THE PROBLEM OF ALIENATION IN THE FICTION OF ARUN JOSHI

A written account of the work
done hitherto submitted for the
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this thesis entitled **THE PROBLEM OF ALIENATION IN THE FICTION OF ARUN JOSHI** submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the Doctor of Philosophy is a record of bonafide research carried out by the candidate under my supervision. No part of this thesis has been submitted to any degree before.

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DECLARATION

I, USHA. K, hereby declare that this thesis entitled **THE PROBLEM OF ALIENATION IN THE FICTION OF ARUN JOSHI** is a bonafide record of research work done by me and that no part of it has been presented earlier for any degree, diploma or fellowship in any other University.

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PREFACE

Modern man is destined to be born into a heritage of frustration, disillusionment, tensions and conflicts as he is left with nothing within or without to fall upon in moments of crisis. The fast changing world estranges him; it also fragments and fractures his being. Since literature is essentially linked to society, it reflects the individual's attempts to interpret the social phenomena. Among the Indian writers in English who have taken up different aspects of this multifaceted theme for serious consideration, Arun Joshi is perhaps the one who is the most concerned with the interior landscape of the soul. He has made an original contribution to the literary world by grafting the Indian sensibility to the western outlook to give a positive dimension to the problem of alienation.

Joshi's honest efforts to seek a solution to this universal predicament has been the greatest inspiration to attempt a thesis on his writings. An earnest attempt has been made to analyse Joshi's unique way of handling the theme of alienation, the narrative strategies employed by this master craftsman, as also the various philosophical streams which might have inspired him in the process. The

first chapter introduces the subject and establishes its universal significance. Four novels have been chosen for detailed introspection in chapters II, III, IV and V, their selection based on the conclusion that each novel has been inspired by a particular Indian thought. The remaining works have been dealt with in the concluding chapter which also focusses on the narrative devices employed by the novelist. A sincere effort has been made to present an unbiased analysis of Joshi's sustained interest in depicting the alienated man's struggle for authenticity in an angst - ridden world.

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Introduction : The Phenomenon of A lienation

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Chapter I

Introduction: The Phenomenon of Alienation

As we take determined steps towards the twenty first century, proud of the record of human achievements, there is one basic sense in which we feel distressed. That feeling arises from an anxiety about the oppressive fate of alienation shared by all humanity. Among the writers who have sought to address this problem, one of the most outstandingly sensitive and thought provoking is Arun Joshi. As an Indian writer writing in English, he is profoundly conscious of being an artist trying to express his native world view through alien intellectual devices --- a tension that is evident from the comments of other writers and critics who are in the same situation.

Alienation is obviously, as Meenakshi Mukkerjee has asserted, "a very common theme in the Indo-English novel."[1] The cause has been analysed as a loss of identity. The Indo-English novelist, situated as he is, finds himself in a strange position. Many Indo-English novelists tend to behave like "a group of hypnotised people, who are heirs to two sets of customs and are shaped in their daily lives by dual codes of behaviour."[2] Confounded by this dilemma, the Indo-English novelist behaves like a literary outcast. Nirad C. Chaudhury describes himself as a "nomad of the Industrial Age."[3] Other

outstanding novelists affected by this problem are Arun Joshi, Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee,to name a few.

Arun Joshi seems to be the most significant among the modern Indo-English novelists in this context. His fiction offers excellent insights into this important aspect of our changing times and mobile society which expresses itself in the alienation of his characters.

The problem of alienation is not altogether a new phenomenon in literary investigation. Some research work has already been done on this problem. So far as the present study is concerned, the intention is largely to view this problem in an Indian perspective, as reflected in Arun Joshi's fiction. The study is an attempt to bring into focus Joshi's innovative approach to the problem of alienation based not just on Western philosophy but also on Indian thought. It would be worthwhile to examine the western concept of alienation as well as its Indian counterpart, as a prelude to the analysis of Joshi's fictional contribution.

The Western Concept of Alienation.

Alienation was a term used in the ancient times to denote an insane person. aliené in French, alienado in Spanish and entfremdung in German are words which mean the psychotic, the thoroughly and absolutely alienated person.

But with a growing awareness of the human mind's intricacies, subtler shades of meaning became associated with the word. Hegel and Marx used the word 'alienation' in the last century to refer not to a state of insanity but to a less drastic form of self-estrangement. The famous psycho analyst Erich Fromm states that "In Marx's system alienation is that condition of man where his own act becomes to him an alien power, standing over and against him, instead of being ruled by him."[4]

The Concept of Alienation in Indian Thought.

The Indian philosophers have always laid great emphasis on the removal of the veil of ignorance because for them ignorance is the root cause of bondage and the resultant disillusionment and alienation. "The cause of the bondage of the soul is merely the perception of distinctions, which is based on unreality and has its origin in the Avidya (ignorance) that veils the true nature of the Brahman."[5]

The issue of alienation, metaphysical anguish, Neitszchean Godless world, dark, fathomless despair etc., are explained in Indian Philosophy as resulting from this Bondage experienced by man in a state of Samsara. All Indian philosophical systems hold that there is a permanent spiritual essence in the soul of man, but it is overlaid with

thick layers of egotism and ignorance as a result of which the individual fails to know his true nature. The Upanishads declare: "Not he who has desisted from evil ways, . . . not he who has a concentrated mind . . . can realise the self, true knowledge."[6]

According to the Nyaya system, the soul of man gets entangled in the cycle of births. In the state of Samsara, men have the false notion that knowledge, pleasure, pain, hatred, desire and impressions are the very nature of the soul.

The Sankhya Philosophy asserts that the quality of an individual is based on the three Gunas --- Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Man, by his effort and discipline can bring about the ascendancy of the Sattva in him to keep the other two under its domain.

The author of the Gita categorically states that "The man who is ignorant and has no faith and who always doubts goes to ruin. There is no salvation, no happiness for men who always doubt."[7]

These illustrations would suffice to suggest that Indian philosophy as a whole is preoccupied with identifying man's inherent existential dilemma and trying to enable him to realise his true spiritual nature. So it is rightly

described as Atman-Centric, a philosophy of inwardness. Central to all philosophical doctrines is the ideal of Moksha, a state of existence where there is perfect bliss and no taint of bondage, sorrow, alienation or imperfection. Indian philosophy is neither completely a religion nor a philosophy in the western sense. It is a quest for spiritual experience in order to attain a state of existence which puts a radical end to suffering.

Inspite of some similarities between the Indian thought and western existential philosophy like subjectivity, the unitary situation of man as a being in the world, the riddles of existence etc., they differ widely regarding the end of the spiritual quest. While the western analysis of the empirical ego leads into the undecipherable depths of nothingness, the Indian introspection leads to the realisation of the External Being lying far beneath the empirical ego. This distinctive quality of the Indian philosophy might have attributed its influence on the western existentialists like Neitzche and Kierkegaard in Germany, as well as literary personalities like Eliot, Yeats and Russell in England as also Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman and Isherwood in America. It has made considerable impact on Indian writing including those of the prominent Indo-English writers like Raja Rao, Arun Joshi and Anita Desai. R.K. Dhawan, an eminent scholar on Indo-English writing and Joshi's acquaintance asserts that "Joshi has also been influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and The Bhagavad Gita."[8]

Evolution of the problem of Alienation.

The universal incidence of this problem makes it clear that it is not just an intellectual malady which it is in some cases. Alienation is induced and influenced by various factors like foreign invasions and religious, political or social causes. The colonization of the Americas presents us with an outstanding example of this problem of massive proportions. The orgies of the Spanish invasion, for instance, left deep scars in the minds of the native Red Indians of America who had been peacefully living by their own tribal culture, trade and religion. The forceful imposition of Spanish trade and compulsory mass conversion into an alien religion left the natives strangers in their own land. Unable to accept an alien culture, they gradually moved south by 1783. Their journey from Georgia to Okalahoma described as "the trail of tears"[9] implies the sense of loss and irreconcilability on the part of the native Red Indians.

Across the Atlantic, in the old world itself, the period 1700 - 1800 was a significant chapter in the history of Europe. The political revolutions in France, Russia and America urged the people to think in terms of liberty and equality and to struggle against restraints of all kinds. The Industrial Revolution which paved the way for the growth of trade and industry had with it many adverse effects too. The affluent and capitalist class became all the more rich while the middle and low classes grew poorer. It is a fact

that in the feudal society the lord had absolute powers over the subject. But at the same time he was bound by custom, and was responsible for his subject. He had to protect him and provide him with a minimum standard of living. But after the revolution the worker became just another commodity in the market. Hence "there was no sense of reciprocity, or of any obligation on the part of the owner of the capital, beyond that of paying wages."[10] If hundreds of thousands of workers were without work that was their bad luck, or simply a social and natural law which could not be changed. This new system baffled the poor employees who felt cheated by the new system which made their lives meaningless. The anguish and despair of these hapless people have been graphically voiced by the literary men of the age in these words:

> . . . with us again something is perishing, we stand at the brink of all the religions which sprang up out of the Catholic one, the abstractions perish, everything is lighter and insubstantial than before, everything presses toward landscape art, looks for something certain in this uncertainty and does not know how to begin . . .[11]

The conditions in Europe changed with the twentieth century. The most obvious change was "the increasing replacing of manual work by machine work and beyond that of human intelligence by machine intelligence."[12] The social

stability that appeared to exist in the last decade of the nineteenth century began to crumble as stresses and strain became apparent in the international relationship in Europe. From 1905, crises followed one after the other and eventually a climate prevailed conducive to the inevitable catastrophe.

Needless to say, the problem has become more acute after the 1950 when man has come to depend more and more on machines. The tensions and conflicts prevailing in the society as also the absurdity of the existing value systems have contributed to the severity of the problem.

Contexts of Alienation and the Alienated Writer.

Literature is essentially linked to society and hence it reflects the individual's attempts to interpret the human condition in its totality and to reflect on the social and political contexts that mould his behavioural patterns. Hence the literary individual cannot ignore this universally significant subject of alienation which is projected in every context of life.

The political revolution that swept Europe at the end of the eighteenth century had far reaching repercussions in the social and economic conditions of the countries. Dostoevsky, who was a representative of the alienated group of the new intelligentsia gives a graphic picture of the under

previliged classes who had to become helpless slaves of the bureaucracy. His Crime and Punishment thus discusses Raskolnikov's state of mind:

> . . . for sometime . . . he had been in an overstrained irritable condition verging on hypochondria. He had become so completely absorbed in himself and isolated from his fellows that he dreaded meeting . . . any one at all. He was crushed by poverty but the anxieties of his position had of late ceased to weigh upon him . . .[13]

This period was also remarkable for the Romantic Revival which began in France and found its waves in England and America. Among the Romantic poets in England who advocated an escape fom the harsh realities, Shelley seems to be the most significant in this context. Due to various misunderstandings which rocked his life and career he was forced to leave his country saying; "I am regarded as a rare prodigy of crime and pollution whose look even might infect."[14]

In America, the theme of alienation which appeared as early as in 1782 in Crevecour's Letter from an American Farmer became the central subject in the fiction of Hawthorne, Poe and many others towards the middle of the nineteenth century.

The political upheavals of the twentieth century which rocked the world along with the social and cultural

reverberations that followed them made man alienated and uprooted. The cultural degradation and dehumanisation which marked the beginning of the era were viewed with alarm and disgust by the writers. Concerned with the frightening manifestation of human impotence in the face of the brazen military technology, they discussed mostly the problems of rootlessness, alienation etc., in their writings.

Socio-cultural contexts.

In England, D.H. Lawrence protested against the deadening restrictiveness of middle class convention often using an outsider, a peasant, a gypsy, who seems to be "Searching for something for what he wanted and never quite finding."[15] Poets like Eliot and Yeats also gave vent to their spiritual anguish in their writings, being shaken by the growing mechanisation and deteriorating value systems. The American writers who represented a rootless culture also were obsessed with the theme of alienation. The group of derelicts in The Ice man Cometh are shown by Eugene O'Neill as both estranged from society and alienated from themselves:

> These figures, all drop outs from the normal society outside, are types drawn from different walks of life who together represent alienated humanity in a predicament of near despair.[16]

For Arthur Miller, the theatre is a means of making men less alone. While observing an early rehearsal of one of his

own plays, he felt:

> We must be a terribly lonely people cut off from each other with such massive pretence of self-sufficiency, machined down so fine, we hardly touch any more. We are trying to save ourselves separately. [17]

The social and cultural contexts of alienation are also characterised by racial discrimination, tense marital conflicts resulting from inter-racial relationships or even due to migrations leading to disillusionment.

The realities of alienation, racial prejudice and rejection against which the South African woman struggles are graphically portrayed in Bessie Head's novels. In her most ambitious work, A Question of Power, Elizabeth laments: "But mine, my destiny is full of doubt, full of doom. I am being dragged down, without my willing, into a whirlpool of horrors."[18]

Australian writing too offers excellent illustrations of discussing the subject of alienation thus suggeting its universality. Gabby in Thea Astley's An Item from the Late News expresses her failure as a human being, which is bound up with her failure as an artist:"O for five years now I have been painting the very heart of boredom and no one can recognise it."[19]

The cultural alienation experienced by the Canadian psyche is articulated in Margaret Atwood's writings:

> We are all immigrants to this place even if we were born here; the country is too big for anyone to inhabit completely and in the parts unknown to us we move in fear, exiles and invaders.[20]

Indo-English writing also presents us with similar instances projecting the predicament of modern man. Maya in Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock leads a meaningless life because of the strained married life. For her "everything is only a dream. An illusion."[21] Her very "name means nothing; is nothing but an illusion" (Desai 172).

Nissim Ezekiel's alienation arises from his destiny to live in India, among Hindus with a Jewish heritage. His constant feeling of being a natural outsider is reflected clearly in some of his poems:

> A poet-rascal-clown was born,
> The frightened child who would not eat
> . . . . . .
> I went to Roman Catholic School,
> A mugging Jew among the wolves.
> They told me I had killed the Christ,
> That year I won the scripture prize,
> A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears.[22]

About his ancestry he thus remarks, "My ancestors among the castes, / Were aliens crushing seed for bread." [23] R. Parthasarathy, another noted Indo-English poet complains about the alienation felt by discriminated Indians in Europe: "'Coloured' is what they call us over there. Here after I should be content I think to go through life with the small change of uncertainties."[24]

Bharati Mukherjee, a popular novelist living in America with her Canadian husband, also attempts a graphic portrayal of cultural alienation owing to marital discords. In her novel, The Tiger's Daughter, Tara Banerjee who feels that her American husband David fails to realise her Indianness rushes home to Calcutta in a moment of distress. But the affected life style of the Indians there only add to her alienation. "The return had brought only wounds . . . She was an embittered woman, she now thought, old and cynical at twenty two and quick to take offence . . ."[25]

Upamanyu Chatterjee's The Last Burden seeks to explore modern man's alienation as he finds himself catapulted by the currents of change into which he is sucked in without his making any conscious option. The novel portrays the alienation of Shyamanand whose affections are directed more to the inanimate things than to its people. His inability to seek his children's help in dire necessity shows his

alienation from them, who appear

> . . . brand new and alien, in jeans and T-shirts of dubious shades, and articulate a puzzling species of English, where as Urmila and he had ripened in an earlier, illusory genial world . . . wherein mawkish that he is, he reckons that the bonds of family had been sturdier, and parents revered.[26]

Shashi Deshpande's novels deal with the loneliness of the individual who suffers while trying to assert his identity in the face of suppression, discrimination and prejudices. Indu in Roots and Shadows realises that "the whole world is made up of interdependant parts"[27] and "which is why no one can be completely free. Freedom has to be relative" (Deshpande 15).

Sunetra Gupta's The Glass Blower's Breath speaks of a fearful emptiness that engulfs Moni on her first night in England. "From time to time she had looked at her watch whose hand still marked the time of a world she had left behind."[28]

Arundhati Roy explores the tensions and disillusionment of the ordinary man through the words of Chacko:

> We belong nowhere. We sail unanchored on troubled seas. We may never be allowed ashore. Our sorrows

> will never be sad enough. Our joys never happy enough. Our dreams never big enough. Our lives never important enough. To matter.[29]

Political Contexts

Socio-cultural encounters of the kinds already mentioned have often led to political conflicts and vice versa. No absolute distinction can hence be made between social, cultural and political aspects leading to alienation. There is such interaction among them that they stand complementary to one another.

The alienation felt by the native Africans who had to silently suffer the consequences of foreign invasions like slavery and racial discrimination in other countries is excellently portrayed by Richard Wright:

> The blonde men of England, Denmark etc., denied our human personalities, tore us from our native soil . . . dragged us across thousands of miles of ocean and hurled us into another land, strange and hostile.[30]

From the subjugation and dehumanisation which they experienced evolved the Black American Literature which first appeared in the form of protest literature, later to be substituted by an aesthetic psychic exploration in the recent writing like that of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison.

Meanwhile, Nadine Gordimer, a prominent South African writer exemplifies the conflict of identity in portraying the White African's intellectual and emotional alienation. July's People tells the story of alienation experienced by a family of Whites forced to flee their city at the outbreak of racial war. Bam and Maureen Smales suffer with their imprisoned sense of "living a life that was already over."[31]

Amitav Ghosh, a recent Indian writer in English demonstrates through his In An Antique Land the need for human understanding in a world torn apart by religious obscurantism and fanaticism. The novel ends with Ghosh's last visit to Egypt in 1990, three weeks after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Nabeel, his Egyptian friend, who is now missing had earlier sympathised with Ghosh's alienation in Egypt. "It must make you think of all the people you left at home when you put that kettle on stove with just enough water for yourself."[32] After the invasion, "Nabeel had vanished into the anonymity of history" (Ghosh 353).

In India, the feelings of disillusionment and alienation became acute during the partition struggle which ensued immediately after gaining freedom. If the Indians had hoped that Mahatma Gandhi's martyrdom would end the carnage and blood bath of partition they were painfully mistaken. On the contrary what we witnessed was a growing estrangement between

the unprivileged individual and the new establishment and also between the old and the new generations.

R. Parthasarathy searches for cultural roots through his poems:

> The street in the evening tilts homeward
> As traffic piles up
> It is then I stir about,
> . . . . pick up
> my glasses and look for myself
> in every nook and corner
> of the night.[33]

The literary and philosophical movements of the west made an impact on Indian writers also, especially the Indian writers in English thus transforming them into confused wanderers between the Indian and European worlds.

Raja Rao, the most prominent among the first generation novelists in English graphically depicts in his Comrade Kirillov the dilemma of the divided consciousness of the protagonist who suffers the tensions between a convinced communist and an existential creature within him, between "honesty of mind and honesty of being."[34]

Thus the political turmoil in India following Independance produced the same tale of woe, rootlessness and

disillusionment as the post war conditions did in Europe and America in the twentieth century. Hence our post independent writers like their European counterparts concentrated mostly on these problems. Among the second generation novelists of the post independence period Arun Joshi makes a bold attempt to analyse how these problems affect the psyche of modern man. What distinguishes him from other prominent writers of the period is his sincere attempt to probe deep into the intricate workings of human mind and honest efforts to find a positive solution to its problems. It would be relevant to remember the thought provoking comment made by Dr. Radhakrishnan in this context:

> The sufferings of man, his disillusionment and sense of rootlessness, all are the result of a conflict in us . . . the only discipline which helps us to change ourselves is religion, which is nothing but man's total conscious attitude towards life found and enlightened by knowledge.[36]

All the same Radhakrishnan holds that the problem of meaninglessness cannot be solved by religious faith alone. Only reasoned faith can give coherence to life and thought.

This theory has been the inspiration behind the present study of Joshi's fiction which is a sincere effort to analyse his unique way of handling the theme of alienation, the

narrative strategies employed in highlighting the theme and the various philosophical theories which seem to have influenced him in the process.

It is obvious therefore, that the problem of alienation and its impact over civilisations as time passes deserves to be studied, taking into account the various factors causing this problem. How Arun Joshi excels in discussing this problem in the modern Indian context, how deeply it has made a psychological effect on his characters who represent the modern generation and what solutions does the novelist search for to reduce its severity shall be the subject of discussion in the remaining part of this study.

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[23] Ezekiel, "Background Casually," Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets 36.

[24] R. Parthasarathy, "Exile," Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets 75.

[25] Bharati Mukherjee, The Tiger's Daughter (London: Chatto, 1973) 25.

[26] Upamanyu Chatterji, The Last Burden (New Delhi: Viking, 1993) 108.

[27] Shashi Deshpande, Roots and Shadows (Bombay: Orient Paperbacks 1983) 15.

[28] Sunetra Gupta, The Glass Blower's Breath (Delhi: Penguin, 1993) 104.

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The Alienated Self in The Foreigner

Usha K. “The problem of alienation in the fiction of Arun Joshi” Thesis. Department of English, University of Calicut, 1998

Chapter II

The Alienated Self in The Foreigner

While the earlier group of Indian Writers in English was concerned with native consciousness awakened by a plethora of constraints caused by western domination, the later generation makes departures and stresses on the inner conflicts in the mind of man. Most of them like Arun Joshi and Anita Desai as also the more recent writers including Upamanyu Chatterjee, Lakshmi Kannan & Arundhati Roy deeply explore the existential dilemma of modern man. In this sense, they are more in tune with the modern Western Writers. The protagonists of the Western existential novels cannot be termed heroes in the literal sense. They are either misfits or aliens in the society and are on an incessant quest for some meaning in life. Arun Joshi too is preoccupied with lost lonely questers who walk aimlessly through his novels and short stories. Their dismal experiences are existential in nature. They are groping in the darkness of their souls, unable to find a way out. The first four novels of Joshi concern lonely quests. In The Foreigner, the novelist, true to his obsession with the problem of alienation, takes the reader directly into the inferno of the existential agony of the modern man. This agony slowly grows into full maturity in the later novels.

Apropros to the observations made earlier, an attempt is being made here to examine how best Arun Joshi tackles the problem of alienation in the modern Indian context. His first novel, The Foreigner, explores the tensions and conflict in the modern world which condemns the human psyche to wander in the dark labyrinths of alienation, uncertainty and despair.

Meanwhile, the novelist also makes a conscious effort to give a positive outlook to the entire problem by finding some solution to it. It is in this context that the writer's choice of the Indian philosophical concepts become significant. Sindi's pretentious indifference to genuine issues which is a self imposed defence mechanism to hide his despair and alienation gives way to the much meaningful principle of Karmayoga expounded in The Bhagavad Gita. Sindi makes a rather belated realisation that complete renunciation of all action is to get completely out of life. The positive view of life is called the Pravrthi marga which commands a strenuous life, yet gives no room for the play of selfish impulses. This exactly is the principle of the Karmayoga which keeps the spirit of renunciation and combines it with a life of ceaseless activity. It requires us to lead active moral life and still escape the bondage that our actions normally forge for us.

Sindi realises this principle when Muthu opens his inner eye to his role in the cosmic entirety. Since each individual is part of the cosmic wheel, there is no 'freedom from action' for him, but only 'freedom in action.' This inspires him to take up office in Khemkha's establishment and restore its state of normalcy. The novel is built on this theory of Karmayoga, accepting it as a means to reduce the intensity of the problem of alienation. Hence a study of this novel which manifests the novelist's conscious efforts to explore the intricacies of the fractured soul tormented by an array of fragmented thoughts would be interesting.

Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist of The Foreigner, is a misfit in the society like his successors in the later novels. He is perhaps the most afflicted victim of the cultural alienation resulting from the East-West encounter depicted by Indian writers in English. Born with a mixed heritage, of an Indian father and English mother, Sindi becomes an orphan at the age of four and remembers his parents only as strangers in a crumpled photograph. He was then looked after by an uncle who did not know what to do with the boy as he "was very different from other high school boys."[1] His plans to send the boy to a college in Nairobi didn't quite work out. He "didn't fit in" (165). Though a bright student, Sindi was always toying with a

perplexing question that he wanted to know the meaning of his life. This strange question that baffled an answer in the class room continues to haunt Sindi even as he grows up. The strange fascination he felt for Anna, an artist of thirty five, while working in an inn, doing odd jobs could not last long as Anna too was tossing with an existential problem. "Anna was not yearning for me or anybody but for her lost youth. But the sad thing about it all was that we both knew that she was never going to find it again" (167). His involvement with another woman Kathy too ends in disappointment. He recalls those painful incidents thus: ". . . after all this I was far from finding the purpose of my life" (169).

It is interesting to note that Sindi's existential dilemma is somewhat similar to the problems experienced by the Jamesian hero, Hyacinth Robinson. In his Princess Cassamassima, James describes Robinson's state of mind thus:

> There were times when he said to himself that it might very well be his fate to be divided to the point of torture, to be split open by sympathies that pulled him in different ways, for hadn't he an extra ordinary mingled current in his blood . . . [2]

The answer to Sindi's existential questions comes at

his meeting with a Catholic priest who helps him in his exploration. One morning, in the midst of a walk, Sindi has a revelation: "All love --- whether of things, or persons, or one self --- was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion. Love begot greed and attachment, and it led to possession" (170). Hence to protect his soul from further injuries, Sindi donns a mask of detachment which is only an illusion. But the simple American girl named June, with her youthful charm and loving nature breaks the mask and succeeds in touching his broken heart. But like Paul Morel in The Sons and Lovers, Sindi is afraid of being possessed by love. Being orphan and rootless, Sindi has never experienced true and selfless love. To him, June's attachment and dependance on him is like a burden. He fears that "their souls will get involved" (70). And involvement would mean throwing to the winds his policy of detachment so carefully woven round his self. Yet despite his efforts to remain indifferent, he realises painfully that the commitment had already been made the moment he saw June at the dance.

Sindi, like Camus' Meursault is anomic. According to Robert M. Maclaver, anomie signifies "the state of mind of one who had been pulled up from his moral roots. The anomic man has become spiritually sterile, responsive only to himself, responsible to no one."[3] The lady in the cafe

gives a perfect description of Sindi to June. "Hold on to him now. Slippery as an eel, that's what he is . . . Take care honey, you might as well fall in love with a shadow. You can't love a stranger now, can you?" (82).

June is a benign, sensitive girl, noble hearted and loving. Her uninhibited love soothes and comforts Sindi. As their mutual attachment deepens into an intense relationship, Sindi apprehends a tragic end to which he is accustomed. He feels that he is "pushed once again on the giant wheel, going round and round waiting for the fall" (82). He is not optimistic enough to hope that he may ride the wheel without falling down. This pessimistic approach to life compels Sindi to refuse June's idea of marriage. For him marriage is more often a lust for possession than anything else. "People get married just as they bought new cars. And they gobbled each other up" (67). His theory is that marriage is one big illusion which crumbles after a while and the partners begin to kill each other bit by bit. He is afraid of possessing or being possessed by others. To him all lands and all people are alien. Like the protagonists of Saul Bellow's The Dangling Man or The Victim, Sindi suffers from alienation, uncertainty and despair wherever he goes. He does not know what to think of his future. He remarks indifferently: "I may go to India. It is all the same" (89). He seems to be emotionally

sterile like Camus' Meursault in The Outsider. Even after five years of stay in Boston he does not feel any attachment to the city. He observes impersonally, "My fifth Christmas on these alien shores. And yet all shores are alien when you don't belong anywhere" (92). This is not just Sindi's predicament, but that of modern man in general. Existentially, man is alienated from his own deepest being, he is not himself, but simply a cipher in the mass existence of the crowd, a cog in the modern industrial world. Even the truck driver whom Sindi and June meet at the coffee shop is not an exemption. Even after spending two sleepless nights of driving, he cannot rest until he has taken the goods to the destination. "After taking a large dose of No-Doze pills, he walked upto the truck --- there was no turning back now; no end to the fruitless search" (95). He is just an automaton leading a meaningless life in the machine age. It is this existential dilemma which forces Sindi also to feel indifferent towards the idea of a married life. Yet, inspite of his strong determination, Sindi realises how hard it is to maintain detachment in such a deep love affair. He is madly in love with June. He resembles Tommy, the protagonist in Saul Bellow's Seize the Day, who realises that "there is really very little that a man can change at his will."[4] This helplessness compels him to remain a passive spectator as his beloved drifts towards another young Indian named Babu Rao Khemka. Sindi has no

cause to complain since he knows that she had tried with patience to adjust with such a difficult person like himself. Hence he painfully watches her relationship with Babu growing stronger.

June, on the other hand, feels entrapped by materialistic entropy. She finds herelf unable to face her aloneness. Like the characters in the works of Ruth Prawar Jhabwala, especially the story "The Aliens," June is on a perpetual quest for identity and has to face a series of crises in the process. Her alienation results from the wrong choices of men in her life. While Sindi is an anomic, Babu is a fool. In Sindi, June finds a terror of indifference, a defensive wall against his humanity which she wants to merge with. In Babu, she finds a terror of aloneness caused by modern Indian ideals. Yet Sindi's indifferent attitude forces her to decide on marrying Babu, a hopeless character. He is an inefficient young man, ever dependant and afraid of his affluent father who is a representative of the bourgeois Indian society. Being used to dependance, he has to lean on to someone in an altogether alien American society. He has in him all the prejudices and false ambitions of the young Indian men who are sent abroad by their rich fathers for higher education. Hence he cannot be expected to be able to understand such a noble person like June. He miserably fails June by making her an

unattainable ideal. June's decision of marrying Babu makes Sindi despair. To escape from his growing feeling of alienation and boredom, he labors at his lab. An astonished professor asks him. "You are not trying to get away from something, are you?" (141) To which Sindi philosphises: "We all are, aren't we? Once you are born you spend the rest of your life getting away from your birth" (141). This statement unfolds the meaning of the term 'alienation,' as Kaufmann defines it. According to him the word alienation is connected with "a human state of being --- the state of being alienated or estranged from somebody or something."[5] While attending the engagement ceremony of June and Babu, Sindi feels terribly lonely being a misfit in the gathering. He meets Babu's landlady there, who too was a stranger in the crowd. Her seeming alienation too is strikingly described by the novelist in a single deft stroke: "Neither of us seemed to belong there, that may be why I started talking to her" (45). His plight is similar to that of Sanand, in Nayantara Sahgal's A Time to be Happy who says:

> It is a strange feeling to be mid-way between two worlds, not completely belonging to either. I don't belong entirely to India. I can't . . . what do I have in common with most of my country men? And of course there can be no question of my belonging to any other country."[6]

Sindi is fast to realise the mistake June has committed in choosing Babu. Inspite of his high ambitions Babu lacks self-confidence since he fails to get his father out of his system. A total failure in life, he is a reminder of Wilhelm, alias Tommy in Saul Bellow's Seize The Day who is a repeated failure in life. Like Wilhelm, he too makes innumerable mistakes and fails to recognise them. Lacking faith in himself, he rushes to Sindi, who is the only other Indian he knows, seeking advice. But Sindi's cynical, detached remarks hurt him. In the dream worlds of June and Babu, Sindi who is devoid of emotions only travelled now and then. Such men like him had no right to any emotions and if they showed any, they even lost their meagre status as advisers. Hence he fails to console either Babu or June. He cannot love anybody except himself. The idea of offering marriage to June just does not enter his mind as the only solution to her as well as his own problem. Instead the remains aloof and alienated even from his own passions and desires as a typical existential hero saying: "And what could I, who had so little control over his own destiny and actions do to stem the tide whose course was set long ago?" (161). Like "the eternal immigrants in the novels of Anita Desai who continue to walk the streets like strangers, frozen, listless, but dutifully trying to be busy, unobtrusive, and however superficially to belong,"[7] Sindi too, is on a constant quest for roots.

After Babu, it is June's turn to seek Sindi's advice. He frankly tells her that it is best to love without attachment and desire: "You can love without fooling yourself that the things you love are indispensible either to you or to the world. Love is real only when you know that what you love must one day die" (170). Sindi is fully aware of the meaninglessness of life and considers his life as a constant existential search for meaning in his life. Like Sartre's protagonist in The Nausea he reflects on the absurdity of existence. Sindi's advice has a temporary effect on relieving June's tension. Moments after June's departure, Sindi gets news of the death of Babu, who left June in a fit of jealousy and suspicion. Sindi feels that he is somehow responsible for the death of Babu. Like the characters in the novels of Kafka he suffers from a sense of guilt which is yet another manifestation of the problem of alienation. He explains the shocking experience thus: "Babu's death was like a bombshell exploding under my nose . . . I felt more and more alone and naked in the world that I had never felt before" (174-75).

This benumbing incident increases his feeling of alienation and persuades him to decide on leaving America. Sindi remarks thus of his feeling frustrated and alienated in America: "The feeling of my nakedness in the hands of existence grew with every passing day and a strong urge

possessed me to once again roam the streets of the world. I didn't know where I would go . . . but . . . my search had to continue" (175). Sindi's predicament is a clear reflection of the modern thinking man's condition. Many modern Indian writers of English like V.S. Naipaul and Sasthi Brata too are vain seekers of a refuge for their tortured souls.

The severest blow to Sindi is the death of June which occured while trying to abort Babu's child. This incident gives him another insight into the mystery of existence. He realises the absurdity of his theory of detachment which had caused the death of the two people intimate to him. He reminisces: "Now I had begun to see the fallacy in it. Detachment consisted of right action and not escape from it" (193). But to learn this lesson he had to pay a heavy price. For the past twenty years he had learnt to be detached from the world but not from himself. That was his fatal error. In this aspect Sindi is a contrast to the protagonist of Joshi's next novel The Apprentice, or even Meursault in Camus' The Outsider, who are both alienated from themselves.

Thus with the new knowledge regarding detachment Sindi resumes his journey like the barren woman in Eliot's "The Wasteland," who wanders over the heaps of ruined towers.

Sindi's is a ruined soul wandering through the dark labyrinths of life which "reminds one of that core of loneliness around which all of us are built."[8] He believed erroneously that he could escape from a part of himself by "hopping from one land mass to the other" (176). Hence the journey to India meant escape from a bit of himself "that appeared the most decayed" (176). Even on the last night in America he is not quite sure of his decision. He is just a fictional representative of the uprooted angry young men of the modern age divided against themselves. On that uncertain night someone asks him: "Going home?" "Yes," he lies, and then qualifies it: "you might say that" (178). Rootless as he is, he is bound to be an alien on any shore. He is a tireless traveller, like an unsponsored explorer without a compass, asking himself the most awkward question, where are you going, and where are you from?

On reaching New Delhi, Sindi dutifully visits Babu's family, wondering how to face them in their mourning. But like Camus' Meursault who faces his mother's death indifferently, Mr. Khemka seems to have a detached approach to the incident. Sindi is perforce dragged by Mr. Khemka into joining his business. But even this new role does not suit Sindi, who helplessly remarks: "I was considered quite a misfit. My foreign background stood against me, No body hated me. I was too insignificant for that sort of thing"

(198). Like V.S. Naipaul, who was considered a Brahmin-Englishman in Trinidad, an Indian in London and a European in India, Sindi is an alien in Kenya, Boston, New York, London or India. Alienated as he is in the office, he feels better at home with the poor labourers who slaved under Mr. Khemka. Their plight saddens him: "These are my people, I thought and yet I moved among them as if I were a stranger. All of us who worked in Mr. Khemka's office or went to his parties . . . were strangers" (198).

The Income Tax raid in Khemka's office teaches Sindi certain lessons which he had never thought to exist. The crooked idea of keeping two account books and the method of handling the Income Tax people baffle and disgust Sindi. This incident warns him that his search for some meaning in life should continue. He reminisces: "I had started life as a confused adolescent awesomely engrossed with myself searching for wisdom and the peace that comes with it. The journey had been long and tedious and still it was not over" (221). His predicament is similar to that of Rushdie's characters with a partial identity. He is similar to the Flapping Eagle in Rushdie's first novel Grimus who ultimately realises that his quest has been like running in a "gigantic blind alley" and "a voyage through the wasteland."[9] Mr. Khemka, with his materialistic preoccupations, and Sheila who lives on the brink of life

but never entering it are all lonely people with empty lives surrounding Sindi, thereby increasing his loneliness. His feeling of aloneness is accentuated by Sheila's purely selfish request to Sindi to own up her father's guilt. Sindi discovers that Mr. Khemka's greed and selfish materialistic attitude had been responsible for Babu's death and that he need not feel guilty any more for it. This reduces the pressure of guilt from his soul and gives him the courage to walk out on Mr. Khemka, asking him: "How long can your contracts stand against the ravages of the desert that is willing you?" (225). However, the misery and distress in the industrial world as represented by Muthu drives Sindi to move from detachment to involvement. Muthu's simple answer to his tormenting doubts clear his mind. He realises that sometimes detachment does not lie in inaction but in right action and getting involved with the world. Hence he successfully steers Khemka's office to normalcy. He accepts the principle of the Bhagavad Gita which preaches right action without hinging onto expectations of a reward. "It is disinterested involvement alone which can break through the selfish instinct of self-preservation and bridge the gap between reality and appearance and help maintain one book" (239). It is only at this juncture that Sindi comes to terms with his 'foreignness' and realises that there might be certain useful tasks to be done though the future may be as bleak as

the past; he might even be able to redeem the past by his newly acquired theory of detached involvement.

Thus Sindi Oberoi becomes the first among Joshi's alienated foreigners who turn inwards to overcome their sense of futility and discover a world of meaningful relatedness within themselves, however limited it may be. Sindi's portrayal is a realistic representation of the modern anomics who are in search of their lost self. For depicting a world of reality he seems to give form to the shapeless facts of reality. For this Joshi does not choose an artificial world like R.K. Narayan or a social stage like Anand to bring home his message. He is rather content with probing into the dark depths of the human psyche. Nor do his protagonists always remain alienated or waiting like the heroes of Beckett or Kafka or any other western existential writer. The wellknit story told convincingly in the first person narrative and unfolding in a series of flashbacks exhibits traces of great craftsmanship which achieves greater perfection in the novels to come. To quote Joshi himself, "My novels are essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and I myself . . ."[10]. The foregoing study was an attempt to discuss how Joshi distinguishes himself from other existential writers in exploring the perennial problem of alienation by resolving to find a solution to it which focusses on Indian thought and

freedom. How far the novelist has progressed in this aspect shall be discussed more deeply and specifically in the following chapters.

Notes

[1] Arun Joshi, The Foreigner (New Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1968) 165.
All subsequent references are to this edition and are included paranthetically within the text.

[2] Henry James, Princess Cassamassima (Middlesex: Penguin, 1977) 134.

[3] Robert M. Maclaver, The Ramparts We Guard (New York: MacMillan, 1950) 84.

[4] Saul Bellow, Seize The Day (New Delhi: Avon Books, 1977) 29.

[5] Walter Kaufmann, "The Inevitability of Alienation," Alienation, ed. Richard Schacht (London: Unwin, 1975) XXII.

[6] Nayantara Sahgal, A Time To Be Happy (New Delhi: Sterling, 1975) 151.

[7] R.S. Sharma, "Alienation, Accomodation and the Locale in Anita Desai's Bye Bye Blackbird," The Literary Criterion 14.4.1979:208.

[8] Arun Joshi, The Last Labyrinth (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1981) 54.

[9] Salman Rushdie, Grimus (London: Granada Publishers, 1975) 90.

[10] Arun Joshi, "Reply to Mr. Dua," 3 Sept. 1971, qtd in R.K. Dhawan, "The Fictional World of Arun Joshi," The Fictional World of Arun Joshi, ed. R.K. Dhawan (New Delhi: Classical Publishing Co., 1986) 18.

Billy Biswas: The Cultural Anomic

Usha K. “The problem of alienation in the fiction of Arun Joshi” Thesis. Department of English, University of Calicut, 1998

Chapter III

Billy Biswas: The Cultural Anomic

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, the second and the most moving novel of Arun Joshi also tells a tale of struggle, tension and conflict. Here again we find the novelist rejoicing in man's capacity to endure alienation and find affirmation of life's purpose by finding a solution to this tormenting problem. We also find here the articulation of the tensions as well as the difficult choices made by man to overcome them. If it was the principle of Karmayoga which influenced The Foreigner, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas seems to be inspired by the principles of Vedanta as well as the ancient Sankhya Philosophy expounded by Kapila. The Sankhya Yoga points out the distinction between Purusa (atman) and Prakriti. Normally one fails to distinguish between the two and hence has an exaggerated concept of the significance of worldly existence. But Billy, the protagonist is throughout aware of this illusion, yet in a dilemma not knowing how to take the right choice. Living in an illusory world, knowing all the while that he is destined to be elsewhere makes Billy suffer the problem of alienation. But towards the end, we find that the Purusa (atman) of the protagonist realises its freedom from a supposed state of bondage (bandha) and tries to attain a state of moksha.

Though in this novel too, the dominant motif is alienation, the state of mind of the protogonist is different from that of the protogonists of the other novels of Joshi. Unlike Sindi, who is wary of action, Billy is a man of action and conviction. His unquenchable urge to choose a primitive life is evident from the very beginning. Though born in "the upper upper crust of society,"[1] Billy is haunted by the awareness that the thirst for power, wealth, fame, etc., are meaningless. The portrayal of such a character reveals traces of Sankhya Philosophy. According to this theory, Purusa (atman) or the life-nomad is unattached and indifferent and never actually in bondage. "Man's problem is simply that his permanent, everpresent actual freedom is not realized because of the turbulent, ignorant, distracted condition of his mind."[2] Billy is unique in the sense that he shows the courage to renounce such a materialistic society which tried to entrap him and opt for a primitive world which offers some meaning to his alienated soul. Peter Christian Ludz's definition of alienation which considers it as a force that stimulates historical development some what agrees to this theory. "The 'Absolute' in order to realize, through the overcoming of this alienation, seeks true unity with itself and therewith it perfection."[3].

Like Joshi's most other protagonists, Billy Biswas too

was born with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth, as the son of a Supreme Court Judge in India. Billy had studied in an English Public School and was sent to New York by his parents to do research in engineering. An engineer, anthropologist and a multifaceted genuis, he is so well off that he can afford to stay in the richest area of New York. Yet strangely enough he chooses to live at Harlem which is "the most human place he could find" (9) is the first hint the reader gets, of his cultural alienation. He further protests against the false prejudices of the phoney society by studying anthropology instead of engineering. Anthropology helps him to reduce his sense of alienation to a considerable extent; it is a part of his effort to keep his identity.

Unlike Sindi Oberoi in The Foreigner, who is literally rootless, Billy has a family and a set of inherited traditional values behind. Hence he is not uprooted in the sense Sindi is. Nor is he an expatriate or exile. Yet he feels an acute sense of loneliness, boredom and rootlessness wherever he is. He feels the same kind of estrangement and alienation whether he is in the United States or among his family members in India. In fact, he is a very complex personality with unusual features that suit his strange interests. Romi Sahai, one of the very few people who understood Billy, confesses that most people considered

Billy as "a light hearted good sport without quite noticing the incongruity of his eyes or suspecting what went on in their dark depths" (12). His appalling apartment is stuffed with empty cans, cardboard boxes, rats and what not; Billy's set up reminds one of Edward Albee's The Zoo Story which presents Jerry, the protogonist, a social outcast. Jerry confronts Peter, a typical American bourgeois. While Peter has a complacent life, "an executive position with . . . a small publishing house, a comfortable home, the average number of children and the right status symbols,"[4] Jerry has no family and has lived in" a four-storey brownstone shabby rooming house"[5] with many other riffraff, brooding over his own rather sordid past.

Joshi unfolds the strange story of Billy Biswas as narrated by his closest friend and District Collector, Romi Sahai. It is through the eyes of the narrator that we get an insight into the strangeness in the character of Billy Biswas. However, apart from the role of the narrator, Romi himself grows into a character which gains almost equal importance as the protogonist. Romi's analysis of Billy's predicament is as the dilemma of a misunderstood soul. His father, for instance, who believes that man is governed only by engineering and by law does not give any importance to Billy's interests in anthropology. "Billy could have become a great civil servant if he had wanted to . . . But

anthropology! What can you do with anthropology?" (49-50), he wonders. Even Romi who claims to have understood Billy sometimes disappoints him. Billy once tries to explain to Romi, a strange dream which often haunts him." . . . the unusual abracadabra of dreams, lights and shadows, mist and a lot of floating bodies and that sort of a thing" (59). At the end he asks Romi whether it isn't an odd dream. Romi fails to answer. Billy looks at him speculatively and says "I guess it wouldn't look odd to some one who didn't understand" (60).

He decides to marry Meena hoping to find an understanding partner in her. Meena's inability to understand strikes Billy just after their engagement. On a return trip from Tughlakabad with friends Billy gets wild when a boy declares that all banjaras are thieves and their women whores. Billy has a tough fight with him. Later, Meena protests against Billy's behaviour "I don't know what is eating you," Meena said, "How are you going to be my wife, if you can't see what's eating me?" (66) is Billy's question which reflects his craving for being understood.

Among the pretentious friends and relatives like Meena, Billy feels totally isolated, estranged and rootless, thus reminding us of Edmund, one of a group of outsiders in Eugene O' Neill's <u>The Ice Man Cometh</u>. In his agonized quest

for selfhood or his lacerating feeling of estrangement from the world, Edmund desires to escape from his dreary daily existence into the night fog. "This fog was where I wanted to be . . . That's what I wanted . . . to be alone with myself . . ."[6] Billy too tries to escape into the unknown realm of the primitive world as a way of protest from the phoney materialistic society. His strange fascination for the primitive and the unknown begins at the impressionable age of fourteen after having a very stimulating experience. He accompanies an old friend of his uncle to a tribal village in Bhubaneswar. Fascinated by the tribal dance and songs, Billy is struck by a strange hallucination which kindles a revelation in him. "Something has gone wrong with me. This is where I belong. This is what I have always dreamt of" (15), Billy tells himself. But at that tender age, he is not capable of taking any bold step to fulfil his dreams and so resigns himself to what he thought was a normal course of life, once he returns from Bhubaneswar.

Yet this desire to belong to the primitive world coupled with the realization that he is unable to break the fetters of the modern world alienates Billy from everyone. Billy finds himself helpless and confused, juxtaposed between the two extremes of culture. And the resultant alienation leads him to choose anthropology instead of engineering. So also his choice of Harlem, the ugliest of

all the slums as his abode in New York is yet another manifestation of his sense of alienation from the bourgeois upper class society. But the tragedy is that Billy himself finds it difficult to a large extent to comprehend the cause of his alienation. Even in New York, far away from his family, Billy remains an alien. Yet it is not a conflict between the cultures of the East and the West that torments his soul but that between the primitive and the civilised cultures within himself. Though he tries his best to find his identity by adjusting to the much-flaunted social values, it makes his existence meaningless and normless. He strains himself to be a part of the tensions and conflicts of the civilised world, which has neither artistic nor intellectual life. The tortures of psychic starvation which civilised people proceed to suffer as described by D.H. Lawrence in his Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious, find graphic expression in Billy's own words:

> 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. Nobody remembered the old songs, or the meaning of the festivals. All the sensuality was gone. So was the poetry. All that was left was loud-mouthed women and men in three-piece suits dreaming their little adulteries (177).

