the neo-culture as their very own. “Among the dunes and defiles of this dazzling empire she reigns with despotism against which Mrs. Lele’s timorous protestations are nothing but so much mist before the sun” (72).

Crushed down by the practical-minded boss in the office and the demanding wife at home, Lele’s only consolation was his nine-year-old daughter. A fragile creature, club-footed, bright-eyed, pale faced, she bore on her cheeks, the hint of a withered rose. Lele’s overwhelming affection for his daughter is described thus:

. . . something akin to that nostalgia which on a summer morning in the hills he might feel for a lone flower in the crevice of a rock, knowing as we would, that before nightfall it would be trodden into dirt by herds of passing mules. She reminded him of all the beautiful and perishable things with which so much of life’s mansion is furnished. (73)

Mr. Lele tried to spend as much time as possible with his daughter because his wife was busy in the ladies’ clubs.

After the tiring office hours, he would come back straight home where his daughter awaited him. Mr. Lele found time to take her to the zoo, and to the children's films. He collected stamps and pictures and post-cards for her and never missed her birthdays.

Around one of the birthdays of his daughter, Mr. Lele was ordered by his boss to make a trip to the southern part of the country to check the sales of his toothpastes from "rattling into a trough" (70). The birthday of his sick daughter was no excuse to the young boss: "Everybody has to make compromises, Lele. That is the least that the company can expect" (74). So, Lele took leave of his daughter promising her to return before her birthday. Lele spent sleepless nights struggling to promote the complicated sale of the product. One sleepless night at a Hyderabad Hotel he began to think of the meaning of his life.

On the last day of his tour, when Lele was flying to Cochin he met a boy who was returning to his home in Quilon from his school in Ootty on vacation. Lele gathered from the sickly boy that his father owned a cashew factory where his elder brothers worked. He had a sister whom he loved very much but she had died of leukaemia the previous

year. The boy had given up racing and sailing, and wanted to do nothing. The boy reminded Lele of his own daughter and of the essentials of life from which his job had estranged him.

Lele took a new decision. Instead of going to Cochin as his boss had ordered, he returned to Delhi, to his daughter, in time for her birthday. He woke her up with kisses and greeted her, "Happy Birthday." The situation culminated in the loss of his job but he did not regret it for he believed he had gained much more:

So now Mr. Lele doesn't sell toothpaste anymore. As a matter of fact, he doesn't even have a job. All day, he stands in dusty corridors waiting for interviews, but in the evening he sits with his daughter and watches the sky that is first grey, then blue and finally the colour of the Oriole's wings. (81)

Lele's love for his daughter encouraged him to survive all the struggles. The interested reader is thrilled to perceive the victory of love over material success. He appreciates Mr. Lele for sacrificing his well-paid job to preserve the happiness of his only child. The disinterested reader is

thrilled at the abundant love Lele has for his daughter but, at the same time, he thinks that Lele should have found some other alternative than resigning his job. The uninterested reader criticizes Mr. Lele for his inordinate love for his daughter, and considers him silly for resigning his job.

“The Survivor”

The title story, “The Survivor,” is a strong criticism of the materialistic aspect of the present society. It portrays an individual’s desperate attempt to survive “that fantastic racket that passes for the modern Indian society” (96). The story revolves round the narrator protagonist, Kewal Kapoor whose strong confessional tone is striking. The absence of love and care from his family and friends made him a victim of pretensions.

Kapoor was given to lying, because he was tired of speaking the truth which none bothered to hear. This had produced in him a hatred towards everything and everybody including himself. He hated his job, his boss, the city of Bombay where he was born and brought up and which he had once loved. He hated his wife, his wife’s father, and even his own parents. He hated the constant talk of money that went

on in his house. The atmosphere of the society he lived in was so stifling that he had forgotten “how to laugh” (82). He had a high level education and had luckily started his career in America. He came back to India after five years of experience there. He started teaching in a university. Though the salary was poor, he was happy to be a teacher in the University.

Trouble started for Kapoor when his nagging wife suddenly discovered that their house was not big enough. Not happy with a three-bedroom house, she longed for a five-bedroom one. His father-in-law, a retired ICS, executed his influence and got Kewal fixed up as a public relations officer in the drugs company of his friend. The job was tiring because he had to answer complaints from people, day after day: “I had complaints for breakfast and complaints for lunch and I took complaints home to bed. Take a job like mine if you want to know how grouchy people really are” (84).

Kapoor’s peace of mind was shattered after he left the university job. He searched for things that would give him entertainment, happiness and peace. He began telling lies to his wife, and started listening to film songs. But it hindered his work and so after a brief struggle with the conscience, he

began to destroy the mails. He took to womanizing to seek relief from the monotony of his life and his job. But he was caught by his wife, and questioned by his father-in-law for not being fair to his daughter. Kapoor unhesitatingly answered: "If I may say so, Sir, I can't stand your daughter" (88). That was the moment that snatched away everything from his life - his job, his wife, his daughter and his money in the bank which he had kept in a joint account with his wife. His immediate reaction was the sense of a wreck: "My soul sets sail towards terrible shipwrecks" (90).

Driven out of the house and deprived of everything, Kapoor landed up in a cheap South Indian hotel where he became friendly with a person named Penalty Rao. The man was so named because he had once played in a football team and specialized in penalty corners. Penalty Rao was "a thief, a smuggler, a pickpocket, a politician, a pimp and God knows what else" (93). The three - Kapoor, Rao and his friend, a taxi-driver named Ghorpad - formed a racket and decided to loot the house of Kapoor's father-in-law.

Kapoor pretended that he wanted to see his daughter. On the night of Diwali, when a party was in progress, he and his friends sneaked into the house, their faces covered in

masks. As Kapoor went to see his daughter who was playing alone with her friend upstairs, Penalty Rao and Ghorpade robbed many precious items from the house. Later, they drove to the sea-beach and uttered prayers to God for helping them to survive that night. Kapoor survived the struggles of life just as he survived that night. His prayer was a microcosm of the prayers of Indians in the modern society:

I am a survivor, gentleman, of card parties, of wedding receptions, five-year plans; of nosy neighbours, conjugal bliss, well-meaning friends and bloody-minded bosses. I am a survivor of life insurance schemes, stock exchanges and family planning techniques. In brief, gentlemen, I am a survivor of that fantastic racket that passes for the MODERN INDIAN SOCIETY. I am a survivor of mendacious mothers and relentless fathers of two-penny politicians, of lawyers and doctors. Above all, I am a survivor of that greatest disaster of them all: "THE MODERN INDIAN WOMAN".

(95-96)

The interested reader waits for the moment when Mr. Kapoor would realize his mistakes. He appreciates Kapoor to gather

courage to rob the money that originally belongs to him. The disinterested reader does not believe that Kapoor has survived all his struggles because he had to forsake his family. The uninterested reader finds fault with Kapoor's pretensions from the beginning.