It would be interesting to examine the behaviour of these egoistic and sophistic men in the light of the Sankhya philosophy. According to Kapila, the founder of the Sankhya theory, "Ahankara, the ego-factor causes us to believe that we feel like acting, that we are suffering, etc... where as Purusa, our real being, is devoid of any such aberrations. Ahankara is the misconception, conceit, supposition, or belief that refers all objects and acts of consciousness to an 'I' (aham)."[7] This Ahankara forces man to have a materialistic and commercial way of thinking. The mechanised, worldly life of the modern age is a reflection of this selfish and narrow-minded approach to life. Hence Billy's alienation is only an illustration of the alienation felt by any thinking, sensitive individual of this age, tormented by the mad rush for wealth, fame and power. Such an individual has only two choices before him --- either to pretend to be emotionally sterile like Sindi in The Foreigner or the young man in Edward Albee's The American Dream who laments that he has no emotion and that he can feel nothing or has to sacrifice his identity lest he be branded as a rebel. Billy initially chooses the second as the choice to discard all that one is expected to enjoy is not an easy thing. One is reminded here of Prince Sidhartha, who had to leave behind his wife and son, all his material possessions and prejudices to fulfill his life's mission. In fact, Billy finds it almost unthinkable to

break the social fetters and escape into a world of his own. So he tries to adjust himself to the usual chores of social life - a foreign education, business, marriage etc., but finds no satisfaction or a sense of belongingness in any of them. Hence his feeling of alienation grows to infinite proportions. He feels an emptiness within himself as much as he tries to attune himself to the civilized society. Unknowingly, he often falls into a trance, which is simply a continuation of the hallucination he had experienced in Bhubaneswar. He plays on the drums in a wild violent fervour in a party at George's house in New York. His drumbeats mesmerise the audience by transporting them into the primitive forests of the Congos. But later he himself fails to explain the cause of his strange behaviour. "I must have been disgustingly drunk, old chap, what else? I had no idea what I was doing" (22) is the only way in which he can react to it.

Among his strange fascinations like anthropology, witch-craft, primitive art, mentally deranged people etc., is Tuula Lindgran, a psychiatrist from Sweden with similar tastes. Billy finds a rapport with her obviously because she is able to understand the dilemma, the alienation and the need for belonging that tormented Billy. She is one of the few "who had any clue to what went on in the dark, unscrutable, unsmiling eyes of Bimal Biswas" (19). Obviously

it is Tuula, who discovers what is wrong with Billy. "Billy feels something inside him, but he is not yet sure" (23). She discloses to Romi that Billy is led by a great force which she terms "Urkraft . . . a primitive force" (23). She forsees from her professional experience, that Billy will never be able to free himself from this strong commanding force and will finally yield to it one day or the other. Billy's alienation is not essentially related to the East-West encounter as in the case of V.S. Naipaul or Nissim Ezekiel. Hence he feels the problem of alienation and identity crisis with as much intensity even after returning to India as he used to feel in New York. The ordered, systematic and hypocritic life of the bourgeois Indian society stifles him. He finds himself engulfed by a vaccum, standing in a void, surrounded by lifeless shadows. He realises the futility of living among men whose only aim in life is making and spending money. Their superficial sense of values, shallow egoism and prejudices baffle and disillusion him. This realisation dawns upon him as he stands in a temple, watching the aarti.

> As I stood there, my eyeballs restive behind the quivering lids, it suddenly dawned upon me that it was all a great waste, that the god who awaited me now was one to which no temples could be built. (18).

Billy reels out his antipathy towards these so-called civilized people as is reflected in his letters to his old friend Tuula:

> 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. . . (96).

These words show his sense of growing alienation from what he sees around him. These poignant words brings Joshi very close to the existential philosophers like Kierkegaard who preaches suspension of conventional moral obligation, or Nietzche who visualises its outright suppression. Nietzche's Zarathustra declares:

> Today the petty folk are become master. They all preach submission and humility and cunning and diligence and consideration and all the long etcetcra of petty virtue.[8]

Kapila's Sankhya Philosophy and Patanjali's Yoga theory also offer their own contributions to this way of thinking. According to Patanjali, the inherent perfection of a person is impaired by Avidya (ignorance), Asmita (ego), Raja (affection of every kind), Dvesa (hatred) and Abhinivesa (clinging to life). This is caused by the interplay of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas as described in both Sankhya and

Yoga theories. "Rajas is evident every where, among men, as the motivating force of our struggle for existence . . . It compels both men and beasts to strive for the goods of life, regardless of the needs and sufferings of others."[9] It is this handicap that forces the world to hang "on this peg of Money" (97). "Tamas is the power that holds the frame of the universe together --- the frame of every society and the character of the individual counterbalancing the danger of self-explosion that perpetually attends the restless dynamism of the principle of rajas" (Zimmer 297). It is this impairment that makes civilization nothing more than the making and spending money "And if there are those who are not busy earning and spending --- the so called thinkers and philosophers and men like that --- they are merely hired to find solution, throw light, as they say, on complications caused by this making and spending of money" (Zimmer 297). Such a civilization has nothing to offer Billy who is on an incessant quest for identity. This meaningless existence alienates and disillusions him.

> It seems, my dear Tuula, that we are swiftly losing what is known as one's grip on life. Why else this constant blurring of reality? Who am I? Whom are my parents? My wife? My child? (97).

Billy's calculation of finding meaning and

belongingness to his restless soul after marriage goes wrong. Meena, a true product of the civilization he hates, with a westernised upbringing and childish interests, is interested in high social life, but fails to understand the sensitive, complex, personality of Billy. Their discordant marital relationship reminds one of the growing alienation between Maya and Gautama in Anita Desai's Cry, the Peacock which makes Maya lament "What is the use? I am alone."[10] Maya in Cry, The Peacock like Nora Helmer in Ibsen's The Doll's House, suffers the pangs of anguish and alienation stemming from material discord and temperamental clash. Maya is one of those doomed and forsaken individuals who find no security and no response in a bitter and callous world. But Billy's aliention is not just emotional or sexual as in the case of Maya or Nora. It is rather, a spiritual stagnation. Billy coniders Meena nothing more than a boring silly girl, who fails to rise upto his expectations of an ideal wife. "I thought you were something other than what you are," (80) he accuses her. On the other hand, Billy too makes remarkable failure in his duties towards the lesser important desires of Meena. Instead without the slightest remorse he recklessly lies that he was whiling away his time with the cannibals of Australia knowing that she had been waiting for him. However this impulsive remark of going with cannibals becomes significant later when Billy makes his decisive choice to live with the tribals. These polarities in their

characters suffice to take their marriage to the verge of breaking up.

The disillusionment of married life kills the spark of bouyancy, instant witticism and optimism of Billy. At a young age he is reduced to "a wornout weary man incapable of spontaneous feeling"[11] like Som Bhaskar in The Last Labyrinth. "Gone was the staggering intelligence, the spectroscopic interests, the sense of humour" (70) complains his friend Romi. "It was as though some part of him had gone on strike" (70). Torn between the shallow, superficial world and the promising land of primitivism, Billy had every chance to take the wrong choice as that initially taken by Ratan Rathor, the protogonist in The Apprentice. But fortunately for Billy, the fetters of the material world are thrown to pieces by his sheer determination and the irresistable call of his soul.

Billy's altruism, which initially dominates his primeval nature forces him to suffer his alienation by suppressing his desire to escape so that his kith and kin may not despair for him. But the resultant tension becomes so acute for him that he cannot hold on to his decision for long. So his sudden disappearance into the Saal forests is not an impulsive action as suspected by his family. It was a cherished dream, growing day by day, refusing to be

suppressed any further. This strong urge forces him to vanish from the face of the earth without confronting anyone with the truth. Seeking refuge among the bhils for Billy is a more intense and significant quest than the deification of nature by Wordsworth, Tennyson or Thoreau. This is a pilgrimage, a spiritual quest, seeking wholeness and harmony in life. His determination is so intense and sincere that the havoc that would follow his disappearance least worries him, once the decision is taken. His renunciation of wife and son is again reminiscent of Prince Siddhartha's renunciation of all worldly pleasures. Billy leaves behind all his social ties without any remorse and walks into the wilderness of the Satpura hills. He "realise[s] through introspection, his possibilities and freedom of right choice,"[12] like Sindi in The Foreigner and Ratan Rathor in The Apprentice. This journey to self-realisation is possible to him only after meeting Bilasia, the tribal girl. Billy himself later recalls:

> 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-hour, it was not Bilasia I had been waiting for, but my future, my past, indeed the very purpose of my life (112-13).

The impact of the meeting with Bilasia is too

irresistable for Billy. It is not just a physical passion for one who has not touched his wife for the past six months and who has discovered that it is not sexual satisfaction that he seeks after his erroneous affair with Rima Kaul. A glimpse of Bilasia in her traditional Lugra and her voluptuous figure is a shattering and at the same time frightening experience for him. He discovers that he is moving towards an unknown, yet exciting road not yet taken by any sophisticated upper-class gentleman. This revelation of his destiny explodes his pent up emotions which he had been struggling to suppress till then.

> I don't know why, but the moment I sat down I started to cry, actually weep, something that I had'nt done for ages . . . I knew something was going to happen to me, I was terrified, as a child is terrified in the dark (119).

On the other hand he is sure this strange experience will give him relief from the boredom and alienation caused by the dominance of sterile intellect over inner strength of life. Hence he decides to make his choice, to fulfil his life-long desire to embrace the primitive life. This desire had manifested itself earlier in Billy's adolescence and had prompted him to run away from his surroundings. But the cruel bastardly civilization had forced him back to lead a

meaningless, alienated life amidst them. Siddhartha, too as early as 563 B.C., had to make such a difficult choice, The turning point in Siddhartha's life came when he met the poor, the ill and the dying.

> Those sights were followed by that of a recluse who had completely renounced the world and it led to his resolve that he would free himself from all worldly ties and . . . In pursuance of this resolve, he left the palace the same night, looking upon it as 'a palace of dust' and went away to a distant forest.[13]

Thus like Siddhartha who got enlightenment while doing penance under the bodhi tree, Billy too has his regeneration while sitting on a rock and contemplating. This is how he explains his fascinating experience:

> I certainly underwent a deep metamorphosis, that was, no doubt, responsible for all that I did subsequently. Layer upon layer was peeled off me until nothing but my primitive self was left trembling in the moonlight (121).

Ibsen depicts a similar crisis in his Peer Gynt where the protagonist is described as a man who, chasing after material gain, discovers eventually, that he has lost his self, that he is like an onion with layer after layer peeled

off and without a kernel.

Billy cannot resist the call of the elements of nature inviting him to come and join them. They seem to assure him that among them he will never feel estranged and rootless. The trees, the furry little animals, the moon and the stream seem to offer a promised land for the tired traveller. They reveal to him the blunder of holding on to what he had thought so far to be the real and only possible kind of civilization. They seem to tell him:

> 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 your fill (126).

Billy's response to their call touches upon a very significant universal problem. It is characteristic of all cultures that they build a man-made, artificial world superimposing it on the natural world in which man lives. But man can fulfil himself only if he remains in touch with the fundamental facts of his existence and if he can experience the exaltation of love and solidarity. If he is completely enmeshed in the routine of life, seeing nothing but the man-made appearance of the world, he will lose the grasp of himelf and the world. Hence there is in every culture the tension resulting from the conflict between

routine and the attempt to get back to the fundamental realities of existence. In this conflict Billy achieves at least a temporary success.

The unique manner in which Billy behaves to his students during the expedition in the Saal forest is illustrious of the stifling conflict of cultures which lay suppressed deep in his soul. The tribal dialect which flows out unknowingly and the possessive tone hint at Billy's unconscious effort to establish that the forest was his land and the students its intruders. Thus Billy with his split personality turns but to be Joshi's most complex characters, carrying within him traits of the civilised and the tribal self. He fears that these young men might do some harm to upset the natural balance of life in the forest. His own ambivalence is incredible even to himself. He supposes that this experience is a kind of psychic conditioning for the oncoming metamorphosis of his life. Unable to resist the invitation of Dhunia, the tribal chieftain, Billy goes to the village to watch the tribal dance at night. The wild dance, the music, the loud beats of the mandar, the liquor and the wild untamed beauty of Dhunia's daughter, Bilasia, drive Billy to the heights of ecstacy. For the first time in his life he is made aware of the mysterious force of the universe, while sitting among the tribals. He had so far been living in a society which runs madly after wealth, fame

and power. Inspite of being an anthropologist, interested in travelling wildly and in everything primitive he had never yet sat awake in the middle of the night to see the rising of the moon. But here, in the Maikala hills, he sits with a group of primitive people and, sharing their primitive excitement, waits for the rising moon:

> Earlier he had waited for degrees, for lectures, for money, for security . . . and for being normal and all those things that civilized men count as their duty . . . While he sat in the purple shadows, he had the first terrible premonition that he might not go back (137).

Billy comes to this decision not on an impulse but after a long thought. He is not just an angry young man taking an impulsive decision as a sign of social protest. He has come to this choice after realising the futility of searching for his identity and meaning in life in the sophisticated materialistic civilization. The same society which failed to understand him has branded him as strange and abnormal. Hence, he decides to bid farewell to that malicious, unrelenting society to choose an entirely different and exciting civilization of the primitive. A major force that leads Billy to take this bold decision is his fascination towards Bilasia, the symbol of the wild untamed beautiful forest. She is different from all the

other women that have appeared, yet failed to make a mark in Billy's life. Meena had misunderstood him, while Rima Kaul had driven him to the verge of self-estrangement. But in Bilasia, Billy is able to find the other half of his self. The sexual union with her is a realization of his own self, his identity, a meaning in life. It is a spiritual fulfilment --- the Purusa - Prakriti Samyoga as described in the Sankhya Philosophy. The Purusa and Prakriti cannot help standing together and co-operating with each other:

> Prakriti takes on form and structure in accordance with the needs of the Purusa. The whole course of evolution is determined by a purpose and this purposive interpretation of nature makes Prakriti meaningless in divorce from Purusa, in performing their own duties.[14]

In terms of psychoanalysis also, the same idea finds expression through a slightly different terminology. In the Jungian concept, we find references to the idealised union of the animus and the anima. In this context, the anima or the male principle in Billy and the animus or the female counterpart in Bilasia discover ideal oneness in their sexual union. Bilasia, for Billy is a symbol of the primitive world as contrasted with the artefacts of the city which Meena represents. The novelist employs these two female characters to suggest the incongruity of the

contrasting worlds. "The primitive Bilasia represents the Satpura Hills and through her, the author aims at connecting culture and tradition with modernity."[15]

By merging with Bilasia, Billy becomes like her, like the whole earth free from all ambition, all civilization. Billy later describes to Romi his desire for Bilasia "as closer to madness, the terrible madness of a man who after great sin and much suffering finally finds himself in the presence of his god" (142). Romi himself is convinced of Bilasia's magnetic power which casts Billy in a spell:

> She had that untamed beauty that comes to flower only in our primitive people. It was as though nature were cocking a snook at the Meena Biswases of the world, informing them once again how little it cared for their self-proclaimed superiority (143).

She reminds him of the tribal kings who "were driven to exile by those rapacious representatives of civilisation who had ruled the thrones of Delhi and still continued to do so" (143).

On that moonlit night, Billy is initiated into a new life. So "Billy Biswas, a refugee from civilisation, sat in the shadow of a Saal tree, a thousand miles away from home,

and gradually underwent his final metamorphosis" (141). He is suddenly made aware of the basic elements of life with which we are born into this world. The enlightenment, the brilliant brightness of the cosmic reality blinds him for a moment. A strange boldness surges through his being, mocking him for delaying his decision so far. He realises that what he has treasured so far as priceless was something as cheap as a heap of tinsel which passed for civilisation.

Billy's decision to join them is welcomed by the tribal community with mixed feelings of shock and jubilation. Dhunia the tribal chief, who guards the mythic world with his tough humanity and terror for outside world, has the cunning to read Billy's sensitive mind. He unhesitatingly accepts Billy as one among them, as his mahaprasad (friend). Among the Bhils, Billy feels relaxed, free, and finds a certain sense of divinity in human life. Thus Billy alienates himself from the outerworld in order to prevent self-estrangement.

Towards the last quarter of the novel, the reader is transported into a world of cultural richness which has been happily embraced by Billy Biswas. The novelist seems to suggest that there still remains a hope in the Indian context to reduce, if not mitigate, the problems of alienation and rootlessness by embracing the rich

traditional myths and folklore of rural India.

Billy who merges with the tribal culture with a surprising ease, calm and swiftness, is soon elevated to the position of the tribal man-god. Though for Billy his rebirth as a tribal is only a means to achieve his final goal, the tribals consider his arrival as a blessing, particularly due to his manifestation of strange powers. Billy, however, knows that he cannot stop with this new role as a tribal man-god. His search has only begun. In his unquenchable thirst for self-realisation, he is some what akin to the Indian rishis who aspire for moksha by discarding all worldly ambitions. He is willing to wait with patience till final revelation comes. "We lived at the subsistence level," (145) Billy explains his life to Romi:

> What kept us happy were . . . the earth, the forest, 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" (145).

He has no regrets, however, about the social responsibilities he had left unfinished in the other world. The thought of his parents, wife or son no longer bother him nor create in him any feeling of remorse. The only occasion when Billy shows some emotion is when he hears from Romi

that Rima Kaul died in a car crash. Yet, his alienation from the civilised world is almost complete by this time that he goes to the extent of calling the tribals as 'we' and the others as 'they'. Intelligent as he is, Billy has a sharp premonition of the consequences if the outside world came to know his whereabouts. Hence he requests Romi, before whom he appears after ten years, to keep the news of his being alive a secret. He warns Romi that it would be dangerous for all if they tried to reclaim him. His decision to reappear after a decade is taken when he hears that there would be a fight between Romi, the Collector and the tribals on his account. Billy is perfectly at home wearing only a loin cloth, as though he had never before belonged to the rich upper class society which believed in holding parties, wearing three-piece suits and making money. His strong, confident strides suggest that his feelings of alienation, lack of belongingness etc., are long forgotten problems. Undoubtedly, this exuberating self confidence of Billy transmits into the simple minds of the tribals too. They had been waiting for centuries for someone powerful enough to make their lives meaningful, eversince the death of their divine king. It is a case of mutual acceptance, understanding and respect. Billy's case is in some way similar to the experience of Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's The Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man. His voyage into the unknown realms of his inner self also reminds one

of Mathew Arnold's Scholar Gypsy who joined a company of vagabond gypsies - that old Oxford scholar who

> One summer morn forsook
> His friends, and went to learn the Gipsy lore,
> and roam'd the world with that wild brother hood
> . . . . . .
> But came to Oxford and his friends no more.[16]

Thus, by becoming one among the tribals, Billy becomes a part of the earth, throbbing with lifeforce and free from all social letters. He has a special language of communication which stands as a mediator between the bhils and nature. He carries the flame of the Chandtola in him which has started glowing at his appearance in the forest. The bhils interpret his language of communication as his skill in magical performances.

The tribal culture of the Satpura Hills opens before us a fascinating world of myths, legends and folklore. Billy becomes to the bhils someone more significant than a mere refugee. Their life, which is based on very subtle cultural beliefs, older than written laws is in a constant need of a driving force in order to sustain them through drought, hunger and poverty. They have waited for centuries for the reincarnation of the legendary king to redeem them. Hence they realize in Billy the fulfilment of their long awaited

dream. For them, "he is like rain on parched land, like balm on a wound. These hills have not seen the like of him since the last of our kings passed away " (36). Their hope is enlivened with the sudden glowing of the Chandtola, which according to their belief, glows only in the presence of a tribal king. Dhunia justifies Billy's decision by saying that the call of Kala pahar cannot be resisted by any one. It calls anyone for the simple reason "that he may know who was" (163). This is an honest answer to the burning, tormenting question that has drawn Billy upto the Maikala Hills in search of its answer. He tries to find a solution to these seething problems of alienation and meaninglessness by seeking roots in a culture which he knows better than the one in which he was born and bred. We get a hint of Billy's deep understanding of the tribal culture in an earlier context when he has an argument with his father on the Krishna murder case. The father argued that the educated couple's sacrifice of their son Krishna to Goddess Kali on the pretext of curing him of leukaemia was premeditated. Billy ruled out this argument saying that he might have committed the crime during the period of temporary insanity in which he might have received a message from Goddess Kali. That the boy was cured of his disease after the sacrifice is ample proof for Billy to convince his father that in spite of all that man has acheived, there is some unknown incomprehensible force which controls him invisibly. It is

this strong conviction that had made him dissatisfied with the materialistic concept of life and urged him, in the form of an urkraft to seek the ultimate reality. This deep knowledge of the primitive culture comes to his assistance while dealing with the problems of the tribals.

The story of the legendary king and the Chandtola, with its numerous versions, gives a new dimension to the novel towards the end. The inclusion of the mythopoeic theme reveals a deft and imaginative myth maker in Arun Joshi. Myth making is the life process of the tribal culture which comprises of folklore and legend. One is reminded of the myth of Percival seeking the Holy Grail for hope and fertility, which finds a mention in T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland." James Joyce also makes use of myths to suggest a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy, which is contemporary history. In this regard, Joshi's closeness to Eliot, Joyce and Yeats cannot be ruled out.

The new phase in Billy's life as a tribal does not suffice to answer all his existential queries. Undoubtedly there is no question of his returning to the world which he had left behind for good. However he still struggles to achieve his final goal of self realisation. Billy himself

confesses:

> Becoming a primitive was only a first step, a means to an end. Of course, I realised it only after I ran away. I realised then that I was seeking something else. I am still seeking something else (189).

He realizes that this something is so hard to achieve that he probably will have to wait indefinitely. For essentially, this is a search for his self, these elements of the ultimate within himself --- call it God or any other name. The advocates of Sankhya Philosophy call this as Jeevanmukti, or

> freedom while still alive. When a person has become fully enlightened and has transcended all the weakness of human flesh, when such a person departs from the life on earth, the Purusa remains as pure spirit, wholly emancipated from Nature. That condition of isolation is described as final aloofment (Kaivalya).[17]

Perfection means here a liberation from physical bonds. The spiritual goal is achieved by merely throwing off the natural. The Vedanta too which is looked upon as the most perfect expression of Indian thought, has references to this particular state of mind:

> When the ultimate truth is realised one attains Moksha, . . . which is not merely knowing Brahman but being Brahman. The person who has reached this state of mind is a Jeevanmukta or a 'free man' . . . He is in life and yet lifted out of it . . . When a Jeevamukta casts off the physical body at death, he becomes freed in the final sense of the term (Vidhehamukti) (Hiriyanna, 116).

It is this ultimate truth that Billy seeks and which raises him to the level of a seer and philosopher. The ordinary man who might fail to understand the working of Billy's mind is bound to label his strange decision as a stereotyped childish escapade. But for him it is either follow the call or be condemned to total decay. The price of not making such choices is 'corruptions', according to Billy, which he shuns to accept a better and richer life. But it is such a world that tries to retrieve him with its deadly fetters strangling him to death in the process. Billy's judgement of the most inhuman and brutal way in which such a society would react proves true when the news of Billy's reappearance reaches his relatives. Romi's wife, who is a part of the bourgeois cannot hold the secret of Billy's existence inspite of her husband's repeated requests. She feels that Billy should be saved and returned to the people whom he loved and who loved him. She is just a

representative of the ordinary insensitive society which is incapable of comprehending the complexities of Billy's sensitive mind. They can never read what conflicts, what torments occur in the dark recesses of a thinking soul. Hence she cannot refrain from leaking the secret out to Meena Biswas. The only person who reads Billy's mind to some extent is Romi. The Biswases pay no heed to Romi's repeated pleas to leave Billy alone and Mr. Biswas even goes to the extent of declaring that he will die on Romi's doorstep if he does not get back his son. Romi fights with tooth and nail to save Billy and social upheaval that is sure to follow as a consequence. But unfortunately, things go beyond Romi's control because the Biswases fail to realise the gravity of the situation. They accuse Romi of being cruel, irrational and childishly selfish. Romi tries to explain Billy's feelings, the reason for taking this strange choice, his hallucinations, his position in the forest at present etc., but realises they are not willing to understand the situation which admittedly is too complex for them to digest. Meena, like any ideal Indian wife condescends to forgive his idiosyncracies, including his affairs with Rima Kaul or even Bilasia. They hope that "once we meet him, all would be well" (206). When Romi does not give in to their request, Meena loses self-control and screams at him: "You just don't want him to be happy. You are selfish and rotten" (207). Things take an unpleasant

turn when Mr. Biswas in sheer desperation goes to the Chief Secretary and requests him to order Romi, the District Collector, to find Billy. Thus Romi, inspite of his unwillingnes is dragged into the final catastrophe. Being a part of the bureaucracy,Romi cannot escape from the muddle. He is left without a choice. But as a last effort, Romi intervenes in the plan of killing Billy and tries to save the situation.

The man-hunt which gathers momentum after one of the tribals kills a havildar, takes the dimensions of the search for a much sought after convict. His quest for identity, is obstructed by the selfish materialistic world which shoot him down. Like Samuel Becket's Murphy who meets death in the middle of his pilgrimage to self-realization, Billy too is interrupted on the way to his goal. Becket's Murphy who abandoned the civilized world which he considers "a colossal fiasco,"[18] Graham Green's Querry of A Burnt Out Case who escapes from the sickly European civilization to a remote leper colony in the Congo, and Billy all are on a spiritual voyage searching for something, some meaning in life and solution to the problem of alienation. While Billy tries desperately to cling to the primitive world which is his life-force, the materialistic world tries to pull him back to another phase of meaningless, mechanical, alienated existence among them. In their bid to reclaim him, they end

up in destroying his freedom for opting a happy, meaningful life. By killing him, they destroy the aspirations of not only Billy but those of the bhil tribe as well. Romi becomes responsible for Billy's tragic death. Though Romi's intervention in the search is to alert Billy of the impending danger, the tribals mistake him to be their traitor. Of all people, Billy too suspects that Romi had deliberately staked him at the cost of his prestige and selfish interests. Hence the last words of Billy "You bastards" (233) has a deeper significance. It is an expression of indignation at the betrayal of friendship. Moreover, it is a bitter accusation of the thoughtless, meaningless assault of the civilized world on his birthright for privacy and freedom. "It is Billy's final verdict on civilization which to him is not natural but bastardly."[19]

This civilization, with its superficial and polished banalities, failed to realize that life's meaning does not lie in the outside world, but within. There are innumerable chambers of the soul which are to be unravelled in the search for meaning in life. If one tries to pursue this search doggedly, society considers him as 'strange' and a fit case for psychiatrists. Billy is well aware of the hostile attitude of the society towards such seers from the very beginning. It would be interesting to recall once again in

this context the argument between Billy and his father about the Krishna murder case. His father's attitude towards the act of murder reveals the reaction of the society towards such an unusual psychic phenomenon.

Billy's intuition about the impending danger in reappearing among the civilised people proves true at the end of the novel. Yet he hopes better treatment since Romi seemed different from the other members of the bourgeois society. This shows Billy's capacity of infinite love and compassion, the qualities that are rarely manifest these days. The Vedanta theory considers this capacity of infinite love possible only in the state of jeevanmukti. Such a person will necessarily continue to work and help others. "The constraint of obligation is replaced in that stage by the spontaniety of love."[20] Hence Billy decides to take the risk of emerging out of his recluse after a long gap of ten years in order that Romi could be saved from being stung by the poisonous fangs of his own society for failing to trace him. It is ironical that the very same friend is destined to become responsible for the tragic death of Billy. Incidentally, the end of Billy's story has shadows of O' Neill's play, The Hairy Ape. Both Yank and Billy meet with their tragic end, while on their way to explore the profoundest human dilemma of belongingness.

It is also pertinent to point out at this point that Romi, the narrator, reminds us of Marlow in Conrad's Lord Jim who categorically states that he was not able to comprehend his friend fully. "He was not --- if I may say so --- clear to me. He was not clear."[21] Romi too disclaims to have understood Billy in the proper sense:

> If . . . I propose to relate Billy's story, it is not so much because I claim to have understood him as it is on account of a deep and unrelieved sense of wonder that in the middle of the twentieth century, in the heart of Delhi's smart society, there should have lived a man of such extraordinary obsessions (7).

Romi too is depicted as a victim of the problem of alienation. But, being less sensitive than Billy, his suffering is comparatively less. A helpless and silent sufferer, no doubt, Romi somehow manages to fit into the set pattern of the bourgeois society. Yet there are times when he too muses about the existential dilemma. His problem of alienation arises largely from the problem of being misunderstood, as in the case with Billy. To quote Romi, "As I grow old, I realise that the most futile cry of man is his impossible wish to be understood. The attempt to understand is probably even more futile" (7). Though Romi does not claim to have understood Billy, the latter's

hallucinations get hold of him and haunt him disturbingly every now and then.

> As I took out a bottle, my glance fell outside. . . The wind gently tapped a stray twig of the bamboo that grew outside against the window pane 'Come, come, come, come', they all said. Who were they calling now ? Surely, not the collector himself; I shook my head vigorously, trying to shake off, as it were, the disturbing vision (122).

While standing on the ruins of an ancient temple with Billy, Romi has another strange experience. The invisible force of the primitive world, the inexplicable presence of a power which controls the whole cosmos seems to overwhelm him as he stands on the top of the Chandtola.

> . . . The shadow had moved further taking me entirely in its embrace. All of a sudden I had the feeling that we were not alone, that there was another presence besides us on the darkening platform . . . It seemed rather good not evil, but terribly old. 'Beware', it seemed to say. 'There are things that the like of you may never know' (191-92).

He functions as a medium through which Billy communicates his complex feelings to the reader. This pivotal role as a

link between the reader and the protagonist endears Romi to Billy. He has concern, compassion and deep attachment for his strange friend and he tries his best to save him from the final catastrophe. But, as if luck would have it, Romi himself gets alienated from his own society in the process. When Billy's relatives chase Billy down, Romi's pleas to leave Billy alone evokes no positive response. This makes him feel misunderstood. His alienation is complete when he is ordered by the Chief Secretary of State to trace out Billy. Romi even goes to the extent of threatening to resign his job as Collector rather than hunting with the hounds for the blood of his dear friend. The diehard authorities firmly refuse to view the situation from Romi's standpoint. Their apparent concern for Billy owes to the fact that he is the son of a dignitary. His identity is reduced to that of the son of a government officer. Romi finds this attitude highly irritating and irrational. His feeling of alienation from this hypocritic society grows with their reprehensive attitude towards Billy. He is ashamed that he too is one among them. Romi remains a helpless spectator while Billy is hounded out of his hiding place and shot dead before his eyes. This bastardly act is such a shattering blow to Romi that he hates all and sundry - the Biswases, the corrupt police force, for throttling the aspirations of an innocent, helpless young man. The tribals, including Bilasia and Billy himself, misinterpret

Romi's arrival with the police force as a planned assault by a traitor. Romi miserably fails to explain his stand to them too and hence cannot help being misunderstood. That Billy too fails to understand him is implied in his last words addressed to Romi.

The alienation of Meena Biswas, on the other hand, works on an entirely different plane. Though the character of Meena does not have as much psychological depth as that of Billy or even Romi, she has her own reasons for being alienated and isolated. Her alienation arises mainly out of a wrong marital relationship which turns out to be a bitter experience for her. A talkative, westernised beauty that she is, Meena Biswas has a polished, superficial behaviour, thanks to her urban upbringing. It is only natural that she fails to comprehend the complexities of Billy's character. Billy reminisces much later that their marriage would have been saved if only Meena had possessed a rare degree of empathy or even a sufficient idea of human suffering. "These, I am afraid, she did not have. Her upbringing, her ambitions, twenty years of contact with a phoney society --- all had ensured that she should not have it" (185). The marital discords take root even before their wedding. She judges her husband by her own standards which unfortunately are too low for a complex personality like Billy. Hence she feels alienated from Billy and becomes disillusioned in

life. She reminds one of Tara Banerji in Bharati Mukherji's Tiger's Daughter who rushes back home, owing to her husband's lack of understanding. She is also in a minor way akin to Maya in Anita Desai's Cry The Peacock, who pines after an unhappy marriage and cries:

> The rolling cotton-balls, the flying yellow leaves, the surging clouds of dust, all seemed to flee and yet could not . . . and returned to continue their struggle for escape. Something similar heaved inside me . . . a longing dread, search for solutions deeper.[22]

Though a comparison of Meena with the heroines of Anita Desai might sound slightly far-fetched since Joshi's women characters are not so dominating and prominent as their counterparts in Anita Desai's works, Meena is an interesting character and a typical house wife of the creamy layer of Indian society who wants her husband to accompany her to parties and enjoy the company of her posh friends. Naturally Meena feels let down when Billy repeatedly forgets that she has been pining for him. Her feeling of being misunderstood is almost similar to what Nora Helmer feels in Henrik Isben's The Doll's House. Nora laments: ". . . it dawned upon me that for eight years I had been living here with a strange man, and had borne him three children --- Oh! I can't bear to think of it!"[23] She has no inclination to

understand Billy's strange interests let alone his feeling of alienation. This is not because she does not love him but she is incapacitated to decipher his strange behaviour. Meena Biswas is only an average woman who is unable to tackle complex situations. Whenever she is confronted with his strange mannerisms she cannot help nagging him with questions like "Why did you marry me if this is how you intended to behave?" (79) Her inability to communicate to him her disillusionment widens the gulf between them. Her indignation is only natural when Billy remarks that he married her because he thought she was something other than what she actually was. Her alienation arises from the suspicion that he is having an illicit affair. Meena in despair seeks the advice of a third person to solve her problem. She confesses to Romi, whom she approaches for advice, "He hasn't touched me for six months" (78). This slip of the tongue reveals the extent to which she has grown distant from her husband. Billy's indifference to Meena's dilemma only helps to add fuel to fire. Still, despite all her disappointments, when the inevitable incident of Billy's disappearance takes place, she does not give up hope of a reunion. It is yet another instance of her inability to understand Billy. Whil Romi is certain that Billy prefers to stay away from her, she goes on hoping that we would return to her one day. Subject to her own limitations, she shows profound magnanimity to him for all his past sins and

misdemeanour. At the same time, Meena is a true representative of the modern woman who refuses to break down on hearing the news of either his escapade or even his death later. Inspite of her love for her husband she never agrees to conform to his strange ideals. Thereby Meena, like Geetha in Joshi's The Last Labyrinth testifies to the farcical nature of married life and the illusory quality of male-female relationship.

These comparatively minor characters, apart from the protagonist, help the novelist in highlighting the universal significance of the problem of alienation using various narrative devices. Joshi is prominent among the recent Indian novelists writing in English to experiment with form which emerges from what Stephen Spender calls "the exploration of the limits of the author's sensibility."[24] Thus for craftsmanship, he draws strength from devices of the French experimental novelists such as adopting Camus' narrative technique of interior monologue. "Joshi invents interior speech of labyrinthine darkness, a linguistic transformation of the inner subjectivity beneath the Indian and American cultural structures,"[25] according to Devinder Mohan. The argument that alienation is not the dominant motif in Joshi's novels would be a reductive approach to an understanding of his fiction. He does not write fiction to a formula, rather he grapples with the moments of acute

trying situations in human life. He experiments with the medium of literature for studying man's predicament in the light of the motives of action, and the reaction of his action on his psyche. "My novels," says Joshi, "are essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and of myself."[26] This statement echoes the influence of the existentialists like Camus, Sartre and Kierkegaard who have not only contributed to existentialism but have also given new dimensions to the problem of alienation in their writings.

Joshi's treatment of the theme of alienation in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is an attempt to find viable alternatives for "the most futile cry of men" (7) to be understood in a smart society. This is the predicament of an alienated personality of the modern world filled with growing hostility, discontent, urbanisation, changing values, psychological maladjustments etc., in which alienation has become a part of life. The result is that estrangement from self and from society is almost a common experience. Hence The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is the psychograph of an alienated hero, who is perhaps an unparalleled character in the whole gamut of Indo-English fictional characters.

The novel is remarkable not only for the fascinating

theme of alienation but also his method of narration as well as the techniques employed such as contrast, controlled development of characters, etc. The alienation theme is highlighted by contrasting the two worlds --- the primitive and the anglicised upper class Indian society. Contrast is also maintained between attitudes, characters and locale by employing certain images, as well as through description. The protagonist's split personality reveals many oddities in his behaviour. At one time, he is attracted to the civilized charm of Meena Chatterjee, at the other, he falls for Bilasia's untainted beauty. The contrasting sense of values and attitudes manifested in the two different worlds accentuate the feeling of alienation on the part of the protagonist. The conflict between the contrasting cultures are depicted with exceptional confidence using the images, archetypes and motifs extracted from both the worlds and interweaving them to create a natural flow of the subject matter. The contrast between light and shadow, between the known and the unknown, the immediate and the remote, proves the successful craftsmanship of Arun Joshi.

Apart from his excellent narrative skill, what makes Arun Joshi significant is his conscious effort to realise the Indian sensibility. He is not a mere imitator of the French existentialists who generally "acknowledge themselves

to be pessimists."[27] His protagonists try to overcome self-estrangement and social alienation by accepting the wisdom of the Vedanta, the Bhagavad Gita or the Sankhya - Yoga. To assess the Hindu existential concern in Joshi's fiction it is necessary to have a familiarity with the basic assumptions of Hindu thought. It synthesises the metaphysical speculation and existential concern so that it is philosophy and religion at once. William Barrett has rightly said:

> . . . the motive of an oriental's taking up the study of philosophy is altogether different from that of a western student . . . Philosophy is the soul's search for salvation, . . . deliverance from suffering and evils of the material world.[28]

The Vedic as well as Non-vedic schools of Indian philosophy have a 'Darsana' of seeing beyond the horizons of time while recognising the restlessness of the temporal life and the apparent indifference of the cosmos. While the western existential analysis of the empirical ego leads them back wards into the dark regions of nothingness, the Hindu antarmuktibhava (introspection) through Karmajnana and Bhakti leads to the realisation of the Eternal being which gives Moksha (release) from the perplexities of the Samsara (material world). As the individual withdraws his soul from

all outward events, and gathers himself inwardly through meditation, a strange experience dawns upon him and reveals to him the vision of the cosmic order and Karma (moral order). Such a person becomes a Yogi who leads his worldly life as Karmayogi in Vedanta or Jeevanmukta in the Sankhya Yoga Theory.

It is against this background that Arun Joshi's existential concerns need to be analysed. He is concerned with the impact of modern civilization on traditional values and moral certitudes. With the loss of religious faith man is spiritually displaced and uprooted. Joshi explores this sense of uprootedness in all his novels, especially the first three. Joshi himself comments thus:

> The first three, to me seem concerned generally about questions of identity and, probably, ethics. The protagonists feel truncated, unfulfilled in some way. There is a withdrawal from the world, then a return to it, the process making them somehow more whole.[29].

This suggests a progress from the initial sense of absurdity and alienation in life. This pattern is in agreement with the Hindu current of thought which makes Joshi's novels different from the western existential novels. His protagonists save themselves from the verge of self-

estrangement through a yearning for affirmation, an irrepressible native cultural thrust, and overcome the dualism that dictates anguish. The protagonist reaches the critical point from where he descends to a final catastrophe which leads to self introspection. If it was June's death in The Foreigner, it is seduction of Rima Kaul in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas which causes the protagonist's introspection of the very process and helps them to regain their subjectivity. If Sindi realises the operation of the Law of Karma in The Foreigner, Billy in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is influenced by the principles of the Sankhya - Yoga and the Vedanta. As a free subject, he intuitively apprehended chaos before. The absurd hero thus evolves into a Karma Yogi or Jeevanmukta and overcomes despair and alienation. The affirmation is not reached through a mystical leap of faith nor is it attempted to be proved rationally. It is because the Hindu conception of myth does neither exalt nor give up reason but enriches it by making reason realise.

The existential concern informs the formal organisation and the choice of fictional techniques in Arun Joshi's works. In them, the characters determine the situation instead of the usual unfolding of characters by situation. The protagonists are neither cultural representatives nor social types but individuals, who choose for themselves in

situations. Arun Joshi's fiction thus, formally and thematically, expresses an existential concern which is basically a Hindu concern and not merely an offshoot of western existentialism.

Notes

[1] Arun Joshi, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1986) 9. All subsequent references are to this edition and are included paranthetically within the text.

[2] Heinrich Zimmer, "Sankhya Psychology, Sankhya and Yoga," Philosophies of India, ed. John Campbell (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1951) 317.

[3] Peter Christian Ludz, "'The Phenomenology of Mind,' A Forgotten Alienation Concept," Alienation: Problems of Meaning, Theory and Method, ed. Felix Geyer and David Schweitzer (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1781).

[4] Edward Albee, The Zoo Story (New York: 1963) 7.

[5] Albee 9.

[6] Eugene O' Neill, The Ice Man Cometh (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1974) 15.

[7] Zimmer 319.

[8] Friedrich Neitzche, Thus Spake Zarathusthra, trans. A Till (London: 1933) 176.

[9] Zimmer 297.

[10] Anita Desai, Cry, The Peacock (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1980) 22.

[11] Arun Joshi, The Last Labyrinth (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1981) 14.

[12] M. Madhusudan Rao, "The Hindu Existential Concern in Joshi's Fiction," When East Meets West: Indian Thought in Anglo Indian and Indo English Fiction, ed. Rao, Adapa Ramakrishna and M. Sivaramakrishna (New Delhi: Sterling, 1994) 160.

[13] M. Hiriyanna, "Non Vedic Schools," The Essentials of Indian Philosophy (London: Allen, 1949) 70.

[14] Hiriyanna, "Sankhya Yoga," The Essentials of Indian Philosophy 126.

[15] Parvathy Jeevan, "Image of Woman in the Novels of Arun Joshi," Commonwealth Quarterly 16.41 June --- September (1990): 27.

[16] Mathew Arnold, "The Scholar Gypsy," The Penguin Book of English Poetry, ed. G.B. Harrison (London: Penguin, 1950) 391.

[17] Hiriyanna, "Sankhya Yoga," The Essentials of Indian Philosophy 116.

[18] Samuel Beckett, Murphy (London: Routledge and Co., 1938) A Jupiter Book 1969. 123.

[19] C.N. Srinath, "The Fiction of Arun Joshi: The Novel of Interior Landscape," The Literary Criterion 12. 2-3 (1976): 126.

[20] Hiriyanna, "Sankhya Yoga," The Essentials of Indian Philosophy 174.

[21] Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim (New York: Doubleday, 1925) 177.

[22] Anita Desai, Cry, The Peacock 35.

[23] Henrik Ibsen, The Doll's House (Madras: MacMillan, 1982) 80.

[24] Stephen Spender, The Making of a Poem (New York: Norton, 1962) 81.

[25] Devinder Mohan, "The Language of the Splintered Mirror: The Fiction of Arun Joshi," ARIEL 14.4 October (1983) 20.

[26] Arun Joshi, Reply to Mr. Dua, 3 Sept. 1971 qtd in R.K. Dhawan, "The Fictional World of Arun Joshi," The Fictional World of Arun Joshi, ed. R.K. Dhawan (New Delhi: Classical Publishing Co., 1986) 18.

[27] John Macquarrie, "'What is Existentialism?' The Existentialist Style of Philosophizing," Existentialism: An Introduction, Guide and Assessment (New York: Penguin, 1985) 17.

[28] William Barret, Irrational Man (New York: Doubleday, 1962) 5.

[29] Arun Joshi, "News Letter," Association for Common wealth Literature and Language Studies, Mysore 10 January (1982): 5.

Being and Becoming in The Last Labyrinth

Usha K. “The problem of alienation in the fiction of Arun Joshi” Thesis. Department of English, University of Calicut, 1998

Chapter IV

Being and Becoming in The Last Labyrinth

The theme of alienation and estrangement is an ultimate subject throughout Joshi's literary creation. The Last Labyrinth exposes the frailty of the human psyche afflicted by the tensions and conflicts of the world. If Sindi in The Foreigner is the paradigm of rootlessness Billy Biswas stands as a cultural anomic. While The Apprentice depicts the mental trauma of Ratan Rathor who encounters social and political degradation of the community, The Last Labyrinth highlights the dilemma of its protagonist caught between faith and scepticism. This chapter would attempt to examine the novelist's achievement in making a subjective response to the angst of present life and orchestrating the inner anguish using apt images and symbols. It would also analyse Joshi's preference of solving psychic conflicts by a curious linking of the Jungian concept of individuation as psychological maturing with the Indian tradition of viewing psychology as an integral part of philosophy.

The protagonist Som Bhaskar's alienation stems from the disharmony between the two worlds within him - his western education and eastern upbringing. Confronted by these conflicting forces of a native heritage rich in tradition and complexity as also an intricate heritage overrun by western

nation he remains an eternal wanderer. Som, who wages a pitched battle against the dark shadows in his mind is the projection of any young, intelligent, western educated Indian. One may recall that even Swami Vivekananda, the great exponent of Hindu philosophy was initially tormented by the conflict between faith and scepticism. However, fortunately for him his very first meeting with Sree Ramakrishna helped to eliminate the confusion from his mind.[1]

A coveted social status, financial security or happy family life offers no solution to the strange cry within him of "I want, I want."[2] This desperate cry of his soul that goes unheeded in life's labyrinths is a manifestation of the spiritual voids in him, which reminds us of Saul Bellow's Henderson whose spiritual quests lead him to the dark forests of Africa.

Som Bhaskar mistakes his longings to be for more money, power or fame. Hence he forces himself to buy new companies hoping that it will help him to smother the desperate cries of his soul. It is with this intention that he meets Aftab Rai, the business tycoon in the Inter-continental Hotel in Delhi. However, the chance meeting with Aftab's wife, Anuradha, becomes a turning point in Som's life. That strange beauty with a mysterious identity

bowls him over. "She could have been from Bengal, from Sikkim, from the valleys of Nepal" (12). Rating himself as a worn-out, weary man of thirty five, incapable of spontaneous feeling, he wonders why he was overwhelmed with passion on seeing her. Hence he is irritated when she snubs him, "A Bhaskar, what is a Bhaskar doing in business?" (13).

The unexpected visit to the Durgah is a painful experience to Som. The sight of the tombs of the seven Sultans and the translation of the Urdu song, "When the dagger of submission has killed you, there will come new lives from unseen worlds" (16), confirms his doubts about the implications of the song. "Isn't it that the seen world has nothing to offer which makes people wait for the unseen? They too, had been, like him. Wanters all" (16). These questions are in conformity with the thinking of the psycho analyst Charles Drekmier:

> Before men united in civil societies, they were governed by the rule of the strong, But there is a golden age in the life of man. The quest innate in man is for this golden age before the organism had distinguished itself from its surroundings.[3]

This quest draws Som to the alluring charm of Anuradha. Setting aside his plans of buying the share he tries to forget his anxieties and uncertainities at least temporarily

in the company of Anuradha. Incidentally, this questioning trait is inherited by Som from his father who had a persistent obsession with the First Cause of things. His father speaks out his anxiety thus. "I believe in science, yes, but science cannot solve the problem of the causes. not many realise this paradox" (26). Like his father, Som too believes in the rationality of science. Hence he can not accept his mother's blind faith in God. He feels that it was her senseless faith in Lord Krishna's healing powers that led to her untimely death due to cancer. The teenaged son is at a loss to know whose approach is right in making life meaningful. This dilemma makes him alienated from society as such. His alienation has become so acute and bereft of all sentiments that tears fail him even at the time of his mother's death.