“Home Coming”

“Home Coming” narrates the experience of a military officer coming back home after a long period of time. In the battlefield he had witnessed the agony of human beings which was still fresh in his memory. The loss of some of his fellow officers was so painful that he struggled to relate it to the people back home. Son of a successful businessman, he went to the war with all the romantic illusion regarding heroism. His mother was now keen on his marriage but the idea of marriage had become meaningless to him. He longed to share the experiences of the war with someone, but everyone around and including the members of his family were so busy that they had no time to listen to him. Even his sister had become a stranger to him.

The survivor of the war was haunted by many scenes: the nightmarish experience of the gruesome deaths of his

fellow soldiers; the neck to neck fight in the dark trenches with the enemies; the memory of a school building full of girls that had been the brothel for a battalion; and a deserted village where he found “a child stuck on a bayonet in front of every hut” (102). Whenever he was alone, these scenes kept “switching about his head” (104). He could not sleep in the nights thinking about these sights. Meanwhile, life outside, with the parties and movies and dancing went on as usual. The story assumes a wider significance because the soldiers who have been through traumatic experiences find themselves alienated from the society. Back home such soldiers need to fight with the society to survive the struggles of their minds.

The interested reader is startled at the inhuman condition of the soldier. He longs to sit with him and share his experiences in the war front. The disinterested reader understands the feelings of the soldier but at the same time he hopes to advise him not to expect anything more from the busy world around. The uninterested reader deals with the matter in a practical way and warns the soldier to be more realistic and show a soldier's strength.

“The Intruder in the Discotheque”

“The Intruder in the Discotheque” is the story of Shambu who longed hopelessly for youth and love in his old age. Shambu’s friend Vishwa, older and wiser than Shambu, spent his time reading and praying. By reading, he accumulated knowledge and through prayers he acquired the strength to face old age. On the other hand, Shambu indulged in all sorts of “youth” activities and therefore feared old age and death. He longed to be young again in order to keep up the thrill of life. Thinking that the company of young men and women and the touch of female flesh would help him to recapture his lost youthfulness, he regularly visited the discotheques of the city: “To that narrow, mirrored hall, he was certain, death could have no entrance” (106).

In one such discotheque he fell in love with a young girl who appeared to him to be an ‘apsara’. The girl ignited his passion and once again he started to have a dream. Finding it unbearable, he disclosed his dream to Vishwa who in turn advised him to bridle his unseemly desire. His dream could not be possible, Vishwa told him, because to realize it, Shambhu must be made young once again, which was “neither easy nor proper to do” (107). His desire was so strong that

he was taken to a merchant of dreams who agreed to restore Shambhu's youth on the condition that he would not touch the girl. He warned Shambhu: "Touch her and my magic will vanish. I am, after all, a seller of dreams. And none, remember, none has touched his dreams" (109). Grudgingly Shambhu agreed to the condition. Night after night, the old-young man danced with the girl and enjoyed himself thoroughly. But he did not touch her. Thus he forgot his age and his sorrow and the fear of inevitable death.

One night, Shambhu revealed the secret of his borrowed youth to the girl and feverishly appealed to her to share the burden of his age. As the girl jumped in panic and attempted to escape, he cried hysterically, and forgetting the caution of the magic, clasped her wrist. The magic spell broke. When the youth came forward to help the screaming girl, they found Shambhu dead with all the ugliness of his withered body exposed. The youth formed a ring around the dead body and looked in disgust at the intruder. Though Shambhu struggled to survive his youth unnecessarily, finally the course of nature and reality survived.

The interested reader enjoys seeing the old man and his odd desire to retain his youth. He considers it an awful

absurdity. The interested reader also agrees that the outcome of the frivolous attempt is justified. The disinterested reader criticizes the old man for being silly and rejoices in his doom. The uninterested reader too has no sympathy for the old man even as he falls down and dies finally.

The Servant

The short story "The Servant" is in the form of a criminal case diary, providing information gathered from various sources, about a servant who is accused of an attempt to rape the wife of his master and drive her to death.

A search into the servant's past life throws light on his neglected childhood, the humiliating jobs he was forced to do and the carefree life he had had so far. Nobody talked to him about the difference between right and wrong. He lived a life full of darkness. Finally when he took up the role of a servant, he had to go through a lot of humiliating experiences. He was in a society where servants were treated not as human beings possessing sensitive minds but merely as servants, insensitive menial labourers. Joshi criticizes the role of the masters who are partly responsible for the thoughtless actions of the servants. The servant in the story struggled to

survive but his untrained mind provoked him to seek the wrong path for survival.

The interested reader does not think that the crimes are momentary. But, at the same time he is not happy with the way modern man treats those who serve him. He firmly supports the author for his courage to reveal the true face of the society. The disinterested reader criticizes the servant for his ungrateful action but, at the same time, the outlook of the upper class also is commented upon. The uninterested reader considers the incident just as another episode of the every day crimes.

“The One American from Our Village”

“The One American from Our Village” is the story of Dr. Khanna who attained immense success in life but, in the process selfishly and conveniently forgot those who had contributed to it. Kundan Lal gave his son a good education in order to assist him attain success. His son became Dr. Khanna, “the most outstanding immigrant physicist at the university of Wisconsin” (55).

When Dr. Khanna was forty and at the peak of fame, he made a trip to India, his homeland, which he had left

fifteen years ago, with his American wife and their two sons. The four-week trip appeared a success by all standards. He met the President and the Prime Minister, inaugurated functions and delivered speeches at well-attended seminars. Everything went well for Dr. Khanna, until finally, he met an old man in the college of his home-town, where he came to deliver a talk. The old man named Radhey Mohan introduced himself as a seller of court-stamp and as a life-long friend of Dr. Khanna's father. The shabbily dressed man compelled Dr. Khanna to listen to him. His story and the manner in which he told it, reminded Dr. Khanna of his father and made him feel uncomfortable. But he could not help listening to this disquieting tale. The haunting quality of the story and Radhey Mohan's passion captured Dr. Khanna's attention.

Radhey Mohan narrated the life story of Dr. Khanna's father, Kundan Lal. He and Khanna's father were close friends from their childhood. They were born in the same village and attended the same school. Both had experienced poverty and privation. Kundal Lal was a brilliant student and stood third in the matriculation examination. Radhey did not pass but he wrote his name and his friend's name on a desk in their classroom. Kundal Lal left the village for higher studies and

did not return from there before his retirement from service. After his retirement he came back a proud man because his daughter had been married and his son had attained international repute: "He said you were the only American from our village. I asked him once what was so great about being the only American from our village. He said it was an honour" (57).

Kundan Lal was expecting a ticket from America. That was his only dream, and not having it shattered his hopes. Radhey Mohan then asked Dr. Khanna: "May be you don't have villages like ours in America but you must try to understand what it meant after the whole village knew you were going to send him a ticket. Did you send him a ticket?" (58). The question took Dr. Khanna by surprise. He looked confused, and said: "I could not, I did not" (58). He was greatly discomfited when the seller of court-stamp said: "What did we care for your achievements; what you did and what you did not do?" (57). Radhey Mohan thus made Dr. Khanna conscious of the hollowness of his so called success.

Radhey continued his story and told him further that his son's negligence shattered Khanna's father and he withdrew himself from the village and became very amiable with the

Gods. He started visiting temples every morning and evening. He had no money. He had looked for financial assistance from his son which never came. He became quiet and stopped talking about his son. When he fell ill, his daughter came to nurse him. Radhey Mohan, at his friend's request, also sent a telegram to Dr. Khanna, but he did not come. He just sent an ordinary letter saying that he was busy with conferences. A few days before his death, Kundan Lal requested Radhey to take him to the school in the town because he wanted to see the desk in the classroom on which their names were carved. The journey was a re-enactment of his childhood and he wanted to make sure that nothing had changed. The next day he died. As he spoke Radhey Mohan's tone was not harsh. He did not even look at Dr. Khanna. Still he had the irrational feeling that the old man was going to slap him: "I was very sorry to hear of his death" he said calmly (60).

Dr. Khanna returned to America but was no longer the same man. He sensed that something was terribly wrong with him: "To a psychiatrist Dr. Khanna has confided that he has periods of great burning in his feet." He had further indicated that he was cursed by his father, perhaps: "He has generally come to be known as the man who does nothing but stare at

his feet” (60). Dr. Khanna’s father had been struggling greatly to survive the struggles of his life and later his son was struggling for the help he never cared to render.

The interested reader appreciates Radhey Mohan for acting as an eye-opener to Dr. Khanna. The disinterested reader exults over Khanna’s change but knows that it is too late for him to realize his mistakes. The uninterested reader blames Dr. Khanna for neglecting his helpless father.

“Kanyakumari”

The narrator’s failure to see the sunrise at Kanyakumari is the inspiration behind the story “Kanyakumari.” Joshi is led to surmise that in India the sun has yet to rise:

Just then the sirens went off. I turned sharply to the east but there was no sign of the sun. A cloud hung on the horizon except that it was not a cloud. Nor was it a fog or mist. It was just a haze, a curtain through which you could not see. I thought may be I was in the wrong place. So, I ran up along the rock to the back of the temple. But there was no sun there either. Just the grey haze, a blanket. You could see nothing, not even a glow. (217)

Even from the Vivekananda rock at Kanyakumari, the narrator failed to witness the sunrise and he compared this experience with the unemployment, violent politics and corruption rampant in India:

One early dawn in March, I swam off Kanyakumari just as the great Swami had done back in 1892. The sea was turbulent and shark-infested as it had been for the Swami . . . So I crossed the turbulent, shark-infested waters and took position and began my wait for the sunrise and I looked back at the great continent of India which is also known as Bharat. (211)

At the end of his all-India tour, the protagonist, an unemployed engineer, came to Kanyakumari to see the sunrise. He found young men like him waiting for the sunrise and, perhaps, looking for God. But he could not join them because he had come to see the sunrise and not God. Besides, he was tempted to ask: "Where was God?" (213). He had no faith, although his friend Ayappan, told him that the hope of seeing the sunrise over Kanyakumari was also a kind of faith. He was confused, and he wondered why he had ever come to the place:

Some people had faith and some people did not have faith. And both were having trouble because those who had faith were often let down and those who did not have faith got mixed up. Faith was like the angle at which you set your telescope if you wanted to see a star. If you didn't know the angle you could not see the star. (214)

When the time of the sunrise passed, the siren went off. Still the eastern horizon remained enveloped by a haze giving no sign of the sun, not even a glow. Frustrated, he returned to the mainland, not by swimming like the Swami as he had planned, but by a boat. Something had disturbed him although he could not put his finger on it. Standing on the deck, in the posture of Vivekananda, with his arms crossed over his bare chest, he could decipher that there was no hope:

There was no sign of the sun. . . . There was a haze all over. You couldn't see very far because the sun had yet to rise. . . . And it was true you could set up sirens and write things in books any way you wanted. They didn't mean very much. Books and sirens didn't make the sunrise. (217-18)

The hero of this short story symbolizes the whole youth of the country who fail to put faith in God. They are waiting in the cold dawn, for the sun to rise and thus to survive all their struggles in life.

The interested reader views the protagonist with wonder when he attempts to observe the sun rise. He also feels disappointed along with the protagonist not to see the sunrise. On the other hand, the disinterested reader is not surprised at the protagonist's failure to see the sunrise. The uninterested reader criticizes the writer for making much ado about not seeing the sunrise because he knows that every action of nature cannot be interpreted in terms of human life and aspirations.

“The wide world and me. Me and the wide world. But how can one separate the two. The wide world took me in its wake, overwhelmed me, smothered me. As simple as that.”

Arun Joshi

CONCLUSION

Bindu Ann Philip “The Routes of the Rootless: A Study of the Novels and Short Stories of Arun Joshi” Thesis. Department of English, Vimala College Thrissur , University of Calicut, 2007

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

The Routes

One of the most persuasive contemporary Indian novelists in Indo- Anglian Literature, Joshi is noted for his concern for fellow human beings, and for his profound insights in to human nature. His novels probe deep into the dark and innermost recesses of the human mind and illuminate the hidden corners of the physical and mental make-up of the characters. His characters, most of whom are contemporary Indians, indulge in a quest for the essence of life. In search of the quintessence of human living, the novelist focuses not simply on man but on his identity. As a novelist exposing the human predicament, Joshi visualizes the inner crisis of the modern man and finds out that the most besetting problem that man faces today is the problem of rootlessness. This problem is aggravated by technological advancements, the economic situations and the inhuman demands of the society. The problem is so pervasive that it threatens to eat into every sphere of human activity. As a result, man fails to discern the very purpose behind life, and the relevance of his existence in a hostile world.

Joshi, the novelist, follows the tradition of Kafka, Camus, Sartre and Saul Bellow. Differing in style from Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Kamala Markandaya and so on, Joshi joins his heroes in searching for their lost self. The individual gets trapped in the world of objects and thereby lose his subjectivity. Later, aware of what he has lost, he experiences a dehumanization mixed with despair and anxiety. The individual is also engaged in a rat-race and is estranged not only from his fellowmen but also from his inner self. He has nothing to fall back upon in the moments of crisis. He is shocked to find that he is no longer the master of his destiny and that there are forces which threaten to hinder his life and all its joys and hopes. The pervading sense of rootlessness is thus the most dominant feature of the human condition in the contemporary scene. No emotional problem is more alarming today, than the sense of rootlessness. The conditions in India, though not so frightening as in the Western world, have begun to take a dismal turn. Despite the differences in their approach, Joshi's heroes are all engaged in the search for the meaning of life. They follow several routes: the route from indifference to involvement, the route from sophistication to simplicity, the

route from crime to confession, the route from the labyrinth to the light, the route from fantasy to fact and the route from the struggle to the survival.