> I saw his [father's] tears and the heaving of his chest, but I did not cry. Behind my eyes, and in the cavities of my skull, the same strange hollowness roared endlessly (26).

This reminds one of Meursault's detached attitude at the sight of his mother's corpse in Camus' The Outsider.

Som mistakes the restless wanderings of his mind as hunger for sex and consequently experiments with many sexual affairs. It is the lure of lust for Anuradha which drags

him from Bombay to the ancient city of Benares to join her disregarding his varied business preoccupations. At the Lal Haveli, the abode of the Aftab, he finds himself in a network of labyrinths which is similar to the working of his own mind. The ancient Haveli with its mysterious mazes, traditional songs, dance and rituals vaguely remind us of Naipaul's Hanuman House which is the symbol of the conventional Indian world with all its superstitions and rituals.

> Among the tumble-down timber and corrugated iron buildings in the High Street at Arwacas, Hanuman House stood like an alien white fortress . . . When the narrow doors on the Tulsi store on the ground floor were closed, the house became bulky, impregnable and blank . . .[4]

Som, a product of the cosmopolitian city, finds himself alienated in the ancient city steeped in supersition. He wonders at the seemingly contented attitude of Aftab who mocks at Som's dilemma "It is a great relief to know that there is no new thing under the sun . . . For people like you it must be different" (38-39). Som replies rather woefully, "I am still running around looking for some new hing under the sun" (39). Som reflects disbelievingly about Aftab's words. He feels that no one can escape from the feeling of alienation in the labyrinths of the Haveli which

was the symbol of the intricate workings of the human mind.

> Here was a void of its own kind and Aftab's ancestors had filled it in their own way . . . Could Aftab get away from the legacy and fill this emptiness with plastic powder? (39)

Som suspects even Anuradha to be suffering from some kind of alienation, as he finds her in the Blue Room, "Staring into the vacancy of crepuscular darkness" (40) around her. Joshi's imaginative reach is reflected in providing such powerful motifs to probe deeper into the mysteries of man's consciousness.

> What is unmistakably there in Joshi's <u>oeuvre</u> is the subtle juxtaposition of <u>void</u> and <u>labyrinth</u> as two modes of making sense in life. Whether one should choose to apprehend the void or the labyrinth is left to oneself.[5]

The visit to the funeral pyres in the Manikarnika Ghats might be just an ordinary journey for Aftab or Anuradha. But for Som, it is a spiritual quest which leads to another shattering experience of the voids. The smell of burning flesh and bursting of bones remind him of his parents' death which had orphaned and alienated him in the impressionable years of adolescence. Kenneth Keniston, the noted psychoanalyst who has made an indepth study about the

intricate workings of human mind comments thus about the teenage syndrome: "The more marked the felt contrast between the bliss one leaves and the emptiness one enters, the greater the foot-dragging, diversions and anger."[6] Hence, recalling those sad days, Som now reflects, "It is the voids of the world, more than its objects that bother me" (47). The visit also reminds him of a similar experience while standing in the Ajanta Caves. There, the walls had seemed to cave in towards him and to recede immediately thereafter. On another occasion, while flying to Honolulu from America, Som was alarmed by a sudden appearance of the dawn which "lit up the empty spaces of the sky like a candle does the dome of a tomb" (47). Interestingly, whenever a tragedy, great or insignificant, occurred in his life, he has experienced such voids.

The ominuous silence of Aftab and Anuradha during the strange journey and the mystery behind their purpose of taking him along have their repercussions on Som's sensitive mind. His anxieties and uncertainties are amplified since he has taken this expedition as a search for his identity. This theme of anxiety, alientionn, etc., often recur in the writings of the western existentialist writers too, like Jaspers, Marcel, Paul Tillich, Camus, etc. Tillich wryly comments:

> Man is drawn into the world of objects and has

> lost his subjectivity in it. But he is still aware of what he has lost or is continuously losing. He is still man enough to experience his dehumanisation as despair.[7]

It would be interesting to see how the Indian philosophy analyses this existential dilemma. In the philosophy of Upanishads too, it is the self that forms the centre of interest. Man's quest for meaning in life is aimed at the highest truth which reveals that the self of man is the greatest reality. This knowledge of the self further clarifies the fact that all our limitations of experience, all our passions and antipathies, all that is ignoble and small in us, that is transient and finite are nothing but false. Emancipation is not a new acquisition. We are always emancipated. But unfortunately we do not realise it. Our belief that we are destined to suffer rebirth and thousands of other troubles are just false beliefs, born out of the ignorance of the true nature of our self.[8] It is this realisation that differentiates the Upanishadic philosophy from the western existential philosophy. In the light of the foregoing analysis it is evident that Som's difficulty in discovering his identity owes mainly to the lack of this self realisation. It is precisely because of this problem that he feels alienated all along the journey to the Manikarnika Ghats, as borne out

by his comments about the boat journey to the abode of Gargi:

> I felt as though I had moved not two hundred yards, but two hundred miles from the town of Benares, from all towns, from the planet itself. I felt as though this was not Ganga but some unknown segment of the universe, leading to a reality that I had not yet known (49).

The meeting on the way with Gargi, the deaf-mute priestess adds to the mystery of the journey. She is believed to have supernatural powers in healing the wounds of people's minds. Her disarming smile which seems to mock at the materialistic ambition of people makes Som guilty for deciding to buy Aftab's property.

On returning to the Haveli, he meets Azizun, Aftab's teenaged girl friend and dancer, who too seems to have a mysterious aura about her. Her portrayal does not conform to the ideal childhood which, according to the psychologist, Kenneth Keniston, has not yet developed the dangerous emphasis on the "successfully socialised adult" (Keninist 20). Instead, she had a vagueness about her that spoke of a child's mind that had been stunted by the despair of the grown ups, even though the body matured and learnt to participate in the pleasures of the world" (52).

Thus all the people that Som meets in the Haveli have an incredible air of mystery which increases his sense of alienation, distancing him from them. "What was I to make of them, a dumb-looking singing girl, a goggled ex-nawab? I felt silly and isolated" (53). He is once again haunted by the familiar frustrated cry of longing within him, "I want, I want . . . if only one knew that I wanted. or may be, to know was what I wanted" (53). Som believesthat the only way to solve his problems is by acquiring knowledge, and struggles hard to come to terms with life and find out its meaning with its help. But this only adds to his discomfiture. Som dreads Azizun's songs which seem to him to have some occult power "to push men into despair, from despair to decadence and madness and death" (54).

This sort of despair, this experience of feeling fragmented is quite a natural phenomenon for the present day genertion. Inspite of the incredible advance made in the field of technology, we shall always remain in a barbaric age, fighting, greedy, envious, violent and burdened.

> Individuality means a totality, the whole, and the word "whole" means healthy holy. But you are not an individual, you are not sane, because, you are broken up, fragmented in yourself.[9]

Azizun's songs transport Som to distant abandoned

cities across which he has often traversed in his dreams. They also make him realise that Aftab, Anuradha and others, apart from the basic differences, all are desperate strugglers, striving to chart a course in life's journey, that "we belonged to the same benighted underside of the world" (55). These people represent a lost generation afflicted by meaninglessness and powerlessness. According to Lewis Fewer, the words like meaninglessness, powerlessness, normlessness, which are used to characterise the dimensions of alienation, have a special application to the experience of a contemporary intellectual. "The meaninglessness of his life is its lack of a social goal, his powerlessness reflects the intellectual's self-description, we have no social class with which to work."[10]

In this novel, there is a regular tussle between faith and scepticism centering round Lord Krishna. Som's mother, Anuradha, Gargi, all are devotees of Lord Krishna. Due to Som's association with these women, his mind too, at times unwillingly lingers on the thought of Krishna. Yet he has hardened his mind so much that he refuses to believe in His powers unless the Lord made Himself manifest to the naked eye. This rigid attitude does not help in any way to mitigate his feeling of alienation. Because of this attitude he pooh poohs the story of the Pir, Gargi's father, which extolled the powers of the Lord. As the story goes,

Gargi's father is a prince who takes to drinking whenever he starts doubting God's existence. God Himself appears to the Pir's father, a devotee and asks him to sacrifice something to redeem his son. The father offers to sacrifice his own life for the sake of his son whereupon he falls ill. Simultaneously the son recovers. Narrating this strange phenomenon and attributing it to the powers of God he convinces his son that this was the proof of God's existence and dies. The son regrets and repents his misdemeanour and becomes a sufi mystic thereafter. Anuradha tries to instil faith in Som's mind by narrating this story. But Som fails as it sounds hyperbolic if not apocryphal. Unlike Billy in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, Som fails to make the right choice. To quote Billy, "I had two clear choices. I could either follow this call, this vision, whatever the cost, or be condemned to total decay."[11] He chose to respond to his inner call and thus saved himself from destruction. Som, on the other hand, wavers till the end. While he refuses to believe the Pir's Story, his wife would have believed such stories because unlike Som, she was not a sceptic. Trust was her sheet anchor. Som envies his wife's capacity for blind trust, the lack of which has made his own life miserable. "I needed the trust because I did not trust myself, or the ceaseless travel on the social wheel . . . in this whore of a city what I needed most was to be reassured that all was well" (63). It was this need for reassurance

that had led Som to marry Geetha and establish home so that he could depend on their physical existence in moments of loneliness. But all this fond wish was just a pipe dream and did not work. The countless psychiatrists whom Som consulted could not identify his problem, it being a typical case of the existential dilemma of the contemporary man. Cross Damon in Richard Wright's The Outsider is a victim of the same problem.

> He was empty, face to face with a sense of dread . . . He was alone . . . Nothing made meaning, his life seemed to have turned into a static dream whose frozen images would remain unchanged throughout eternity.[12]

"This aloneness, this existentialist alienation remains with Cross to the end of his days," comments Amarjit Singh in an article on The Outsider.[13]

Some psychiatrists diagnosed Som's symptoms as insecurity, fear of death, loss of youth etc., which are the true manifestations of alienation. One even talked about Som's soul searching for another soul for satisfying his wants. The spiritual interpretation by this doctor, a man of science seems rather strange and funny to Som. "It sounds good. One has to find a proof of the existance of soul, though" (75), is his reaction.

Even Som's friend, Dr. Leela Sabnis, who sought proper explanations for everything, fails to solve his problem. However, she shows her eagerness to help him sort out his problems by providing him books on philosophy.

> I stuffed my pockets with them, stuffed my mouth, my nose, my eyes. Then the voids returned, knocked them out of my hands, emptied my pockets, made me rinse my mouth with their bitter gall (77).

Dr. Leela Sabnis prompts him to read Descartes who separated matter from the spirit, but what Som wants actually is a union between spirit and matter.

> For a while I had believed in the powers of her cures. And yet, when I left her . . . what I heard in the twilight was not the wisdom of Descartes . . . but the strumming of great chords way up in the sky, beating the old tattoo, I want, I want, I want (81).

He is perpetually tormented by this existential dilemma. His need to know his own self is the supreme doctrine enunciated by the Vedanta philosophy, as well as western existentialism. But while the existential analysis of the empirical ego leads one to the mysterious land of

darkness and nothingness, the Hindu antarmuktibhava (introspection) leads to the realisation of the Eternal Being which confers moksha (release) from the Samsara (worldly pleasure). The Chandogya Upanishad which refers to man's efforts to integrate Karma, Bhakti and Yoga to "find his own soul," (Chandogya Upanishad, 8.4) and the Svetaswatara Upanishad which prays, "Who rules our joys from the unreal to the real, lead me from death to immortality" (Svetaswatara Upanishad, 13-28) reveal the concept of existential concern in the Hindu philosophy. Som Bhaskar is one among the lost generation, wandering in the labyrinths of the mind in search of moksha from the Samsara of this world.

Mistaking his inner cries for his lust for women, Som becomes more infatuated with Anuradha and makes frequent visits to the Lal Haveli. On one such visit, he happens to witness a street brawl and stabbing outside Azizun's house. Least perturbed by the ghastly incident that it only evokes a momentary impact in him reveals the extent to which he has become indifferent. Som goes into the house only to be reminded once again of the omni-presence of Lord Krishna. Azizun was singing a melodious love song of Radha and Krishna, signifying to the discerning mind, the merging of the Jeevatma with the Paramatma which solves all existential queries.

The carnival to which Aftab takes Som later, arouses mixed feelings in him. Poverty and sickness too nauseate him as before, "A beggar tried to grab my feet --- I knocked at him --- to the horror of the bystanders," (101) he reflects indifferently. On the other hand, the Bhojpuri ballad sung by an old man transports him to strange distant lands as did Azizun's songs earlier. He was only aware that he "stood far from home, in a most desolate of places, from where there wouldbe no rescue" (102). Like all the other Joshean protagonists, Som too anticipates doom ahead. Like Hickey in O' Neill's The Lower Depths, he hasn't got "a single damned hope of a pipe-dream left."[14]

O'Neill's soul-searching had resulted in an impasse --- the absence of a positive faith and the futility of clearly defined philosophy. He had discovered that all conviction was transient: that no absolute existed, save emptiness and death, and that men could only go on, seeking and never finding. Each of his lost outcasts lives with a secret guilt that paralyses the will to act; and turns to drinks for solace and forgetfulness. Joshi's protogonist Som also seems to be more or less in a similar predicament. He turns to Anuradha hoping to achieve solace and forgetfulness. In a moment of intimacy, he tries to explain vainly to her his problems. Anuradha tells him bluntly "You dont't know what you want" (106). These words, her embrace,

all make him further alienated. "I never felt more alone than when locked in this, the most intimate of dialogues" (107). Strangely enough, Anuradha too experiences the problem of alienation often.

> She lets out a prolonged, wild, hoarse, cry that could have been the cry of the world's first lost lover, or of all men, destined as they are to cry, unfulfilled, to the stars (108).

Som's persistent feeling of alienation intensifies further with his affair with Anuradha. Fresh bouts of insomnia and mental fatigue afflict him. Amidst the tight business schedule, his mind would often be idling about like a stationary engine, getting involved in nothing. As in Dostoevsky's Notes from the Underground, he is forced to live a meaningless, pretentious, nasty life. No one, not even Gargi could save him from this delirious state of mind. But for his sceptism he is almost on the verge of self-realisation after meeting Gargi. "That night in Gargi's room, I thought a shadow had brushed past me, touching me lightly, telling me how to rouse myself, but then all was confusion once again" (110). Leela Sabnis' characteristic way of explaining his confusion, "What you want is a mystical identification . . . you haven't got the faith. You have always been a sceptic. You always will be . . ." (113) does not offer any consolation to him.

Hence Som decides to go on a trip abroad to be relieved of the haunting hold of the mysterious Haveli where "all were bores, frogs stuck in their ancient marshy wells in a land of obsessions" (113). In New York, he feels quite at home as it is a land inhabited by people without an identity, "a land with its dazzling bazaars and a face that has no past" (114). But here also it is only a temporary relief to his sufferings. In sheer desperation, he approaches Gargi and confesses, "I am fed up of this restlessness . . . So absolutely fed up. Can you help me?" (118). Her soothing words that God will send some one to help him does not offer him any solace as he is doubtful about God's existence. However, he continues his intimacy with Anuradha, shuttling between Bombay and Benares, these two cities representing two extremities of civilization. One comprises mostly of rootless people where as the other of people deeply rooted in the traditional past. For Som, who is city bred, Beneres is a strange land. Once while there, he finds himself walking through the labyrinths of the Lal Haveli, wondering what lay in the last labyrinth. Interestingly, the image of the labyrinth finds recurrance in the other novels also of Arun Joshi.

Som's visit to the hills with Anuradha offers no permanent solution to his dilemma. His initial response to Anuradha's story of her mother's faith in Lord Krishna is a

desire to visit the shrine up the hill. The mother's blind faith, reminiscent of Mirabai's devotion to the Lord kindles Som curiosity in His charismatic powers in holding unto himself so many devotees even in this rational age. But at her assurance that God will cure him, Som loses heart and flares up. "Cure me of what? A bad heart? Fears? Disappointment?" (126) unwilling to admit that there is some malice in him which has to be cured. "Deep inside my heart I knew I was a leper that needed a cure" (126). Anuradha's mention of God spoils his mood for intimacy. However close they may be, she remains an enigma, evading him. Hence he laments, "When I tried to touch her, she moved away, her tear-drenched face reflecting emotions that I did not understand" (128). This lack of understanding even between intimate people is a major cause of alienation, as is depicted in most of Joshi's novels. Billy in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas also suffered from alienation for want of being understood by the society. All of Joshi's protagonists are foreigners, if viewed in this perspective.

On another occasion, Som accompanies Aftab and Anuradha to the Krishna temple on the Janmashtami day. While all go inside to offer worship, Som alone waits outside feeling isolated and lonely in a crowd of believers. The tilting slab on which he sits symbolises his oscillation between faith and scepticism. Further more, the spot is in darkness

which matches with the darkness in his mind. By such deft touches of striking images, Joshi highlights the dilemma of Som in its true colours.

The major problem with Som Bhaskar is his preponderant disposition for introspection. Besieged with a complex collection of doctrines like that of Descartes, Yagna Valkya, Tukaram, Kierkegaard and the Buddhist ideal of Dharma, his mind seems to explode with doubts. In one such moment, he grills Gargi with searching questions:

> Why should Man be equipped, burdened with . . . this strange sensibility, or urge or drive? Is it by chance? . . . The moral influence of others? . . . how did those others get the morals in the first place? (132).

However his doubts remain unanswered. All the same, Anuradha's apt comment, "May be Krishna begins where Darwin left" (132) makes him wonder about the means he should choose to achieve his aim.

The visit to the holy ghats at night makes him irritated at the sight of filth and disease all round. It creates in him the very same nauseating disgust which he had felt earlier on seeing the beggars on the way to the shrine. He stares aghast at the swarming crowd of pilgrims who are

least bothered with the filth around them. He wonders how they can pray in such unhygienic conditions. This disgust shown by Som reminds us of the reaction of Ancient Mariner on seeing the water snakes, "The many men, so beautiful !/ And they all did die/ And a thousand thousand slimy things lived on."[15] The striking similarily here is that both the Mariner and Som cannot pray unless their minds are freed of sinful thoughts. The Vedanta philosophy underlines the basic fact that only when the soul purifies itself by getting rid of the two evils, namely Rajas and Tamas will it attain Moksha. In the path from darkness to light, from neisence to self-knowledge, the major obstacle is Avidya, or ignorance which is considered as the root of Samsara, the stream of time; it is the cause of Maya or bondage to the wordly attachments - and wrongly deifies the body and mind as the true self. This is a misconceived identification of the soul with desires and sensations. It is this Avidya, which is the root cause of all desires that has seized Som Bhaskar. It requries great will-power and self control to overcome one's passion and desires. Even gods are no exception to this. To cite an instance, when a sage asks God why Brhaspathi, the Guru of Gods told a lie, the reply is significant. "All creatures, even gods, are subject to passions. Otherwise, the universe . . . could not continue . . ."[16]

This illustration implies that man and God alike are afflicted by ignorance. It is this ignorance that fills Som with nausea and scorn in the temple premises. These scenes aggravate his alienation in the city of Benares. The bustle of the jostling crowd in Bombay is preferable to him, for he would feel at 'home', only among the faceless, homeless, wanderers and be just another seeker. To quote Neitzche.

> Ah! whither shall I ascend with my longing! From all mountains did I look out for fatherlands and motherlands. But a home have I found nowhere; unsettled in all cities, and decamping at all gates.[17]

This perennial quest which makes Som a perpetual quester wherever he is Bombay, Benaras, or New York forces him to take the impulsive decision to leave Benaras, taking Anuradha his Shakti with him. He finds nothing wrong in keeping both Anuradha and Geetha with him as he loves both. This attitude of the protagonist is a protest against the conventional ekapatni concept of marriage still revered by the Indian society. Joshi seems to give no undue reverence to such sanctities. Instead, his fictional world offers rebellious portrayals of man - woman relationship. Anuradha remains loyal to Aftab, Som and even Lord Krishna, simultaneously. Som too, inspite of his infatuation for Anuradha, no less admires and respects his wife Geetha who

has stood by him in thick and thin. So he returns to Bombay, deciding to tell Geetha of his plans to bring Anuradha from Benares. But on reaching there, he confronts with another shattering experience of the voids, coming this time in the shape of the moon which becomes larger moment by moment, blazing the sky with huge flames. And at its crescendo, he falls unconscious. This state of illness continues for a few days after which Som develops a strange fascination for remaining in bed, doing nothing. Unfortunately this unhealthy aptitude for inertia is a striking characteristic trait in the attitude of the young generation today as a manifestation of alienation. A young student of Harvard, who participated in a case study of alienation, explains.

> I'll find myself sitting in a chair for hours on end, doing nothing - reading until I got tired of reading . . . then I'll just sit in the seat doing absolutely nothing, in a certain way wishing there was something I felt like doing, but with nothing very appealing to me. I'll just sit there for hours, not even caring about getting happy.[18]

The incredible news that Anuradha is absconding which comes as a bolt from the blue makes Som all the more alienated from society. Her desertion almost upsets his mental balance making him hot-tempered, rash and revengeful. He

goads himself to the most outrageous and irrational of all his decisions to buy all of Aftab's shares even at the cost of mortgaging his own property as a gesture of revenge. This drawing urge to possess is nothing but a manifestation of the frantic efforts of a desperate person trying to get hold of anything to save himself from drowning in the whirlpool of alienation. However determined he is to wreak vengeance, he often develops cold feet under pensive moods, which again testifies to his vulnerability to vacillation. He wonders whether he has inherited his father's problem of melancholia, the most despicable psychosomatic disease that afflicts mankind. Som has in fact inherited not only his father's trait, but also that of his grandfather's, being pensive and alienated like the former and reckless and a womaniser like the latter. This peculiar nature of Som turns out to be a nuisance to all those associated with him. Aftab Rai, coming to know of Som's amorous affairs with Anuradha, flares up "You don't even know what you want. You are being torn apart by your doubts" (164).

Aftab continues, "You want to have faith. But you also want to reserve the right to challenge your own faith when it suits you" (169). He warns Som that his desire of having the cake and eating it will destroy not only himself but others too associated with him. But disregarding Aftab's warning, Som continues to grope in the darkness of his

labyrinthine soul. He refuses to give in even on receiving a gift from Anuradha an idol of Lord Krishna with the object of extricating and salvaging him from his pensive mood and challenging his sceptic mind. For him, Krishna remains through out a wooden creature and nothing more. What Som is searching for is a world, where the material and spiritual meet, little realising that the twin shall never meet. It is evident that only by discarding the former can the latter be attained. But Som refuses to accept this cardinal principle and hence his metaphysical curiosity does not grow into spiritual maturity. The novelist himself seems to be confused about the muddled personality of his protagonist. "A man so successful, so intelligent, why should such a man be confused?" (74).