The Foreigner, Joshi's maiden novel, portrays some of the possible routes of the rootless especially the path from indifference to involvement. Cut-off from his cultural and emotional attachments, Sindi Oberoi of *The Foreigner* finds himself in the predicament of a foreigner wherever he goes. He drifts from one end of the globe to the other in search of peace and emotional stability. He cannot reach out to the world for fear of pain and he seeks refuge in the thought of detachment, which he misconstrues as inaction and withdrawal from life. But his detachment or indifference turns into a kind of delusion because he cannot free himself from self-engrossment. His selfish desires make him drift from crisis to crisis; sucking on its way the lives of two innocent persons he loves most, Babu and June. The tragedy shakes Oberoi out of his self-complacency and reorients his life. Through sincere self-examination he learns that true detachment does not mean inaction and withdrawal from life. On the other hand, it is proper action without desire for its fruit. He also

understands that involvement with the world around is the real attitude to life and living.

The response of the readers to *The Stranger* varies from person to person, group to group. The interested reader is silently surprised as he travels with Meursault through the transitional stages of his life. The reader's interest helps him to experience the pain of Meursault's indifference and detachment especially with regard to Marie. The reader's heart also beats as fast as Meursault's when he sees Marie dead in the end. The reader moves swiftly to the scene with the same pace and momentum to confront Meursault and comfort him in his dramatic sense of indifference. The disinterested reader, no doubt, sweeps along the ups and downs of Meursault's life and stands still, trying to winnow the right and the wrong in his actions. The impartiality in the reader supports Meursault to an extent, taking into consideration his rootless past but he is slightly confused at Meursault's remorseless action of leaving Marie just for the cause of detachment. The uninterested reader, on the other hand, responds in a negative manner, criticizing Meursault for his cruel and inhumane actions. The indifference in the reader makes him ignore Meursault's past and his resultant character and the consequent actions. The

principle of detachment is also outside the purview of the uninterested reader because he has no interest in Oberoi and therefore no feelings for his thought-content.

The route from sophistication to simplicity is also shown in *The Foreigner* in which Oberoi finds America, “a place for well-fed automations rubbing about in automatic cars” (87). He notices the hypocrisy and fabrication of the modern society in America and he gets boggled and totally uncomfortable with his life in the mechanized world. It is a place where “strangers parted on the doorsteps, promising to meet again” (26). His busy, meaningless and sophisticated life makes him yearn for the primitive land. With the sudden death of June and Babu, Oberoi is forced to leave that fast society behind. He comes to India and embraces a peaceful life in Khemka’s group of industry. Though work-wise Oberoi does not find any difference between the two countries, he notices the mental peace in the lives of the factory workers. As he decides to be one among them to fight for their rights, he faces his own much sought-after being. Thus he enjoys living and working for the betterment of others.

Obviously he transforms his life into a successful existence. The interested reader fully understands Oberoi and

rejoices with him for forsaking the sophisticated norms in America and for accepting the simplicity of his land. If Oberoi is able to delve into his roots, the greatest dream of a foreigner is fulfilled. On the other hand, the disinterested reader is not so eager about Oberoi's return. In fact he is unconcerned about Oberoi's choice because he believes it is the person and not the place that matters in life. On the contrary, the uninterested reader accuses Oberoi for preferring the primitive to the sophisticated.

The path from crime to confession in the life of Oberoi is clearly depicted in the novel. Oberoi who wilfully whirled in worldly pleasures, including illegal sexual relationships with Anna and Kathy, was haunted by a call within. Though he got more involved in worldly pleasures after his encounter with June, his intensely passionate affair with her, breaks off all the principles he had held up, until then: "Sindi lives in a strange world of intense pleasure" (82). The relationship between June and Babu ends in a tragedy. An episode in which he contemplates on a relationship with a Catholic priest is also mentioned. Yet the novel concludes on the note that when Oberoi stands as a fortress for the factory workers, his self-realization paves the way for his glory.

The interested reader is pleased with Oberoi's route from sin to confession, and his decision to turn to the religious door. The disinterested reader is surprised at Oberoi's turning point and wonders whether he would succeed in living a life with the gates of his lurid life completely closed. The uninterested reader does not find any fancy in Oberoi shunning himself from the public gaze. He believes that Oberoi should maintain a balance between worldly pleasures and spiritual purification.

The Foreigner also traces the route from the labyrinth to the light. Oberoi's wild experiences of life drag him to the realization of truth. The novel describes his childhood that leads to his wanton desires in the later stages of his life. The darkness of his life is more darkened by the contemplation of suicide. His sadness is noticed by Sheila who says: "You are the saddest man I have ever known" (140). Nevertheless, the novel ends with a hope that it will not be long before Oberoi will find a loving wife in Babu's sister, Sheila. Clear indications are given of a growing mutual tenderness that promises a closer relationship.

The interested reader is startled at Oberoi's route through labyrinthine paths. But finally he is relieved when

Oberoi attains self-knowledge and the light of truth. The disinterested reader is not sure whether he should justify Oberoi or not, for he is not convinced about Oberoi's detachment or indifference. The uninterested reader, on the other hand, does not agree with the opinion that Oberoi has ever achieved anything in his life.

The route from fantasy to fact is also delineated in *The Foreigner*. Oberoi is a true hero of the fantasy world with his belief in the principle of indifference. June, Sheila and Babu remind him that his concept of detachment is only a fantasy. It is his fantasy that shatters the lives of June and Babu. Oberoi realizes the drastic effect of his fantasy and decides to face the facts of life. Only through Muthu's words, "Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved" Oberoi gets down to the world of reality in order to serve his fellow beings (188).

The response of the readers to the route from fantasy to reality is varied. The interested reader observes closely Oberoi's fanciful thoughts and deeds and perceives the beauty of the turning point in Oberoi's life, wherein he begins to assess life through a realistic perspective. The disinterested reader watches Oberoi's detachment and then his attachment to

June, but he does not agree to the story-ending where things go wrong for Oberoi. According to the uninterested reader, Oberoi is not capable of starting a new life with Sheila. He is also not ready to accept the fact that Oberoi is capable of living outside the world of fantasy and accepting the facts of life.