Som's confused thinking drives him to all sorts of crazy ideas. He goes to the extent of appointing a detective to find out Anuradha's missing shares. Much to his chagrin, the detective reports that they have been donated to the Krishna temple. He cannot stand all this fuss about Krishna and thus, once again, the image of Krishna stirs a hornet's nest in his mind. It sets ablaze his thoughts. Krishna seems an enigma to him. While he cannot dispute His charisma, what baffles him is the lack of proof for his existence. Hence his decision to go to the mountain to fetch the missing shares turns out to be an

attempt to seek proof of Gods existence. He realises that there was nothing that simple about Krishna; otherwise He would not have survived in the minds of people for generations. All the same, Som recalls Leela Sabnis' principle that everything could be reasoned out and with that aim sets out on his quest towards the holy ghats. He "was on the way to reason out Krishna himself" (179).

Som's journey to the mountain top symbolises the Jeevatma's journey towards the Paramatma. Mystics say that one must pass through the night of darkness, doubt and agony before reaching the dawn of enlightenment. It may be so because human consciousness often tends to be perverse and there is always a deep resistance, if not resentment in it to a new advent or a real dawn of the consciousness. Human consciousness is aberrant, heavy with inertia, thick with its crudeness, fear-ridden to pass through the labyrinth of darkness. It is filled with deep rooted desire, the flame that leaps brightly before it extinguishes like a dying candle. The problem with Som Bhaskar is that the journey of the Jeevatma does not end in self-realisation, if not the merging with the Paramatma. It is significant to note that in this novel Joshi does not suggest any remedial approach to counter act Soms acute feeling of alienation. Contrastingly Sindi in <u>The Foreigner</u> attains self realisation by accepting the principle of Karmayoga as Ratan

Rathor in The Apprentice who realises his goal by repenting for his sins. Where as Billy in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas gets rid of his alienation through the ultimate union with Bilasia implying the union of Purusa and Prakriti expounded in the Sankhya theory.

Som Bhaskar's dilemma in The Last Labyrinth remains not only unresolved, but gets aggravated due to his obsession with curiosity, reason and scepticism. Little does he understand that life's riddles can be solved only by an unflinching trust and genuine understanding born of tolerance, as also by acceptance of all the facts of life non chalantly. It is mainly because he lacks precisely these positive qualities that Som is destined to grope vainly for a ray of hope in the dark labyrinths of his soul.

The final trip to the mountains taken up as a challenge and a matter of bitter pride ends up in further disillusconment is accompanied by Dr. K., who inspite of being a man of science, still retains a soft corner for spiritual faith which is ironical, to Som. This journey, far from being a smooth one, is often marred by obstacles on the road like mist and fog. This is a symbollic representation of the various hazards that human soul confronts with before merging with the Divine.

The accidental meeting with a little boy during his journey happens to be another significant incident in the novel. The boy and the congregation whom he follows surrounded by a mysterious aura is another striking quest motif. The boy's search for a unique pebble has a striking resemblance to Som's perennial quest for some meaning in life. The boy is one among a group of people carrying his dying grandfather to the holy lake on the mountains as death by that lake was considered to be auspicious and sanctimonious. Som watches them with mixed feelings of wonder, longing and bitterness. He is embittered by their outrageousness in denying the old man proper medical facilities and other essential needs. He looks down upon the whole ritual as being ridiculous and obsolete. Nevertheless, their staunch faith seems to help them face the multitudinous problems of life, including death without fear or anxiety and with stoic indifference. Even the little boy shows greater maturity and understanding of life than Som. He has his own dreams and expectations but unlike Som, he is not much bothered about their possibilities For instance to Som's question about the rare pebble, "And what if you don't find the pebble?" / "Even then it is all right (186) is his answer

Later again, Som asks:

"Have you ever seen the ocean?"

"No."

"Don't you want to?"

"Yes. But I don't mind if I don't" (187).

Pat comes his reply.

Som strangely feels secure and relaxed in the company of these people. Unknowingly, he shares for a brief spell their equanimity, composure and fearlessness to face the crises in life. Thus the journey with them becomes another unforgettable experience in the life of Som.

Yet another somewhat similar experience is still in store for him. It is the meeting with Vasudev, a Panda, which again offers him some solace. A brief stay with Vasudev gives him a feeling of security and relaxation that a believer is usually blessed with. This experience of peace and security in the company of the boy and later the Panda warns him that only staunch believers like them are fortunate to feel secure, relaxed and calm. He is deprived of them because of his nagging doubt and scepticism, which haunt him as he does not sincerely strive for inner progress. One who want to improve oneself must first of all strive for self-realisation. Self-knowledge functions as a prerequisite to self-transcendance. An earnest moral endeavour is imperative on the part an individual who needs to be saved from himself, from the ignominy of corruption and attendent evils that abide in him. This is what Som fails to accomplish.

The attitude of Vasudev, the Panda, about man, life and God have striking similarities with that of the little boy. His words reveal an unwavering trust in God. He has no doubts about the powers of the mountain diety; "Every one goes there" (197) he says. "The Old and the Crippled. The Blind." "Where do you include me?" (197) asks Som revealing the intensity of his mental turbulence and alienation. it lays bare the frantic efforts of a blind crippled mind groping in the dark labyrinths of his consciousness for a streak of light to guide him.

Dr. K, who had so far remained a silent participant in the journey comes into focus towards its end. He who has been closely observing Som's idiosyncrasies and making his own judgement, functions almost as a foil to Som, trying to convince him that even a man of science can believe in God. Dr. K, along with the other characters in the novel has tried to make him understand that whether one is a believer or not, it is difficult to deny the presence of an unseen and a highly creative power which science cannot comprehend. Yet, at times, the doctor too has his own doubts about God's powers. His simple question as to whether anyone's wishes have been fulfilled by prayers is answered by Vasudev with full confidence, "Faith can move mountains, doctor sahib" (198). Evidently, the emphasis is on Faith. Vasudev

further adds in a sarcastic tone that 'modern' people like Som may know better than him. In fact, Som, a true representative of the modern man is seething with confusion and despair. His education, intelligence and scholarship or his avid reading of Descartes or Pascal are of no avail to mitigate his despair. Vasudev, on the other hand, with his poor upbringing, limited reading and simple faith, understands life better and faces its problems with greater strength. Joshi makes vain attempts in the novel to lead Som on the path of self realisation with the help of other characters.

The journey ends with a surprise twist. The presence of Gargi in a room atop the hill is least expected. Like everything connected with Gargi, this also is a mystery to Som. He feels like getting more and more entangled in the mazes and labyrinths of life, without knowing anything about the happenings around. Wherever he might be, Gargi seems to intercept his efforts to reason out things with her meaningful silence and winning smile. This reiterates his feelings that she is perhaps the only one who can understand him. Som and all of Joshi's protagonists for that matter, yearn to be understood by someone. It is only natural that most men, particularly in this mechanised world, crave for understanding by others. In The Strange Case of Billy Biswas for instance, Romi makes a wry comment in the opening

page itself, "As I grow old, I realise that the most futile cry of man is his impossible wish to be understood."[19] Sindi Oberoi in The Foreigner and Ratan in The Apprentice also belong to this category of persons suffering from the feeling that they are not understood by others.

Som feels that Gargi is possibly the only person who can understand him. So he stands before her like the seeker who poses pestering questions before the renowned philosopher, Jiddu Krishnamurti and complains thus:

> I have always been a seeker . . . I have read, Oh, so many books on many subjects. I was a Catholic, but left that Church to join another. Leaving that too, I joined a religious society. I have recently been reading oriental philosophy, the teachings of the Buddha, and added to all this, I have had myself psychoanalysed, but even that hasn't stopped me from seeking . . .[20]

Similar to Krishnamurti's advice to this seeker not to be over anxious about the discontent and take things along one's stride, Gargi pleads with Som to have faith in God who is sure to set things right for him. Som feels defeated on hearing from Gargi that Anuradha had left with her a packet of shares for Som.

The whole plot to save his life in the hospital unfolds itself before Som as he pieces together a few events as explained by Dr. K. while opening up his mind to Gargi. In the warmth of Gargi's human presence, Dr. K. tells them how Anuradha had pleaded with Gargi to save Som's life, in return for which Gargi had insisted that Anuradha should forget him. This revelation explains to Som the reason for Anuradha's sudden indifference towards him. Anuradha, with her simple devotion and spiritual magnanimity achieves what Leela Sabnis, with her adherence to Descartes or Pascal, could not achieve. While in the case of Leela, the two worlds --- that of matter and spirit --- never meet, Anuradha's decision paves the way for a meeting of the two. Gargi's candid statement that Anuradha is Som's Shakti proves true here. By sacrificing her love, she was only trying to help Som to begin a new a meaningful life. Som is puzzled on being forced to correlate Anuradha's sudden withdrawal and his own subsequent recovery. Once again, he starts wondering, though unwillingly, about the divine powers of Lord Krishna and decides to visit Him in the hill shrine, if not to pray. The revelation of the truth, though tempting, is incapable of piercing his steadfast scepticism that fortifies him against faith. He succumbs to his ego and its concommitent evils to surrender to baseless beliefs, thus making himself all the more miserable and confused.

According to the Isha Upanishad, when the spirit is not bound by ignorance due to the ego, it conceives of the person inhabited by itself as standing apart from everything in the cosmos and different from all the rest of the inhabitants. This illusion of ignorance falsifies all realities:

> The illusion is called ahamkara, the separative ego-sense which makes each being conceive of itself as an independent personality. The result of the separation is the inability to enter into harmony and oneness with the universe and a consequent inability to possess it . . . The result is discord with others and oneself, mental and physical suffering, the sense of weakness and physical suffering, the sense of weakness and inability . . . of obscuration, the straining of energy in passion and in desire . . . the recoil of energy exhausted or disappointed towards death and disintegration. Desire is the badge of subjection with its attendant discord and suffering. That which is free . . . does not desire, but inalienably [emphasis added] contains, possesses and enjoys.[21]

This Ahamkara, the illusion of ignorance that falsifies

all realities underline the tragedy of Som's life. It is this ego in him that forbids him from treating the mountain trek as a pilgrimage. The journey ends in utter disappointment for Som, for having expected to see for himself Lord Krishna, the much reverred and worshipped diety.

But what he sees in the shrine is only a flame. Little does he realise that it is the Agni, that according to the Hindu concept purifies one of all the sins, destroys evils and reinforces energy into the living beings. The sight of that flame should have been an eye opener to Som to cleanse his mind of all doubts and impurities. But to his opaque mind it yields nothing beyond an ounce of tranquility.

The Upanishads refer to two lines of knowledge and action which lead to the supreme vision and the divine felicity. This is done as invocations to the Vedic Godheads Surya and Agni, one representative of the Supreme Truth and its illuminations, the other of the Divine Will raising, purifying and perfecting human action. To quote from the Isha Upanishad:

> O God Agni, knowing all things that are manifested, lead us by the good path to the felicity, remove us from the devious attractions of sin. To the completed speech of submissioin we would dispose.[22]

This state of beatitude in the intended self-content is the principle of pure Love and Joy, which the Vedic initiates regarded as "the source of the divine existence in the universe . . . It is the deformation of this principle by egoism which appears as desire and the trust of possession in the lower worlds."[23]

The glow of the flame only helps to reinforce the darkness within him. Once again it brings to his mind disturbing memories of the voids and the nightmares that haunt him, heedless of time --- unpleasant dreams of Aftab chasing him through the labyrinths of the Lal Haveli and Gargi's embrace tasting of sex. He tries every new drug with a hope of recovering from his trauma. Yet Gargi's generous show of love which is as pure and uncontaminated as a bright flame in the darkness around is mistaken as an expression of lust. It is such flames of love kindled by kindly souls that radiate our lives in this gloom-ridden world to help us to prevent them from breaking into fragments. But the ego bound, ordinary mortals like Som Bhaskar fail to realise this truth and end up in making their own lives miserable.

Som returns to Gargi, burdened with doubts. The visit to the shrine had not helped to instil any faith in him as it could not boast of even a stone statue of Lord Krishna.

This only confirms his doubts regarding the existence of God and also his incorrigible egoism. He eventually thinks of walking away with the shares donated to Lord Krishna by Anuradha, as a challenge to the baseless belief of Gargi and others in God. He reiterates his insistance on solid proof for everything. "I want to know. Probably I want to believe. But one can't order belief. I must have evidence. You see what I mean?" (213) Gargi's reply, "God does not work in this simple manner, God does not seek revenge . . . there is no harm in believing that God exists" (213) reflects the reply Jiddu Krishnamurti gives to the desperate seeker mentioned earlier in this chapter:

> We get lost in the mystery of man's achievement, in the mystery of the Church, or of the jet plane. Again, this is superficial, empty, leading to destruction and misery. There is a mystery beyond the capacities and powers of the mind. You cannot seek it out or invite it, it must come without your asking, and with it comes a benediction for man.[24].

Gargi too comments that the seekers are like children trying to reach up a crack in the door to peep into a room, but what lay in store for them inside the room was inexplicable even to her. Som considers all this as sheer nonsense and leaves the place disgusted, with the package of shares.

Aftab accuses Som of destroying their lives, apart from his own, thereby making the lives of everyone miserable. He remarks wryly:

> You think by logic. By . . . your brain. You are proud of your education. There is an understanding that only suffering and humiliation bring. Anuradha has that. Even I have a bit of it. You are empty of that understanding (217).

While Som often feels sore under the grievance of being misunderstood by others, Aftab shocks him by accusing him of misunderstanding others.

Treading on mistakes one after another, Som in a rash moment, decides to take Anuradha by force from the Lal Haveli, despite Aftab's stern warning against jeopardising his family. In a bid to save him, Anuradha entreates Som to leave the place lest his life would be in danger. But Som remains adamant. Obsessed with lust and revenge, he returns the next morning to take her away, only to be told that she has disappeared rather mysteriously. The curse of Aftab that "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) turns out to be the last nail on the coffin. This once again reminds one of the Mariner's curse in Coleridge's poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

Som is doomed to be desolate and forlorn in a crowded world like the Mariner who laments:

> O Wedding Guest ! this soul hath been
> Alone on a wide, wide sea,
> So lonely twas, that God himself
> Scarce seemed there to be.[25]

This loneliness, alienation and anguish persist in Som all along, driving him at times to the verge of insanity. It is in such a frustrated moment that he decides to put an end to his life and holds the revolver close to his temple, when his alarmed wife dissuades him from pulling the trigger. By resorting to this impusive action, Som was showing his protest against his alienation, and not being understood rightly by others. The novel ends revealing his longing to be understood at least by his wife, which would make him much less alienated in this angst-ridden world.

With this fitting finale to the novel, Joshi incidentally underscores the irony of certain core human foibles. While the longing to be understood is quite human, it is unfortunately just the opposite that befalls man. It is easier to be misunderstood, than to be understood, if not appreciated, in the present day situation. For we are now living in an age that holds little regard for ethical values and human considerations. Idealism is dead. Ideas of

social change are passe. Large scale erosion of ideologies and a resurgent fundamentalism seem to be the order of the day. People all over the world have started talking of their growing distance from one another; from their social order, and even from values held high in the past, which had given their lives cohesiveness and direction. Says Kenneth Keniston:

> The vocabulary of social commentary is dominated by terms that characterise this distance; alienation, estrangement, separation, withdrawal . . . Alienation once seen as the consequence of a cruel (but changeable) economic order, has become for many the central fact of human existance, characterising man's "thrown-ness" into a world in which he has no inherent place.[26]

Karl Jaspers points out that life seems to have grown "indefinitely vast"[27] - it no longer has that "inter-linkage" (Jaspers 202) which holds it together so that it is not frittered away. Joshi too, is seriously concerned with man's feeling of anxiety arising from a sense of futility in life. Hence this obsession with anxiety and alienation arising out of the chaos prevalent in the modern age remains the central theme in all his writings. Compared to the protagonists of the earlier novels, Som Bhaskar in this novel seems to be the most complex and complicated

character. His dilemma of existence is of greater intensity and against a wider backdrop of unusual experience and complex relationships. Hari Mohan Prasad, makes an apt comment: "He suffers from an undefinable hunger, a restlessness, a Hamlet-like incertitude, an inherent sickness."[28] Som is a typical Jungian man, full of inner disharmony and is a loose cluster of fragments of identity, struggling to bring some authenticity to his life.

The novel as a whole is a painstaking exploration of life, existence and reality through the dark labyrinths of Som's turbulent mind. Two aspects of his life are highlighted in the novel. The inflictions he got by inheriting certain malevolent traits of his father and grandfather as well as the influence of the various women in life shape his peculiar and characteristic demeanour. Of these women, while his mother, Anuradha and Gargi are archetypes of the Eastern culture and philosophy, Leela Sabnis represents the Western side.

The Last Labyrinth is a unique novel in which the archetypes, symbols and motifs used suggest that none of the characters succeed in holding a complete sway over the protagonist's life. While Joshi's earlier novels had some suggestion to solve the dilemma of the protagonist, this one offers no progress towards the end. It ends from where it

had begun. From the very beginning we find Som haunted by the mysterious voids, clinging desperately to one person or the other, never at peace with himself. He believes that he cannot think of a life without his wife, but simultaneously sleeps with other women. He establishes a strong rapport with Leela Sabnis, but breaks off, lacking her conviction and clarity in the power of reasoning. Even the affair with Anuradha, which he had considered the deepest, ends abruptly for mysterious reasons. None of these three women help much in reducing Som's suffering from alienation. Gargi, on the other hand, becomes closer to Som. With her benevolent smile and soothing presence, she takes up the role of Lord Krishna who instils in Arjuna the philosophy of the Jnanayoga, which extolls man as being essentially divine - a manifestation of God Himself on earth. Yet strangely, even such a woman fails to make a dent to Som's sceptic mind. He is too much obsessed with the phobia of being a rationalist that inspite of his ardent wish he fails to take the plunge into faith. He is, so to say, a modern Abhimanyu, who struggles in vain for an outlet in the Chakravyuha or labyrinth of life.

This motif of the labyrinth recurs in almost all of Joshi's novels and it is so conspicuous sometimes as to denote the leit motif of his writing. In this context and more so in the context of its growing usage by modern

writers, it would be interesting to examine the impact of this concept on a wider perspective. The labyrinth here signifies the nature and working of the self, especially of the protagonist, which keeps on trying to find a way out of its own intricacies. In The Foreigner Sindi Oberoi reflects painfully about one of his broken love affairs: "Even after several years, some where in the labyrinth of my consciousness, the wound still bled."[28] In the beginning of The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, the narrator explains:

> If life's meaning lies not in the glossy surfaces of our pretentions but in those dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish for ever . . . then I do not know of any man . . . who abandoned so recklessly to its call [than Billy].[29]

The Last Labyrinth also has illustrations galore of the labyrinth image. It finds a clearer graphic presentation here, being juxtaposed with the void image. The image of the labyrinth is a favourite motif of the modern and post-modern writing. The ontological premise in all the labyrinths is the enigma of existence. We find its usage in the writings of Borges and Durrel. Mr Fearmax in Durrell's The Dark Labyrinth, like Som Bhaskar, in his quest for the illuminating text "which puts him into force with himself"[30] has entered a metaphysical labyrinth in which he

has seemingly lost his way. Jorge Luis Borge's Labyrinths describes a Universe, otherwise a Library within which it is humanly impossible to search for the book, with its infinite number of hexagonal galleries, with vast air shafts between, surrounded by dark railings. The search for the books is in fact a search for authenticity in misbeliefs as is in the case of Som Bhaskar. A deconstructed tale of the Cretan myth by Borges brings out the loneliness of man and the pitiable nature of the fragility of his existence.

The image of the labyrinth in the novel under study here is related to the image of voids and that of death. The end of the labyrinth is death as explained by Aftab Rai. While trying to rescue his soul from drowning in the mysterious voids, the protagonist gets himself bogged in the labyrinths which makes him often wonder: "Was this maroon Blue Room a part of the labyrinth too? If so, what was I doing here midst these strangers?" (31). To his persistent cries in the voids of 'I want, I want,' Anuradha responds by sacrificing her love for his sake. Human mind is an apparatus suited for compromises. When we have to make a difficult choice, we often find ourselves in a labyrinth. The price we have to pay for making a choice is terrible but the price of not making it is all the more terrible. While Billy Biswas in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas chose the first boldly, Som is unable to escape from the labyrinths by

opting for the second. Joshi has thus made use of this image to highlight the protagonist's existentialist dilemma.

Apart from using the image of labyrinths and voids, Joshi explores the protagonist's existentialist anguish with the help of the language of dreams. The dreams function as a mirror which reflects the intricate workings of his inner mind. His hopes, fears and tensions find expressiion in them. The dream of flying the aeroplane into dizzy heights for instance, unveils Son's desire of possessing material wealth. Similarly, his intention of reaching the white mountain top in a plane tantamounts to his craving to enjoy life without any suffering. The dream undoubtedly ends in the air crash, suggesting the futility of aspiring to reach a spiritual goal with material means. So also, the dream of tall, deserted houses suggest both the meaninglessness of shallow materialism as well as the inner emptiness of modern man. Various contrasting images of life and death, hope and despair, light and darkness etc., are juxtaposed as in a Kaleidoscope in Som's dreams. The language used to narrate the dreams is in tune with the wavering nature of the protagonist. It is at the same time both simple and surrealistic because it is deliberately meant to depict dreams which are generally viewed in a disconnected and hallucinatory manner. The tone and tenor of the language of the dreams, coupled with the image of the labyrinth reveal

the inner conflicts in the mind of Som Bhaskar.

The Western social scientists generally believed that man is free only if he is rationally aware or is class conscious. Liberalism, Marxisim, Radicalism etc., equally stress the relation between reason and freedom. All the same towards the end of the twentieth century a new wave of thought is veering round the theory that the ideas of freedom and reason have become absolute and the increased rationality may not lead to increased freedom. Caught in the milieux of their daily chores common man does not have the right frame of mind to reason about the great structures of which their milieux are subordinate parts. Many other factors also like repression of any positive myth, morality, value etc.,also cause great discontent leading to protests and alienation. Without a clear perspective of a suitable alternative to alienation creative and meaningful change for the society is difficult if not impossible to achieve. Alienation leads to absurdity as the action of individuals coming under it becomes uncoordinated. The homo absurdus of Sartre or of Camus and the doctrines of existentialism reveal man who projects his absurdity in the world but not the universe. They hold that life on this planet is on the point of becoming absurd. Creations of art and literature are absurd, being a true mirror of our times. Existentialism in the true sense of the word, is a

philosophy of crisis. Hence the central theme of their exponents is estrangement which pervades the whole strata of society. They generally reject science which embraces the whole of true knowledge, contending that it has resulted in materialistic alienation which has led to institutional aliention. This, along with man's alienation from Nature, and more over from God is in a sense the source of all these troubles and therefore remains a recurrent theme from Kierkegaard to Marcel and Sartre.[31] All existentialists in one way or other stress the phenomenon of alienation. This problem with its multidimensional facets poses the pertinent question. Is there no solution to this problem? Are we destined to remain alien to one another in this universe? The existentialists generally believe that the Yogis with their spiritual attainments speak of a subjective experience, which is beyond the reach of the ordinary mortals. It is this dread which withholds Som Bhaskar in The Last Labyrinth from accepting spiritual faith blind foldedly. Bur unfortunately, this philosophy is not just the right panacea. It offers no satisfactory solution to the existential problem. We may just push it to the background from the foreground.

The phenomenon of alienation in a limited sense has a positive element to it as being healthy and desirable, but when it assumes greater proportions, it turns morbid. It

becomes an impediment to creative work, destroying good relationships and transforming trust into mistrust. In short, for all practical purposes, it is evident that the western thinkers have no apparent solution to offer to the riddle of existential dilemma. It is this realisation that tempts Som Bhaskar to turn to the Gita and other spiritual texts. It is quite natural for a person of rational thinking like Som to wonder that if Descartes or Pascal cannot solve his problem can Krishna offer any help in this matter. It is in this context that one has to examine the observations of the ancient sages on this vexed problem.