Joshi's second novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* traces the route from sophistication to simplicity and several other routes of the rootless character, Billy Biswas. Biswas's search for the primitive life is the result of his detachment from the sophisticated society. This is Joshi's vision of man's existence as Hari Mohan Prasad observes in his article, "The Crisis of Consciousness: *The Last Labyrinth*:"

Bhaskar's dilemma lies deep down in his own self and consciousness. It is not the outer world, the objective reality but the world within, the subjective reality which is essentially the fountain-spring of despair and anxiety. This is a metaphysical awareness of human loneliness, of human inadequacy, of human unfulfilment

Bhaskar's dilemma has crystallized the sociological, psychological and metaphysical dimensions of

human existence into Joshi's unique vision of modern man's predicament. (Dhawan 239)

Biswas, who does not find any enjoyment in his social circle, is greatly attracted towards the magic of the primitive. Like Oberoi, he is in search for a human world of emotional fullness - a world of meaningful relatedness. Aware of the deeper layers of his personality Biswas is totally alienated from the superficial reality of life. Sophisticated and educated in the U.S., he renounces his past, his family and the everyday world, and goes in search of his roots in a very hostile atmosphere. For not conforming to the norms of the urban civilization and for daring to step out of its stifling confines, he pays a heavy price. The readers are made to believe that the strange case of Billy Biswas has been disposed of in the only manner in which a humdrum society knows how to dispose of its rebels, its seers, and its lovers. Thus from sophisticated norms he finds solace in simplistic living.

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is a fascinating novel to an interested reader, who experiences Biswas's thrill of living an exciting high-level life. The interested reader also shares Biswas's bitterness and understands that he is suffocated by

the sophistication of the society and believes that it is high time he accepted the simplicity of a primitive life. The disinterested reader raises several questions of significance for he does not agree with the idea that going to the forest is the only way to lead a simple life. Being impartial he wonders how Biswas could be relaxed and peaceful when denied of all the familiar luxuries of life. Meanwhile, the uninterested reader is shocked because he considers Biswas descending to the level of a primitive, and is unable to accept such an action from the son of a High Court judge, who has a doctorate to his credit and the honour of a civilized life. An uninterested reader also blames Biswas for his instant and unmeditative decision of moving into a jungle.

The route from indifference to involvement is also portrayed in the novel. America was, for Biswas, too civilized a place. The first glimpse of Biswas's indifference towards everything phoney, materialistic and superfluous begins in America. He craves for a simplistic way of living, and realizes the ultimate truth that he can be happy only in the wilderness. And, that is the revelation of his identity too. His life is thus a journey from the world of indifference to the world of involvement. Only when he accepts the primitive

world he finds himself at home. Romi's surprise at Biswas's experience is seen in his observation: "I realized that for the first time I was face to face with Billy's world. Here was the jungle that had wrought in him such a magical change" (159). The interested reader of the novel justifies Biswas for detaching himself from the sophisticated world and for embracing the solace of the primitive. The disinterested reader is unable to decide whether Biswas has taken the right step, whereas, the uninterested reader resentfully waits at the gateway, criticizing him for his indifference to the successful world and his involvement with the primitive.

The spiritual decay of the westernized Indian society, and the route from crime to confession is also the case of Biswas. His problem is the authentic problem of a perceptive young man who had lost his spiritual anchorage. The novel clearly explains the triviality of modern man's pursuit for money, his love of romance and other fleeting pleasures of life. Biswas, a misfit in civilized America, becomes conscious of his "itching to be back" in India (27). His 'itching' is symptomatic of his craving for deeper things in life. He longs to move away from worldly pleasures to the religious door. After undergoing the regenerative process himself, Biswas puts

on a new role, that of a healer and a priest who cures dying children and helps the primitive people with their worldly problems.

The interested reader admires Biswas for his escape to the simplicity of the primitive world, for he believes that the retreat is ideal, though unbelievable. Moreover the interested reader is curious about the confessional part of the novel. The disinterested reader is not impressed by the primitive world, but he is tempted to suggest to Biswas that it is possible to find out better means of living than just simply plunging into the primitive way of life. On the contrary, the uninterested reader opposes the simplistic kind of living because he knows that it is not the only way of attaining self-realization.

The route from the labyrinth to the light is also portrayed in the novel. Biswas is entangled in a labyrinth from which he hopes to move towards light. It is shocking to notice how Biswas, a student of New York University, belonging to the anglicized ruling class of India, his father being a Supreme Court Judge, deserts his family and friends to live in the light of lawless love, in accordance with nature's natural course. The interested reader is delighted at

Biswas for coming out of his labyrinth of life and entering the world of light. As far as the disinterested reader is concerned, Biswas's route to primitiveness is incredible. Nevertheless he supports him for his search for self-realization. To the uninterested reader, Biswas's desire for happiness in the primitive world is an unacceptable route. He wonders how Biswas would ever find the light of life.

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas also shows the path from fantasy to facts. Biswas, a young man, full of vigour and enthusiasm, lives in a world of fantasy. His fantasy-world exists in the primitive wilderness. He finds happiness in the arms of Bilasia, a primitive beauty. Later on when confronted with Romi, he immerses himself in the primitive world and is treated like a 'seer.' He begins to fantasize that he has some supernatural powers. Finally, he is forced to believe the sad fact of reality through his death. His transformation from the world of fantasy to reality is appreciated by the interested reader. The disinterested reader keeps track of the happenings in Biswas's life on the rungs of the ladder of success. But he does not accept his journey to the primitive world because he (the disinterested reader) does not believe that it is the only world of reality. The uninterested reader criticizes the novelist

for the sudden twist in the character of Biswas from ‘a creature of fantasy’ to a falsely realistic being.

The Apprentice portrays Rathor's route from crime to confession. The novel, a confessional monologue, shows a contemporary man drifting about in a confused society without a purpose. Belonging to an impoverished middle-class family, the protagonist hopes to find a route in this world. His rootlessness is intensified by his awareness that he is the child of a double inheritance. While his father was patriotic and courageous, his mother was endowed with worldly wisdom. Torn apart by these two conflicting philosophies of life, Rathor is petrified and frozen. The torture of living in a muddle confuses him all the more and he fails to differentiate between right and wrong. He tries to restore his mental peace by undergoing the most difficult act in the world - wiping the shoes of the devotees outside the temple, every morning on his way to the office. And that is the path he selected for repentance, the route from crime to confession.

The readers' response to the routes with regard to the theme of crime and confession is varied and, of course, significant. The interested reader of *The Apprentice* sympathizes with Rathor for his self-punishment and confession. The

pathetic plight of Rathor is convincing to the interested reader and when Rathor turns to self-purification, the interested reader is overwhelmed with joy and tends to give him a pat on his back. It is Rathor's capacity to laugh at the past that wins the interested-reader's heart. On the other hand, the disinterested reader does not justify Rathor for his past actions. He criticizes him for bribing his countrymen and cheating his own country, more so, because he is the son of a patriot. All the same, he supports him for the firm steps he has taken for the purification of his soul. The uninterested reader blames Rathor for the shameless past and declares harshly that he does not deserve any sympathy. The uninterested reader even goes further ahead to suggest that Rathor could have been more wise and shrewd, and tried to find out the truth behind the deal.

The Apprentice delineates other routes too, for example, the route from indifference to involvement. Rathor gets involved in all corrupt activities and then detaches himself from everything around him. As he had committed the crime of taking bribes for clearing military equipments, he is troubled to the core. Later he comprehends that the major hands in this deed were not his, but those of the officers at

the higher level. This apprehension coaxes him to keep himself detached from the society around “One day they refused my tea. It was a considerable snub as such things go, but to my surprise, I discovered that it made no difference to me” (40). He is alone and robbed of all familiar ties and is faced with the emptiness and darkness of his guilt-tormented soul. Rathor went through terrible days and nights with, “no occurrence, no conversation, no visit of either friend or foe, no sleep, in spite of the sleeping pills that our good doctor gave me, no relief, no respite from the hands that pulled me steadily down towards those caverns where, I felt certain, the Brigadier had gone” (125). That’s how, finally he turned to absolute involvement in spiritual purgation by sitting at the entrance of a temple to wipe the shoes of the congregation.

Rathor is appreciated by the interested reader for being detached from the meaningless world of business concerns, and for waiting at the sacred steps of the temple as a penance. Though the disinterested reader is able to digest the height of Rathor’s confession and repentance to an extent, his response is a discreet silence. The uninterested reader, on the other hand, opposes this mentality and reacts harshly.

The route from sophisticated norms to simplistic living is also found in the life of Rathor. Familiar with a high-level living, Rathor gets opportunities to dive deep into the snazzy snares of the modern society. He eventually perceives the hollowness of life and through a sincere confession turns to the primitive idea of doing humble jobs for the sake of self-purification. Notwithstanding his cowardice and his mother's contempt for idealism, Rathor hopes to climb the ladder of success. He musters courage to accept a bribe, the aftermath of which finally urges him to accept a primitive way of life.

The interested reader of *The Apprentice* gladly watches Rathor on the steps of the temple polishing shoes, free of all the troubles and tribulations of life. The disinterested reader partially agrees with the action and partially wonders whether such a repentant step is possible for a man of Rathor's background. The uninterested reader is not convinced that a person like Rathor can stoop to shine shoes at the doorstep of a temple. But he swallows the statements as they are.

The Apprentice shows how Ratan Rathor yields completely to the corrupt labyrinth of the modern society and thrives in it temporarily. His dual parentage is perhaps a cause for his degeneration. When he understands that the bribe he receives

for clearing the war materials leads to the Brigadier's death, he becomes a cynic. However, his confession helps him attain light.

The route of Ratan Rathor is welcomed by the interested reader who understands and appreciates his willingness to leave behind all his evil desires. The disinterested reader wonders how Rathor could have taken such a deviation from a point of utter self-degradation to a point of light. The uninterested reader is shocked at Rathor's bold step but is cynical about its possibility.

Rathor also goes through the path of reality away from fantasy. He had conquered everything in life- a good career, a beautiful and educated wife and covetable reputation. He lived a life of fanciful ideas, also involving crime. Later when he realizes the consequences of his crime, and understands the truth that his higher officers were the real culprits, he faces a harsh reality. The realization, that he was living in a world of fantasy, leads him to the life of penance at the entrance of the temple.

The interested reader of *The Apprentice* responds positively to the transformation of Rathor from a world of imagination to facts. Rathor builds up his own world of

fanciful ideas. But finally when he makes recompense for his sin, the interested reader is with him, nodding his head in approval. The disinterested reader keeps himself on a par with Rathor in all his endeavours but does not agree with him finally when he decides to go down to the level of a shoeshiner. The uninterested reader sternly opposes the ultimate change in Rathor because he considers the act of shoe-polishing as a strange idea, far removed from reality.

The Last Labyrinth gives a picturesque description of Som Bhaskar's route from the labyrinth of love to the light of love. Driven by several kinds of undefined hunger, in spite of a wife of accepted standards and two children, Bhaskar goes in search of his 'wants.' The strident song of his life is "I want, I want, I want" (11). Attracted by Anuradha, he indulges in extra-marital sexual pleasures with her, and yet his desires have no end. Towards the end of the novel he is desperate and decides to serve in the temple every evening, and thus attain the light of love.

The reader's response to the routes from the labyrinth to the light is varied. The interested reader of *The Last Labyrinth* is influenced by Bhaskar's transformation from the labyrinth of unlawful love to the light of love. Though

Bhaskar satisfies his sexual desires with Anuradha, he finally attains the gift of realization. The disinterested reader supports Bhaskar in his ambition for progress, but at the same time, opposes his infatuation for Anuradha. The uninterested reader thoroughly protests against his involvement with her and firmly believes that it is his behaviour that causes the tragedy of his life. Moreover, the uninterested reader is not sure of the fact that Bhaskar has attained the light of love.

The Last Labyrinth also throws light on Bhaskar's path from indifference to involvement. Bhaskar is presented as a successful man, who at the peak of his attainments becomes totally dejected and indifferent, and estranges himself from the outside world. His meeting with Anuradha turns his life into a marathon search for grabbing material pleasures. As Joshi notes, Bhaskar is against his will drawn helplessly into "the labyrinth of [this] mysterious world" (69). His insane pursuit of Anuradha is a torture, like his bizarre journey to the hills in search of the missing shares of Aftab's company. The constant reasoning that goes on in his head suggests another labyrinth: "This, then, was a labyrinth, too, this going forward and backward and sideways of the mind" (53). He experiences a sort of total indifference with regard to his wife

and son as he gets involved in Anuradha's labyrinth of love. Later on, her indifference to him, leads to his involvement in a religious pursuit.

The interested reader of *The Last Labyrinth* understands the cause of Bhaskar's detachment and is willing to sympathize with his estrangement from his wife, family and business in order to pursue the ravishing beauty, Anuradha. At the same time, the interested reader is aware that Anuradha is a difficult hurdle in the hurdle race of life that is, the evolution of life. The disinterested reader supports him for his natural inclination, but at the same time, criticizes his unnatural involvement with her. The uninterested reader is unkind and stands totally against the unscrupulous actions of being indifferent to one's wife for a sheer infatuation.

The Last Labyrinth portrays the route from sophisticated norms to the simplistic. Bhaskar's path from the modern society to the light of a primitive mountain God is incredible because he had all that a modern man wishes for- an educated and a trustworthy wife, an expanding business empire, and a peaceful living. But Bhaskar was not satisfied. He suffered from a loss of identity in the society he lived in. Surprisingly, he seeks consolation in the company of

Anuradha, a primitive beauty. Consequently, he rebuffs his responsibilities towards his family and business and concentrates on Anuradha. He does not care for any religious sermons and even becomes resentful of Anuradha's mention of the 'God in the Mountain.' Being a worshipper of the modern world, he denounces what he calls the primitive concepts. Towards the end of the novel, when Anuradha forsakes him he is ready to search for the sedating splendour of the God in the mountain. This act of turning to God is taken as an act of repentance, a primitive concept of atonement for sin. "Deep inside my heart, I knew that I was a leper and that I needed a cure" (126). At last, the light of 'Moksha' dawns upon Bhaskar as though the universe has come out of the void. He begins to undergo a path of renunciation because of guilt.