The Isha and the Kena Upanishads are both concerned with this existential dilemma experienced by man from days of yore. The spiritual texts delve deep into the relations of the Brahman to the world and to the human consciousness, the means of passing out of our divided self, ignorance and suffering leading to the truth, the divine beatitude. We have to realise our true self as the one unchangeable, indivisible Brahman. Being is one, Becomings are many. Both are interlocked. Becomings in no ways shall be ignored, they being manifestations of the One Being. If we attain self realisation, we shall be delivered from the bondage of <u>egoism</u> and <u>desire</u> as also the sense of <u>separate existence.</u> Thereby getting rid of all <u>grief</u> and <u>delusion.</u> Since Som Bhaskar fails to attain self realisation, he is

destined to suffer due to his tryst with delusions. In his egoism, Som suspects even Gargi of having evil motives in her relations with him. Urged by selfish motives he has no scruples to deprive others of their happiness. His desire of worldly pleasures like wealth and lust for woman drives him mad. His egocentric actions, with least concern for the well being of others often recoil in himself and makes him sad. This results in his ever being alienated, experiencing voids and frightening images. In this context the following lines from the Isha Upanishad are revealing.

> Get rid of this, see meanness every where, be the One manifesting himself in all creatures; ego will disappear, desire will disappear, the free inalienable delight of the One in His Own existence will take the place of desire . . . Immortality will be yours, death born of division wil be overcome.[32]

According to the Isha Upanishad, there are two states of darkness that envelop mankind. Those who believe in the principle of multiplicity and division and turn away from the progression to oneness enter into a blind darkness of ignorance, aptly termed Avidya. Those who wander from one consciousness to another and put away from the integrality of the Brahman enter into a greater darkness. While the former state is one of chaos from which redemption is always

possible, the latter is a conception of void or Asat, a kind of nonexistence of self from which it is more difficult to extricate and salvage oneself to self fulfilment, Som Bhaskar belongs to that unfortunate lot, destined to grope in darkness and remain an eternal quester who fails to attain self realisation.

The Kathopanishad also expounds the same principle of attaining self-realisation to reach Brahman by illustrating it with the story of Nachikethas. Yama, pleased with Nachikethas, offers him the boon of all world pleasures like wealth, long life, desire etc. Nachikethas in all humility refuses to accept them. This makes Yama all the more pleased and he briefs Nachikethas to distinguish good from pleasant. The former is generally chosen by the wise and the latter by dull souls.

> They who dwell in ignorance and deeming themselves very learned men, bewildered are they, who wander about round and round circling like blind men led by the blind.[33]

It is interesting to note that these pertinent words of Yama sound true in the case of Som Bhaskar. His "childish wit bewildered and drunken in the illusion of riches, cannot open its eyes to see the passage to heaven."[34] Hence he chooses the pleasant for the good and indulges himself in

wealth, lust and wordly pleasures. Nachikethas, on the other hand, attains self-realisation on understanding Yama's words that real wisdom is not to be had by reasoning and that the Purusha, the unmanifest is the culmination, the highest goal of the journey. Hence his comment:

> I know of treasure that it is not for ever, for not by things unstable shall one attain that One which is stable: therefore . . . by the sacrifice of the transitory things I won the Eternal (Kathopanishad 2.10, I cycle)

Unlike Nachikethas, Som Bhaskar refuses to give up the transitory things and hence fails to win the Eternal. However, he acknowledges the inevitable pressure of an unknown factor which makes existence a problem, our own self a mystery, the Universe a riddle. If we were only what we seem to be, there would be no mystery, an easily solved riddle, the problem only of a child's puzzle. There is more to it. But Som refuses to believe that more is the hidden heart of the Eternal, the Brahman. At the same time, he knows that science offers no solution to this riddle, as unequivocally expressed by no less a philosopher than Sri Aurobindo in the following words:

> Our highest wisdom, our minutest and most accurate science, our most effective application of knowledge can be at most a thinning of the veil of

> ignorance, but not going beyond it . . . they do not bring to the highest goal; they lead to no permanent solution of the problem of existence.[35]

These arguments might suffice to argue that while the western thinkers and philosophers have no tangible solution to offer to aliention our ancient seers and sages have definite views on the problem and its solution, as testified by the Upanishads and Vedas. Arun Joshi with his background of western education and interest in Indian thought seems to be well aware of these facts. Also he is equally aware that in the milieu of our socio-economic ethos, the common man is unable to comprehend, let alone fathom the metaphysical theories enunciated in the Vedic texts and so he is destined to succumb to the travails of existential dilemma. In the portrayal of Som Bhaskar, a typical character from our socio-economic scenario Arun Joshi possibly feels that he would better leave his protagonist as a typical contemporary man languishing in the labyrinth of delusions, till the end, rather than helping him resurrect into a new life with an optimistic and bonhomic outlook.

Notes

[1] Prof. S. Jagadisan, "Momentous Meeting of Master Minds," Bhavan's Journal 41.14.28 February 1995: 77.

[2] Arun Joshi, The Last Labyrinth (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1981) 12. All subsequent references in this chapter are to this edition and are documented parenthetically in the text.

[3] Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, "Time, Fate and the Fall of Man," The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology (New Delhi: Indological Publishers, 1976) 23.

[4] V.S. Naipaul, A House for Mr. Biswas (New Delhi: Sterling, 1961) 80-81.

[5] A. Ramakrishna Rao, "Arun Joshi's Voids and Labyrinths," The Literary Endeavour 2.4.1989: 16-17.

[6] Kenneth Keniston, "Alienation and the Decline of Utopia," Alienation: A Casebook, ed. David Burrows and Frederik R. Lapides (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1971) 21.

[7] Paul Tillich, The Courage To Be (New Haven: Yale UP, 1952) 142.

[8] Sri Aurobindo interprets this principle expounded in the Bhagavad Gita as follows:

The soul is and cannot cease to be. This opposition of is and is not, this balance of being and becoming which is the mind's view of existence finds it end in imperishable self by whom all this universe has been extended.

Sri Aurobindo, "The Creed of the Aryan Fighter," Essays on the Gita (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1970) 57.

[9] Jiddu Krishnamurti, "Existence," Beyond Violence (New Delhi: B.I. Publications, 1988) 13.

[10] Lewis Fewer, "From What is Alienation," Alienation: A Casebook 96.

[11] Arun Joshi, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas (New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1971) 113.

[12] Richard Wright, The Outsider (New York: Harper and Row, 1965) 101.

[13] Amarjit Singh, "Richard Wright's The Outsider: Existential Exemplar Critique?" Existentialism in American Literature, ed. Ruby Chatterjee (New Delhi: Arnold, Heinemann, 1983) 137.

[14] Allan Lewis, American Plays and Playwrights of the Contemporary Theatre (New York: Crown Publishers, 1970) 18.

[15] S.T. Coleridge, "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," The Penguin Book of English Poetry. ed. G.B. Harrison (Middlesex: Penguin, 1970) 162.

[16] Devibhagavata 4-13.

[17] Freidrich Neitzche, Thus Spake Zarathusthra, trans. A. Tille (New York: Dutton, 1933) 19.

[18] Steven Kelman, "These are three of the Alienated," The New York Times Magazine 22 Oct 1967: 142 qtd. in Kenneth Keniston, "Alienation and the Decline of Utopia," Alienation: A Case Book 12-13.

[19] Arun Joshi, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas 1.

[20] Jiddu Krishnamurti, "The Fire of Discontent," Commentaries of Living, ed. D. Rajagopal. From the Notebooks of J. Krishnamurti 2 (New Delhi: B.I. Publications, 1984) 149.

[21] Sri. Aurobindo, "Isha Upanishad," The Upanishads (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publications, 1972) 30-31.

[22] Isha Upanishad 7:14.

[23] Sri Aurobindo, "Isha Upanishad," The Upanishads 24.

[24] Jiddu Krishnamurti, "The Fire of Discontent," Commentaries of Living 150.

[25] S.T. Coleridge, "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," The Penguin Book of English Poetry 162.

[26] Kenneth Keniston, "Alienation and the Decline of Utopia," Alienation: A Casebook 12-13.

[27] Karl Jaspers, Man in the Modern Age, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Double day, 1956) 202.

[28] Hari Hohan Prasad, "The Crisis of Consciousness: The Last Labyrinth," The Fictional World of Arun Joshi, ed. R.K. Dhawan (New Delhi: Classical Publishing Co., 1986) 282.

[29] Arun Joshi, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas 1.

[30] A. Ramakrishna Rao, "The Image of Labyrinth in Borges, Durrell and Joshi," Glimpses of Indo-English Fiction, ed. O.P. Saxena, vol.3 (New Delhi: Jainons Publications, 1985) 13.

[31] For Hegel the estrangement was to be found within the very structure of life universal. For Marx it was to be found within the structure of man's conditions of labour which compelled him to be alienated from his work, from himself, and from his fellow men. These definitions are found in F.W. Dillistone, The Christian Understanding of Atonement (Philadedphia: n.p, 1968) 3 qtd. in John Macquarrie, "Finitude and guilt," Existentialism (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 204.

[32] Isha Upanishad 14:3.1

[33] Kathopanishad 2.6 First Cycle.

[34] Sri. Aurobindo, "The Knowledge of Brahman," The Upanishads 145.

[35] Sri. Aurobindo, "The Knowledge of Brahman," The Upanishads 146.

The City and the River :
A Voyage into the Wider Self

Usha K. “The problem of alienation in the fiction of Arun Joshi” Thesis.
Department of English, University of Calicut, 1998

Chapter V

The City and the River : A Voyage into the Wider Self

The City and the River, Joshi's last novel,published in 1990 is perhaps his most complex and ambitious work. It has evoked amazingly diverse interpretations. While B.D. Sharma sees it as a "successful political novel"[1] T.N. Padma examines its achievement as " an experiment in the mythic mode."[2] For Hansa Gautam, it is a novel "standing for the modern man's salvation through restoring faith in the very existence of God"[3]. This chapter will attempt to extend these considerations a little further, and will intend to analyse The City and the River as a paradigm of mass alienation built dexterously within a political framework using the techniques of the post modern metafiction.

Unlike in Joshi's earlier writings, here the story proper does not revolve around a single protagonist. Instead, it unfolds an entire political scenario riddled with pulsating questions arising out of dissatisfaction in the rigid authoritarian system that rules the roost. The novelist lashes out at the present political system steeped in corruption, malefaction and hypocrisy and also the resultant social structure built fragilely on confusion and disharmony. The novel as a whole is a fictional response to the political oppression which instils alienation, pessimism and despair in the community. By adopting the metafictional narrative strategy of using archetypal symbols, myths and

motifs, Joshi emphasises the continuity of tension and conflict between culture and civilisation which makes an impact on our collective unconscious.

The symbolic representation using archetypes needs special mention not only because it helps to convey the author's message succinctly but it also makes it possible to transform a simple story into an engrossing novel of multidimensional proportions. The nameless 'City' depicted in the novel represents an imaginary man-made civilisation that has undergone several ups and downs inevitable with the passage of time. In sharp relief to this seemingly domineering artificiality stands the permanent presence of the 'River' which symbolises Nature, the manifestation of the Divine Spirit. The administrative complexes constructed on The Seven Hills expose our frailty in hankering after material gains. The luxurious buildings in the posh localities can at best be admired as architectural marvels but serve little purpose as they are not accessible to the laymen. The most sought after sections in the ministry headed by a corrupt Grand Master are those of Trade and Education managed by equally corrupt ministers who are invariably the wheelers of administration. The entire administrative machinery is run on sheer muscle power. In their bid to flex muscles the authorities resort to various political gimmicks. Mass Rallies in support of the Grand Master are held every now and then for which truck loads of

poor people are brought from far and wide. These helpless ones are left in lurch after the rallies, without transport facilities to return home. In this context it may be recalled that such unsavoury incidents were quite frequent during the emergency period in India when, as Kuldip Nayar remembers:

> Government buses were deployed with impunity to bring crowds free of charge. That after the rallies no free transport was available for the people who had to trek back home was another matter.[4]

Needless to say, the corrupt Grand Master nods his consent to all kinds of malpractices and manipulations for personal gains. The abusive traits in his character have parallels in Girish Karnad's Tughlaq[5] as also in Ananda Murthy's Bharatipura[6] where the king justifies bloodshed and cruelty in the name of a glorious tomorrow.

Manipulations are operated on distinct levels in the novel---that of events and that of money. The most shameful among the events manipulated are those done by the mass media run under the remote control of smugglers and black marketeers and are secretly linked to the Grand Master's personal satellite. Bhoma's ill-luck begins with fabricated news reports that he was instrumental in hatching a conspiracy to kill the Grand Master. Another malicious

report appears with the photographs of those boatmen who pasted Bhoma's pictures on their boatprows. It accuses them of abetting Bhoma in his conspiracy, though the police had taken their photos the previous day on the pretext of helping them. The reports praise the Commissioner, who fabricated things to win the Grand Master's favour, for his timely intervention which saved the city from traitors like Bhoma. About the River Boat Incidents in which hundreds of innocent striking workers were brutally massacred by the Flying Patrol, the reports that appear in the papers are that "the striking workers had peacefully dispersed and reached their homes."[7]

Besides the mass media, the ministers and officers vie with one another in manipulating events to suit their materialistic motives. The Era of Ultimate Greatness and The Three Beatitudes illustrate the Astrologer's ugly politicking and alacrity to kow-tow before the Grand Master to win his favour. His interpretation of the Festival of the River as a time for renewing allegiance to the Grand Master is applauded by the innocent citizens who hold the Astrologer in high esteem for his scholarship. The shameless indulgence of those in power either to seek vengeance on enemies or to promote self aggrandisement has further illustrations. The Professor, who actually approached the Commissioner seeking help to trace Bhoma, is arrested on the basis of a false

report of the Commissioner himself accusing him to be a part of the conspiracy. The Professor's crime is further aggravated by the Captain, who blames him for the boatmen's refusal to take the oath of allegiance after hearing his speech at the lottery stall. But being aware of the Professor's esteem among the people, his death in the Gold Mines creates panic among the authorities. To assuage public feeling, the Grand Master, quite characterstically issues an order "that all prisoners shall be told of their crimes, or set free" (167) to be followed by a confidential assurance to a confused Astrologer that "Issuing of a decree, Astrologer, does not mean its immediate implementation" (168). In his eagerness to grab the post of Commissioner the Captain convinces the Grand Master that the Commissioner's hesitation to arrest the Professor's innocent father popularly known as Grand father, shows his disloyalty and involvement in the conspiracy. The minister also succeeds in convincing the Grand Master that the Grand father's efforts to trace Bhoma is a dangerous crime committed against the throne. They impress upon him, who has by this time been crowned King, the gravity of the crime and the need to deploy all the three forces to combat the threat which results in unnecessary loss of man power and money.

If these illustrations reveal how 'manipulation of events' hamper the progress of a nation and destroy the morale of the citizens, 'manipulation of public funds'

further accelerate these processes. Squandering of public money in unproductive ventures like straightening avenues merely to please the crazy aesthetic tastes of the Grand Master's wife are quite common. In this process hundreds of hapless pavement dwellers are thrown to the streets without the least prick of conscience. The prices of commodities and the city's trade policies are decided by smugglers, hoarders and black marketeers. Prices of essential goods are pushed up by ingenious means regardless of their impact on the public. Pinstripe, a notorious hoarder who bakes bread for the Trade Minister suggests: "In the light of the approaching Festival of the River cooking oil can bring in excellent revenues. Prices can be pushed very high if the produce of the Gold Mines is cornered" (64).

Another instance of manipulating city funds makes startling revelations. While the city is being rocked by violence during the boatmen's strike, the ministers are engaged in cheating one another and back biting. The Trade Minister, in his eagerness to oust the Grand Master ensures the service of the shock brigades by complying with a dreadful condition. The Education Advisor's demand is that five percent of the city's cash flow should go to him for the next ninety nine years which must be handed over to his heir after his death. According to their mutual understanding that Bhoma can be exploited by both, the shock brigades lay

snares to catch him, at the same time, pretending to assist the boatmen in their violent struggle.

The Minister of Trade next seeks the help of General Starch, the Army Chief, having no faith in the Education Advisor's promises. The startling condition put forth by the General that ninety percent of the city's cash flows should reach him in return for which he offers a war every five years in addition to his support to the Minister's candidature to Grand Mastership is also accepted by the Trade Minister. Their collective decision to oust the Grand Master while pretending to stand by him in crisis imply that neither the Education department nor the army has any inhibition in looting the city exchequer for material gains. The city funds meant to be spent for utilitarian purposes are depleted for petty motives like using helicopters to search for the Army Chief's missing parrot, launching expensive radars unnecessarily, the Grand Master's daily rounds over the city in state helicopters,etc.

Manipulation of funds and events are accompanied by other equally reprehensible malpractices like inflicting crude methods of punishment even for pardonable blemishes and denying all kinds of freedom to the citizens. Unable to hold his irritation on hearing the laments of the boatmen, the Grand Master orders his men to burn their musical

instruments, thereby destroying their morale without any compunction. Yet another instance of such barbaric acts is launching 'The Triple Way' to reduce population which goes against all norms of propriety. Rules and regulations are changed on impulse and anyone can be arrested without a warrant and punished without trial as is the case of Pathanjali, Bhoma's aged neighbour who is arrested as his substitute. Similar is the fate of the Professor who is put in jail just because he set out searching for Bhoma. The authorities who run after cosy comforts and indulge in malpractices, seldom care for the common man's welfare. The criminals are protected with an eye on the vote bank. The Education Advisor is accused of hiding Bhoma, a hard core criminal just because he belonged to his constituency.

The educational institution is the abode of all kinds of vices. The institution which should set an example as a beacon light to guide the young generation, imparts training in physical skills like callisthenics, wrestling, fencing and karate which are the essential requisites to survive in a materialistic society. The students groomed in martial arts, come out as a goonda force parallel to the Government forces.

Among those responsible for the city's downfall, the most prominent are the Education Advisor and the Minister of Trade. The latter counting on the backing of the army and the shock brigade to his candidature for the Grand

Mastership, convinces the Grand Master of the inevitability of his being "a monarch, a king" (211) who "took full responsibility for the citizen's material and spiritual needs" (211). He dismisses the idea of electing the King fearing that it may diminish his own chances of usurping power after making the present imcumbent a mere figurehead. He who had worked his way by diabolical manouvering pooh-poohs the suggestions for democractic elections by sneering at them : "What are elections but horse-trading? Does the Supreme Council desire that the king of this city be made an object of horse trading ? " (211). Refusing to comply with the Hermit's frequent reminders of his moral responsibility, the Minister of Trade further indulges in corruption after becoming the Grand Master. His friendship with the Captain who achieves his goal by hook or by crook is characteristic of his crooked nature. Needless to say, he makes a significant contribution to the city's downfall.

The Captain and the Commissioner, who represent the Army and the Police Department respectively, vie with each other in their game plan of villainy. The Commissioner, whose false report containing "six bogus files cooked up to win the Minister's favour" (237) starts all the trouble and the Captain with his crooked methods to oust the Commissioner complicates the whole issue. A graphic description of the Professor's meeting with the Commissioner reveals the latter's sadistic intentions. The sight of a responsible

police officer toying with handcuffs, trying them on genuine hands protruding from the wall is at once nauseating and frightening. His sarcastic complaint about the thinness of the hands to suit which samll handcuffs are difficult to be made is quite ironical. The Professor realises the folly in approaching him with a grievance on hearing his comment that "the poorer a city is, the more guns its government needs" (82). As soon as the meeting ends, the Commissioner is quick to order that the Professor should be watched round the clock as he is a party to the conspiracy. Anxious to boost his own image he sedulously publishes a cooked up story in the papers of how he thwarted Bhoma's attempt to smuggle gold, arms and transmitters from the city. Another illustration of the police tactics of suppressing the people is threatening to subject their eardrums to a random examination during which the Commissioner could detect the slightest attempt to protest. The Commissioner, who loses his patience at the delay in arresting Bhoma, threatens to put all the policemen in jail if they failed to speed up the process. His eagerness to impose a dragnet on this issue "as the only way to ensure that what needs to be done to save the city must be done, the freedom of peace-loving citizens is in no case stepped - upon" (137-138) reveals the hypocritical attitude of the administrators.

On the Astrologer's political ambitions a brief mention has already been made. His Machiavellian strategies and

crooked imagination come out explicitly during the Festival of the River. While performing the yagna he cleverly deviates "to substitute the hymn of the Great River with another composition that spoke of the greatness of Kings and their indispensability to the earth" (97). When the Hermit, who alone understands the strange language walks out accusing him of blasphemy and sacrilege, the Astrologer briefs the crowd "about the great threat unleashed by the 'asuras'" (100). The mood of the gathering, which is informed about Bhoma's conspiracy in a melodramatic manner is raised to such a frenzy that "the cheer leaders now demanded Master Bhoma's head" (99). In the din that ensues the Astrologer manager to administer the oath of "allegience to the Grand Master and to no one else" (100). Before concluding the ceremony with the coronation of the Grand Master's son as his heir to convince the people, he himself swears "in the name of Dharma Rajya" (100). No further evidence is needed to prove his diabolic nature than the statement that "Ours is a spiritual civilisation. It is through prayer and through vow that a man perfects himself" (100). The Astrologer's fear of open criticism finds expression in his order to blind the Headman who spits on his face when asked to declare allegience to the king. Being the disciple of the Great Yogeswara, he is the only person other than the Hermit who can interpret the oracle of the city. Yet, inspite of the Hermit's repeated minders, she refuses to give it any serious thought which

might have saved the city from annihilation. His negative approach to the city's future is reminiscent of the Shakespearean theory that character is destiny. He insults his master, the Great Sage, as well as his own scholarship by stooping to the level of a shameless bootlicker of the corrupt ruler.

Corruption reigns supreme in all branches of administration, not only by the ministers but even their proteges. The sons of the Education Advisor and the Grand Master who gloat in their fathers' glory are excellent examples of nepotism and favouritism which flourish among the politicians. Their unnecessary interventions in the burning issues of the city aggravate the tension that prevails. The Education Advisor's son screams wildly with a despicable gleam in his eyes: "I broke his neck . . . The third man I have killed this month" (32). The Prince on his part, interfering in the Bhoma case, orders a spectacular mass attack using all the three forces just to catch an innocent mudman. Sure enough such persons cannot be expected to be good samaritans in a land ruined by their fathers.

Thus the archetypal symbol of the city grows parallel to that of the river, which is exemplified through the remaining characters. It is one of the lessons of the history of civilisations that where ever the social milieu is

stifled by political aggression it is often challenged and resisted by fearless revolutionaries within it. Erich Fromm says: "As long as there was overt authority, there was conflict and there was rebellion against irrational authority."[8] Here too, the disintegration of the city is obstructed now and again by some of its citizens.

Responses to oppression are manifested in varying degrees ranging from silent acceptance to bold resistance. As the former mode of response needs no serious discussion, a close look at the latter type reveals its interesting variations which depend upon the extent of alienation experienced by each resistor. Those who offer fearless resistance may be classified broadly as those within the administrative frame work and those outside it. Whatever may be their mode of operation, irrespective of whether they are active or passive, they are men upholding the vanishing values of Truth, Justice, Freedom and Fraternity. Their resistance stems from the perception of a profound discrepancy between the choices they would like to make in life and the choices allowed to them by the existing political system.