The interested reader is conscious of Bhaskar's change and considers him a credible character. On the other hand, the disinterested reader approves of his change of interest from the glamorous world but disapproves of his infatuation for Anuradha. The uninterested reader protests against the relationship as a shameful one. He also disbelieves Bhaskar's final action.

The Last Labyrinth depicts the route from crime to confession. Bhaskar's obsession with Anuradha is one of illegal love, a love that does not liberate him and sublimate his desires. The novelist portrays the relationship as criminal because he goes through a disorientation of self.

His intense passion for Anuradha makes him shuttle between Bombay and Benaras. Even when he ignores the temptation, a dream about her drags him back to the labyrinth of her carnal love. Finally his relationship with Gargi takes him to the door of religion thus effecting the transition from crime to confession.

The interested reader of *The Last Labyrinth* is awestruck by the passionate life of Bhaskar as he traverses along the rare realms of love and satiety. The disinterested reader observes the movements of Bhaskar with interest but the thought of his crime and the total outcome of his passion are shocking to him. The uninterested reader points his finger at Bhaskar's thoughtless actions and is pleased with the fate meted out to him.

The Last Labyrinth also depicts Bhaskar's world of fantasy revolving round Anuradha. Another aspect of his fantasy-world is Aftab's shares. Beguiled by these powers of

fantasy, he forgets his wife, son and dear ones. It is Anuradha's disappearance that opens his eyes to the world of reality, and he decides to search for God, who, according to her, lives in the mountains.

The interested reader of *The Last Labyrinth* is tickled by Bhaskar's fancy for Anuradha. Bhaskar's passion had driven him so crazy that he is pitied by the interested reader. The disinterested reader blames Bhaskar for the infatuation and is not willing to accept the fact that Anuradha can instil the idea of God in him. The uninterested reader does not believe in Anuradha's disappearance, thus breaking the fantasy-shell. Reality dawns on Bhaskar but not on the uninterested reader.

The City and the River traces the route from fantasy to fact from the point of view of public and political issues. There is a juxtaposition of fantasy and fact in the novel, presented through various episodes. The tale repeated by the Great Yogeshwara to educate his disciple, the Nameless-one, who spent thirty years under his master, is itself a fantasy. Another example is the dream of the Grand Master. The whole episode of tyranny and cruelty is aroused by a fantasy-dream where the Grand Master sees himself as the king of the city, but surrounded by boatmen ready to attack him. The

Grand Master lives in a world of fantasy and therefore he does not bother to familiarize himself with the people. He is filled with contempt for the boatmen and is disgusted at their rootlessness. The products of his 'fantasy' are 'the Era of Ultimate Greatness' and 'The Triple Ways.' The Grand Master becomes totally devastated as he watches the city pulled down to nothingness. The story ends with the conviction that God is the real leader of the universe.

The interested reader of *The City and the River* is overjoyed at the thought of good winning over evil. He deliberately warns the Grand Master against the consequences of living in a fantasy world. When reality dawns, the interested reader's expectation comes true and he gloats at it. The disinterested reader is carried away by the different phases of fantasy but is not willing to believe in any incredible aspect of life. The uninterested reader does not agree with the supernatural interference that finally terminates in a tragedy.

The route from indifference to involvement is also seen in *The City and the River*. It contains a severe indictment of the corruption and malpractices of political leaders, businessmen, police and army chiefs. Joshi suggests that politics, detached

from religion and truth, may bring only destruction and death: Both the palace Astrologer, who is the mentor of the Grand Master and the ruler of the city, and the Hermit of the mountain, who identifies himself with the river and the river populace, are disciples of the Great Yogeshwara. But the different choices they make turn them into adversaries. The prophesy, regarding the advent of a king that sets the wheel of action in motion, is interpreted differently by the two, each according to his nature. The precarious balance between the city and the river is disturbed by the different choices made by the Grand Master and the boatmen. The whole story contains the life and activity of the people who work out their daily chores on the river banks. They insist on offering their allegiance to the river alone, which is for them, 'a symbol of the divine mother, of God Himself' (22). When the river is disturbed to the maximum, the supernatural power that has been quite detached all this while, starts to act - thus showing its great involvement by involving itself at the right time.

The interested reader of *The City and the River* is enthralled by the omnipotent for acting at the opportune moment and showing the people that he still rules the world.

The disinterested reader accuses the Grand Master for being so callous, for he finds no reason to protest against the action of nature. The uninterested reader opposes the omnipotent's indifference and the final episode in which nature annihilates an entire city.

The route from the sophisticated political scenario to the primitive idea of nature's dominance is portrayed in *The City and the River*. The story of the novel is spread along the bank of the river and is governed by the Grand Master, 'the sons and grandsons of Grand Masters' (13). The Grand Master's monopoly spreads over every nook and corner but those who have a self-image oppose his rule. The result is immediate jailing or corporal punishment. Simultaneous with all this, Joshi presents nature as a force beyond all human powers. As the primitive concept would have it, it rains for seven days and seven nights, demolishing all that belonged to the Grand Master. Thus the novel focuses on nature's dominance over man.

The interested reader applauds the interference of nature in order to make everyone believe in the omnipotent. The disinterested reader is not willing to accept the power of nature pervading over human beings. At the same time, he

confirms that the Grand Master's monopoly is unacceptable. The uninterested reader refuses to confirm to the idea of nature overpowering man. He also dares to criticize Joshi for concluding the novel upholding the primitive concept of nature's domination over man.

The *City and the River* exposes the route from crime to confession too. The novel portrays the loss of faith in the omnipotent, the tyranny spelled out by the rule of the Grand Master, and the description of the 'Crowning Ceremony' the Grand Master has indulged in. In the name of sacrifice and public interest, the Astrologer tries to beguile the people of the city. The novel also focuses on exposing the importance of astrology in the lives of Indians, their credulity and their blind belief in it. The novelist's message is that "the world belongs to God . . . let him be the king of what is His" (70). Thus the move from crime to confession is explicit.

The interested reader of *The City and the River* is glad to witness the city being saved from crime. He considers the rain of seven days and seven nights as a purification of the city. The disinterested reader rejoices at the transition but is not able to digest the Grand Master's monopoly. The uninterested reader finds the final episode a superficial act.

He attaches no special significance to nature's absolution of the crime.

The route from the labyrinth to the light is traced in the novel *The City and the River*. The city is dipped in darkness because of the Grand Master's rule. The innocent boatmen and the ordinary people of the city are troubled and tormented and all man-made forces and powers fail. The citizens are filled with "fear and foreboding" (23). But God acts through rain and the river for the purification of the whole city. The evil intentions of the Grand Master and all his people are wiped off through plenty of water.

The interested reader is thrilled at the pathetic plight of the Grand Master and his people who are entangled in labyrinthine paths. The disinterested reader justifies the death of the Grand Master but does not agree with the ruin of the entire city because of what the Grand Master and his people have done. The uninterested reader challenges nature for acting so suddenly and destroying the whole city.

Chapter Seven, "The Route from the Struggle to the Survival," is an analysis of Joshi's short stories, published as a collection under the title *The Survivor*. The story "The Gherao" depicts the struggle between a college principal and

the students who 'gherao' him and thus defeat him. The story highlights the declining sense of values among the post-colonial youth of India, and the degrading status of the student-teacher relationship in the modern society. "The Frontier Mail is Gone" recounts the story of a young girl, who is deprived of the comforts of life, crushed by the rich and the big men of the upper class. "Eve-Teasers," a tale of modern India, deals with the evil of eve-teasing. Both Ram and Shyam are examples of the corrupt youth, whom the weaker sex is scared of. "The Boy with a Flute" is a successful short story presenting the life of Mr. Sethu, a businessman, "wealthy beyond calculations" (50). In his struggle to reach the peak of success he forgot the small prayer his mother had taught him in his childhood. But later on, the same prayer helped him to survive an accident that might have led to his death.

In "A Trip for Mr. Lele," Mr. Lele loses his high-level career because of his love for his daughter. Staying at his daughter's bedside when she is sick, Mr. Lele becomes an example of a 'survivor' in the competitive world. His sacrifice helps him survive different kinds of struggles in his life. "The Survivor" depicts an individual's desperate attempt to

survive “that fantastic racket that passes for the modern Indian Society” (96). The story echoes the inner cry of Kewal, “the survivor of the greatest disaster of them all: “The Modern Indian Woman” (95-96). Another short story, “The Homecoming,” one of the memorable stories of Joshi, deals with the theme of an unsuccessful arrival. It narrates the failure of an individual, a survivor of war, to establish meaningful contacts with others, a failure that results in a painful experience of loneliness.

“The Intruder in the Discotheque” is a piece of fantasy that deals with the hopeless longing of Shembhu to survive the struggles of his old age. “The Servant” is portrayed as a cut-off piece of corrupt society. It is the story of a servant who gathers courage to rape his mistress. This story emphasizes the struggle of women to survive such attacks. Another impressive short-story, “The Only American from Our Village,” is about Dr. Khanna who was given a good education despite of the poverty in his family. His father expected to survive the struggles of his life when his son would attain a secured financial position in the future. But Dr. Khanna forgot altogether his father’s difficulties and enjoyed his life as the only American from his village. In “Kanyakumari” the

protagonist failed to see the sunrise at Kanyakumari, and this led him to a great disappointment. He is the representative of the country's young ones who are lost in faith, yet waiting for the sun to rise so as to assist them survive their struggles. As stated in chapter six, G. S. Amir is right when he says: ". . . as an affirmation of India's wisdom and the value of the fable as a mode of comprehension, it has a unique place in Indian Fiction in English. But he expresses his doubt about the future of Joshi as a novelist - 'where can he (Joshi) go from here?'" The answer to this question is now quite clear but probably Joshi knew that after writing this novel he had to go nowhere else but to the abode of Great God, leaving behind his search for rootlessness.

Joshi's novels and short stories are thus bold attempts to discover the roots of life. As Tapan Kumar Ghosh points out in the article, "The Indian English Fictional Milieu and Arun Joshi:"

Joshi may be regarded as an avant-garde novelist in the sense that for the first time in the history of Indian novel in English he has powerfully exploited and given sustained treatment to a very potent theme of his time, namely a maladjusted

individual pitted against an insane, lopsided society which is unhinged from its cultural as well as spiritual moorings, and his uncompromising search for identity. (Ghosh 30)

Arun Joshi's novels devise ways and means to eliminate the discrepancy between the individual's pursuits and his fulfilment. His heroes are lonely misfits in the world in which they live and face the rootlessness of life. In the article, " 'Isolation' in Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner* and *The Last Labyrinth*," S. S. Rengaghari states: "The Joshian heroes face a conflict that is common to the entire world of sceptics. They cannot feel at home in their own tradition. . . .They find themselves isolated even in a crowd" (Bhatnagar 117). Though they are not religious or saintly, they learn the lessons taught by life's problems. While experiencing love and hatred, doubts and dilemmas, they face the challenges of their rootless life by outstripping the narrow confines of their distraught selves. A reader of Arun Joshi's novels is tempted to believe what Erich Fromm proclaims in *The Sane Society*: "In the nineteenth century the problem was that God is dead; in the twentieth century the problem is that man is dead" (122).

According to Arun Joshi, the success of an individual life depends upon its transformation or evolution of consciousness. An individual's lifetime offers unlimited opportunities for conscious growth and the individual is expected to make use of the opportunities. Though every individual has an urge to grow, actual growth takes place only rarely because growth involves effort, and an individual is generally reluctant to exercise the required effort for growth. An individual, who attains growth by taking effort, enjoys the advantages of growth. But the enjoyment is not an end in itself. He is obliged to render to his fellowmen, the growth he has attained. Not all persons are willing to take up such a responsibility.

There are some human beings who evolve consciously, accepting the responsibility of assisting humanity to evolve. This becomes difficult because there is resistance everywhere. Such resistance is natural. Evolving becomes strenuous with entropy because entropy retards growth. To fight against resistance and entropy, the human spirit requires effort – the conscious effort to serve and thus grow, the effort to grow and thus serve. The route towards evolution thus becomes a hurdle race, and to reach one's destination, hurdles should be overcome.

Joshi's characters do not show the mark of the spiritually advanced persons, though they are spiritually inclined. The mark of the spiritually advanced is the awareness of their sense of responsibility. To evolve means to be aware of responsibility and to be determined about one's power of choice. If the purpose of life is to be God's agent and to spread goodness, Joshi's heroes are God's agents with a difference. They are not God's agents if being an agent means sowing love in the human hearts where it does not exist, watering human minds with love, nurturing human lives with God's love, and thus helping one's own evolution of the human race. Joshi's heroes live life to the full with all the pleasures a permissive society can offer. Yet they give up at one particular stage of their lives to live a life of penance. They do not prepare themselves for such a life from the beginning, but, as already mentioned, they drink life to the lees only to be satiated at the end. Their routes naturally differ from the routes of the spiritually advanced. The main reason for this is their rootlessness. Rootless in one way or the other, Joshi's characters suffer the consequences of their rootlessness and thereby search for routes to make their lives worthy.

As the strength and weakness of the routes of the rootless characters are analyzed, there is a message of hope and happiness. Their routes lead to the ultimate reality of God. Be it Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism with differences in customs, ways and beliefs, their routes lead to one end- the route to the Almighty.

“Life is zero. . . . You can take nothing away from a zero . . . Of late, however, I have begun to see a flow in the argument . . . You can take things out of a zero! You can make it negative . . . Life might will be a zero, for all I know, but it seems to me it need not be negative. And it becomes negative when you take out of it your sense of shame, your honour.”

Arun Joshi

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