Rebellions are motivated either out of sheer organic necessity or as an expression of ontological necessity. Since the passive resistors like the Hermit or the Professor are not direct victims of the structures of deprivation and

humiliation that they are fighting, their rebellion is of the second type. Whereas the boatmen are driven into active resistance by the first cause as they are the most exploited community in the city. They being illiterate, the only viable method known to them to resist is the mode of stiff resistance. Though uneducated, they are quick to "realise they are being used, deceived, manipulated, oppressed or persecuted; that they are mere objects of other peoples actions"[9].

They defy even the slightest slur to their identity which they cherish, by resorting to violence, being easily provoked due to poverty and ignorance. These innocent folk, with their simple nobility provide a pleasant contrast to the die-hard power mongers devoid of any scruples. Long years of oppression have not subdued their spirits. On the other hand, it has only emboldened them to surge forward with renewed vigour, reinforced by the concept of equality of social status. They boldly participate in the boatrace by pasting Bhoma's pictures on their boat-prows as a mark of protest against accusations about Bhoma. The untold humiliation to which they are subjected by the rulers by burning their precious musical instruments adds to their feeling of alienation. The Grand Master who fails to realise that their song is an expression of their anguish and protest, orders that their musical instruments should be

charred using lassers. For these alienated men, their song is a "display of souls . . . that is how they put it . . . they want everyone to see how their souls ache since their children were outlawed. They want the Grand Master to make amends" (30). Their alienation is projected through a beautiful surrealistic image of the Grand father's roses wilting on hearing the boatmen's lament. The condition of the boatmen may be termed as one of "economic alienation"[10] a case where "workers may be satisfied with their chosen form of work, and yet dismayed with their situation because they feel over worked or under valued".[11]

The boatmen are further insulted by the authorities who ask them to participate in the boat race in a slow procession wearing shirts with only loin clothes beneath to please the Grand Master. They are treated with the greatest disregard by the Grand Master who is "not very familiar with the mud people who in any case, are also known as the nameless ones because outside their habitations no one knows their name" (13). Their hard labour always goes unappreciated while they are accused of causing a population explosion though "it is the boatmen's blood down the ages that has saved the city from annihilation" (21). The authorities view the boatmen as a clog in the wheels of the city's progress and treat them with cruelty, sarcasm and contempt. The Grand Master complains:

> We try to be patient with him. We humour him and let him make mischief until our lives become intolerable. He forces us to use the police against him. He forces us to beat him . . . Such is the low esteem in which he holds his life that it means nothing to him if he is killed . (58)

Boldly refusing to obey the Three Beatitudes or to owe allegience to the Grand Master, they reaffirm their allegience to the sacred river, to whom they turn in moments of despair and alienation.

> 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 (170-78)

But their rectitude is misinterpreted by the Grand Master as sheer recalcitrance. He forces the Astrologer to support his attitude by asking him;

> Who do you think freed this man [Bhoma] between his house and police lock up ?. . .who, Astrologer, has the capacity, the numbers, the temerity to attack an armed police party ? ... Now whose psychological make up is such that he would defy death, hold the police in utter contempt and think of nothing but attacking them? (59)

The Astrologer has no other choice but to concede that the boatmen are to be blamed for these crimes. Indiscriminate arrests of boatmen follow this dialogue to establish that they alone are responsible for the unrest and anarchy in the city: "The Commissioner did, however, take steps to ease Dharma's burden [of arresting the boatmen]. In the category of the mud-people, he decided there was no need to give names, only quantities need be mentioned " (142). The boatmen avenge the authorities by hiding Bhoma in their huts, risking their own lives. They are given all encouragement by their woman leader, the Headman, who is a pillar of strength. But at times, even she fails to rouse them from their recurrent moods of despair, caused by untold suffering meted out at the hands of "the enemies within" (21). The Grand Master alone, whose duty it is to serve the citizens, should be blamed because "He, after all, is of a different mould" (21).

The Headman's choice of active resistance is born out of the indignation at the shameless acceptance of oppression manifested by other sections of the populace "The Headman wanted to set the city on fire - at once" (187) for "violence was the only way to prove that. . . our sould are dying. . . We might as well tell the world how we feel" (39). She takes the arrest of the Professor and Shailaja's brother as well as the destruction of the Lottery stall as a personal insult.

Effect of benzyl benzoate on the growth of P. capsici

Benzyl benzoate also inhibited the growth of P. capsici, but to a lesser extent compared to benzoic acid. The inhibition per cent was 58.5 at 1 μ mol/mL, 77 at 2 μ mol/mL and 95 at 3 μ mol/mL. Complete inhibition was noticed at 4 μ mol/mL (Table V.5).

Table V.5. Effect of benzyl benzoate on the growth of P. capsici

Benzyl benzoate dose (μ mol/mL)	Radial growth (mm)	Inhibition (%) (a-b/a) x 100
Control	37.25	--
1	15.5	58.4
2	8.5	77.18
3	1.7	95.44
4	0	100

Effect of benzoic acid on sporulation of P. capsici

Sporulation of P. capsici was inhibited even at a very low concentration of benzoic acid. At 0.1 μ mol/mL the inhibition per cent was 28.86. But at 0.2 μ mol/mL the

the charge of the river to the Navy. The embittered boatmen return to the path of active resistance ignoring the entreaties of Bhoma and the Hermit. Violence is let loose in the city causing large scale destruction. The gruesome scenes of violence laid bare before them as they storm into the Gold Mines and the news of the Professor's death are the limits to their patience. They resort to further violence, burning down all the important institutions. They fight heroically till the last breath, retaliating against the most sophisticated modes of attack using their flimsy hand-made bows and arrows. It would seem ironical that these innocent men who were treated with contempt while alive receive a traditional burial of their ashes in the holy river as their charred bodies are thrown into her waters. Their tragic experience proves apt the socialist concept of alienation caused by "the state as the supreme coercive agency within the society . . . The state, as the organ of class dominations is not an agency of integration but an agency of repression."[12]

Pathanjali is the only character with a name among the boatmen. His significance arises from the stoic calm with which he questions the foolishness of being arrested as a substitute for the much wanted Bhoma, his neighbour. Dharma, the police officer makes an absurd offer to pardon him if he apologises. This the old man bluntly refuses. "But why should I apologise ? I have done no wrong. Rather, the Grand Master should apologise for making such absurd rules" (29).

But before departing to the Gold Mines he gives Dharma a piece of warning "With due respect, Sir," he said, "I think you are innocent. what is involved here is the future of this city". (27).

Among the active resistors is also Dharma's nephew, Shani who personifies the frustrations of the Angry Young Men of the city. He who had watched the approaching gun boats and helicopters with an innocent adolescent fascination is quick to react violently when the Commissioner kills Dharma, taking him to be Bhoma. Shani's bullet which pierces the Commissioner's heart is in fact an explosion of the suppressed frustrations of the young generation for whom life has become nothing but a void.

These active resistors are often inspired and corrected by a group of passive or non-violent resistors, Bhoma being the most significant among them. Born into a poor family of mudmen he has his first taste of alienation at the death of his parents by an epidemic caused by the high toxic content of the 'boatman grade' of cooking oil. This disillusionment which grows with him comes out in the open while teaching in the University. He nearly explodes when the other teachers praise the Astrologer's administrative reforms. "He didn't share their optimism, he had said, Didn't they see the King was naked ?" (153). The equation of this story with the existing situation becomes so burdening to Bhoma that he can

not help narrating it to whom ever he met. The Hermit also encourages him to use the story to convince the people about the fallacies of the Government. Though the Hermit's assurance that the river has entrusted Bhoma to continue this mission lends validity to his purpose, Bhoma who does not possess the image of a conventional hero is an ordinary man who fears punishment and humiliation. Eventhough he exults in narrating the story he is apprehensive of its impact on the authorities. But the Hermit eases his tension by asking him.

> Do you say 'I must speak what I know even though I stand alone, and must act as I wish all were to act, and, by so doing, push the shadow back into the lair, "or do you say 'I must hold my tongue for I am alone, and I dread the shadow 's prisons." What do you choose my friend ? (56)

These soul- searching questions implying the need to make the right kind of choice in life clears Bhoma's doubts and helps him to continue his mission with added vigour and dedication. The story is picked up by the multitude with amazingly rapid momentum. The authorities who smell danger are quick to whisk Bhoma away to the Gold Mines. But as if the destiny of the city demanded it, Bhoma makes a miraculous escape on the way to prison. This event becomes a turning point in his life after which he resolves to alienate himself from the crazy society by living on the river, and appeasing the boatmen with

the parable in their moments of despair. He remains a passive resistor till the end instilling in the boatmen's mind the need for preserving their identity, and calmly pursues his mission even as tempests rage against him all over the city.

Another passive resistor who protests from outside the administrative framework is the Professor, an astronomer, who in the beginning, typifies the scientific intelligentsia who lead an ivory tower-existence, distancing themselves from the ordinary realities. The Professor is not aware that there are men who compute from the planets the fate of mankind or that there are men who are mortally afraid of them. To the Professor, "In twenty years of friendship the stars have brought complete freedom" (27-28)

However, from this state of blissful innocence, he wakes to bitter experiences following the disappearance of Bhoma, his favourite disciple. Concern about Bhoma creates in him a new awakening of social responsibility. This necessitates a substitution of the search for new stars in the galaxy by a more meaningful quest for truth and justice. But sadly for him, this quest turns out to be the most agonising, revealing some harsh existential problems, hitherto unknown to him. His futile efforts to seek governmental assistance to trace Bhoma alienates him so much that he loses all interest in life, even to look through his beloved telescope. "I have

not felt the urge, What with Bhumiputra gone and still not found" (42). His difficulty to comprehend the incongruity of the laws which govern the universe and those which ignore the problems of man makes him wonder, "How could men vanish without explanation if stars did not ? And what would happen if they remained vanished ? " (46). The only help that the Professor gets in his lone search for Bhoma is from Little Star, the spirit of Pathanjali who died in prison. Their hazardous venture in search for freedom and justice is an excellent blend of reality and fantasy used skilfully to project the main theme of the novel. It is the Little Star, who exhorts the Professor to face humiliation with dignity during his search for Bhoma. His advice helps the Professor to boldly cancel the Education Secretary's order to stop looking for Bhoma, with a cool remark that "You are being silly"(33). He explodes at the Education Advisor's son who burns his favourite pillar with lasers to threaten him, by saying "That is sacrilége, you arrogant fool" (86). He dismisses with dignity the Education Advisor's offer of a deal to stop his search. " Please thank him on my behalf but I am happy as I am" (85). The sickening experience in the Commissioner's Office convinces the Professor that the city is doomed. Still, he tries to reason it out with the Commissioner : "I thought our law provides for a human being to be free" (82). Fed up with the Commissioner's cold attitude,

the Professor decides to defy the Government's apathy by evoking public response by setting up a lottery stall that would easily attract the poor people. Luckily for him, Shailaja's brother, another advocate of passive resistance comes to his aid. He takes up the task of narrating Bhoma's story of the naked king and establishes easy rapport with people using his charming eloquence. Its electrifying effect on the people was evident from the growing crowds that swelled out of the stall as days passed by. The authorities who realise the danger are quick to prevent new bouts of violence by ransacking the stall and arresting the Professor with his friend. In such malice ridden societies it is only inevitable that such lone questors end up in the dark dungeons. But even there, the Professor doggedly pursues his mission, going from dungeon to dungeon narrating the parable and refusing to accept "the darkness, which comes to fill the new comer's mind" (162). The painful realisation that the life in the dark dungeons is just a chip of the world outside with all its sufferings concentrated, fills his innocent mind with alienation and despair.

> He was astonished that the great galaxies had never given him a hint that places such as this existed on the face of the earth; or that men who worshipped the planets and stood in terror of them, had the audacity to bury other men in dungeons of unending night (163).

The Professor feels guilty at his own helplessness to ease the world of its tension. Hence he laments :

> I have spent my life in sleep. My life has been a joke, even as the lives of brick-people are a joke. God gave me life that I might serve this earth. I have squandered it on baubles (163).

In an effort to overcome the growing void in his soul, the Professor decides to make a last fight by going on a fast unto death. As the authorities refuse to relent, the Professor slowly slips into the eternal sleep, which comes to him as a state of bliss, wherein his soul can rest in peace, whispering:

"Yes Little Star . . . I see the stars. I see the great galaxies swinging through the void . . . "(166).

Yet another passive resistor is the Grand father. He too, like his son moves from a state of blissful innocence to bitter experience. His rarest collection of the most exotic roses reflects his own simplicity and grace. The childlike surprise be feels at the unexpected visit of the Grand Master to his Rose Garden reveals his ignorance of corruption and hypocricy in which the ruler revels. To the Grand Master's seemingly courteous question: "Can I take a little walk in your garden, Grandfather?" (50) the flattered old man replies, "It is my pleasure, Sir" (50). It is strange then that this same innocent person later takes the bold decision to hide

Bhoma to take a passive revenge against his son's arrest. He gives expression to his sense of loss on knowing of his son's death in a poignant comment: "No one is blaming you, Commissioner . . . It is the same grindstone that is grinding us all" (233). But as fortune would have it, the miraculous and fascinating spectacle that he happens to witness in the sky one night helps him to understand his ultimate goal in life. The ethereal hues of the sky belittling the artificial illumination of the Seven Hills tend to convey the truth that the man-made city and its artefacts will finally fade in the glory of nature. Added to this is the illusion of a crown floating aimlessly in the sky suggesting the frivolousness of materialistic ambitions. "If the other artefacts lacked a context, the crown did not even seem to need one" (232). This statement implies the transience and fickleness of life in the entire cosmic context. The soothing light emanating from the pyramids which stand as symbols of Eternal Time helps the Professor to sort out his problems. "Have no fears" they seemed to say to Godfather. Thus it is and thus it shall always be. Now go home" (232). Thus consoled, the Grandfather returns to meet the Hermit who also advises him to overcome alienation by fighting for Justice and Freedom. This emboldens the Grandfather to take a strong stand in the Bhoma case. He too, like his son, has to encounter abuse and discouragement as he knocks at several doors with his grievances. The urgency with which the King sends him to General Starch with a sarcasting comment that "Starch is as

much the city" (235) shows his disregard about the citizen's problems. But Starch's contempt on hearing the complaint is paid back in the same coin by the Grandfather who deliberately coughs at Starch's cigarette smoke and bluntly refuses his offer of a cigarette. These bitter experiences make him also a victim of alienation. He continues his method of passive resistance to fight oppression till his death.

Another passive resistor is Shailaja, Dharma's fiancee, who also opposes oppression, remaining outside the administrative framework. The enormity of corruption in the Government is too shocking for her sensitive mind, especially after realising her father's involvement in it. His unjust stand in the Boatworks Incident alienates her so much that she decides to leave her house for ever, lest the disillusionment may drive her mad. But she rejects the doctor's suggestion to leave the city for a change with the argument that she will never shirk her responsibility towards the suffering humanity. She chooses to stay in Dharma's house which she considers as the abode of Truth and Justice, offering Dharma all possible support in his hours of mental trauma. But there too, she has no escape from the pangs of alienation, this time due to the mysterious disappearance of her only brother immediately after Dharma's recovery. "One by one, she thought, they are all going, everyone I have loved or respected" (241). Yet

refusing to resign to her fate, Shailaja sets out on a lone hunt for her missing brother which ends up with the same results as those of the vain quests launched by the Professor and Grandfather.

Passive resistance against the administration is also offered by Dharma's friend Vasu, a freelance journalist. In a city where even the basic right of free thought is denied, Vasu makes a commendable effort to preserve his identity by wielding his pen against corruption through his underground newspaper called The Rumblings. He is an ordinary man without pretences and superficial courtesies. Hence he cannot desist from showering abuses and showing indecent gestures at the Grand Master and his men as they take daily rounds over the city in helicopters. Thanks to his friendship with Dharma, he is enabled to understand Bhoma's case better. He identifies himself with the genuine cause and offers it full support in its fight for Justice.

This longing for freedom and meaningful purpose in life cherished by these persons outside the administration is equally shared by some people within it. The most prominent among them is Dharma, the honest and principled police officer, who too moves from a state of innocence to traumatic experiences. Though a loyal government officer, at times he

lashes out at the corruption and malpractices existing within the department, incurring thereby the displeasure of his superiors.Needless to say, in a society which curtails freedom of opinion, his lone voice of protest remains unheeded. The Police Commissioner's decision to arrest the boatmen for disobeying the Astrologer's absurd rules shocks Dharma. "But Sir, boatmen are not dangerous," said Dharma Vira, for he was an innocent at heart and had yet to learn the ways of the world" (29). He also finds it difficult to comprehend the Commissioner's logic in dismissing the adjutant as a good-for-nothing fellow with a comment that "We want people, Dharma, who are crazy and tough. Blood thirsty" (25). Pathanjali's ironic statement that Dharma who has come to arrest him is an innocent man is an apt comment on Dharma's ignorance of the dirty games involved in politics. He emerges from this state of innocence only after the unfortunate incidents which follow Bhoma's arrest. These events open his eyes to the serious issues that widen the gap between the rulers and the ruled. The fact that the emergency meetings invariably end up tilting the balance against the boatmen further alienates Dharma from the hypocritical society. The Commissioner's exasperated comment that the path should be cleared not only for the Grand Master but also for his son confuses him. "Dharma got it and did not get it" (142). Being a responsible police officer, he refuses to remain a mute spectator to the atrocities committed by the police to

suppress the boatmen. This attitude however, increases his anguish, guilt and helplessness. Watching the cold blooded massacre helplessly while on duty at the Great River Boats is a nerve-racking experience for Dharma. Added to this is the more shocking newspaper report that the striking workers had peacefully dispersed and returned home. All these unfortunate incidents upset Dharma's mental balance.

> Dharma sat very still. He did not know that . . . He had not spoken since his last hoarse cry from the catwalk . . . Dharma started to unbutton his shirt but half way down forgot what he was doing and simply walked out to his jeep (185).

Vasu, his friend gets a hint of Dharma's condition on seeing "his eyes which were shining and squinting in a peculiar way and were at the same time, totally blank" (186). However, Shailaja's staunch support and the Headman's inspiration help him to regain his lost identity and revive his mental balance. His decision to sever all ties with the materialistic world of which he was hitherto a member, and live thereafter as a humble boatman resembles Billy's choice of a primitive life in Joshi's The Strange Case of Billy Biswas in a similar situation. His metamorphosis is complete in all aspects, physically and mentally, clad in a loin cloth like Bhoma who already had such a tryst with destiny.

Another interesting character who protests passively from within the establishment is Shailaja's brother, a member of the shock brigades. His disillusionment begins on realising that the university is not an educational institution. Being an ardent admirer of Bhoma, he decides to take up his mission of spreading the message of the naked king's story after Bhoma's arrest. His captivating oratory has far reaching repercussions as is evident from the swelling crowds which gathered every day in the lottery stall. "The crowd looked about in silence. It seemed to the Professor that they had been lulled into sleep and were now awakening to their new surroundings" (127). He pursues his mission even after his arrest, refusing to submit to any kind of oppression. His sense of alienation haunts him even after he manages to escape from the Gold Mines, to get rid of it by meditating in the calm quietude of the pyramids. While sitting there he chances to hear one of the rarest kinds of music which soothes his whole being. On approaching the Headman in a state of confusion, she astonishes him by playing the same song on her one stringed instrument. She explains the eternal significance of the song "which has always been there, just as the mountain and the river have been there. The boatmen have always known it" (208). Though this explanation by itself is sufficient to clear his existential dilemma, the incidents that follow further increase his feeling of alienation. He feels that the shock brigade's

sudden decision to withdraw support to the boatmen, agreeing to the Trade Minister's demands is nothing short of a cruel treachery.

Taking up moral responsibility for the crimes done by the shock brigades he pleads with the Headman to chop off his head as a punishment to atone for his guilt. He pays no heed to her admonishing for his unnecessary feeling of guilt and approaches the river, which is the final abode of peace for the sufferers. The Hermit who passes by is shocked to see the boy preparing his own pyre. What with the gruesome sight of charred bodies of the boatmen floating past them on the river, the Hermit has nothing more to offer than his blessings. The macabre incidents that lead to the young man's self immolation tell the tale of how innocent young men, victimised for the cause of freedom and justice end up their lives in disillusionment. This again is a poignant reminder of the days of Emergency when the midnight knock at the door sent shivers down the spine in every home. The novelist whose prime concern is about the human predicament in a materialistic society makes further explorations about its manifestation in the antagonists as well. The Grand Master, for instance, who fosters corruption, at times feels exploited by his colleagues: "Trust is such a beautiful thing, Astrologer, yet how few are the people in the world that one can trust?" (57).

The Astrologer too is at times haunted by alienation. It arises from the spells of confusion between his moral responsibility towards the city and his political ambitions. "The Astrologer reminded himself that he was the disciple of a great sage at whose feet he had taken the vow of ever and always upholding the Truth" (59-60). He also feels left out at times when the Grand Master who wants his own word to be the final, turns a deaf ear to his appeals against certain decisions. To the ruler's suggestion that the population of the mudmen should be frozen by law, the Astrologer exclaims that never in the history of the city has such a thing been heard of.

The Commissioner's alienation comes as a sad finale to his hitherto materialistic attitude towards life. At a certain stage of indulging in violence he feels that the boatmen may be safer inside the Gold Mines than outside them. Not used to such humanitarian thoughts they burden him so much that when Dharma visits him, "he looked pulled down" (141). He feels forlorn on being excluded from the Supreme Council meeting held to choose the King. He also chafes at the Astrologer's diabolic stand on the Bhoma case. "It was as though not only Bhoma but he [Commissioner] too was merely a pawn in the whole game" (220). Hence his compliments to young Shani for practising with the revolver: "Good for him. One had better arm oneself the way things are going" (221), are apt words of one who is disillusioned with a system in which

he had believed so far. His metamorphosis is complete at the Rose Farm where he goes to arrest Bhoma. The visit fills him with compassion for the bereaved family of the Professor and forces him to return without accomplishing his task. This makes the captain's efforts easier to get him arrested for failing to arrest Bhoma, thus completing the Commissioner's feeling of alienation.

The Rallies Master whose skill in communicating with the masses is exploited by the Grand Master, is a coward who lacks the guts to protest against atrocities. His suppressed indignation and anger come out only in rare moments of intimacy. He unknowingly opens his heart before Vasu on such an occasion :

> Even animals get angry and strike back. Nor do animals flatter you with a smile and say, "Yes Sir, Yes Sir" when they mean the opposite.Tell me then. Am I worse than an animal? (75).

He wonders what his role will be when a great city is preparing to immolate itself because it's Grand Master and his council dare not lose his face (75). That he should conduct rallies not only for the Grand Master but also for his son adds to his despair.

> I have no peace . . . When I believed in God I had peace. And in truth, I felt His presence on the river when I was a child. But where is God now ? I do not see him on the river and I do not see him on the Seven Hills. Has he veiled his face ?. . . The city must now face the final humiliation and I must be an instrument to it (76).

Laments the frustrated Rallies Master.

The Minister of Trade, the mastermind behind most of the malpractices also feels alienated occasionally. A schoolmate of the Grand Master, he often feels let down by the latter who has now become omnipotent. The changing demands with the passage of time have strained their relationship. He recalls how for years the young Grand Master had depended upon him for every little thing, how he had been a loyal friends, inspite of all provocation to oust him.

> But what does he care? said "I am his loyal Minister. I am also the senior most member of the council. I expect him to take me into confidence. But what does he care about what I expect?" (64).

If these antagonists suffer from alienation related to the existing political situation, the Education Advisor's

alienation rose from his bitter experiences in his younger days when he was disqualified for a job just because he was born in an upper caste. "When he was still a student he discovered that in this city, beyond the college gates nothing but failure awaited him" (34). He did not think twice before throwing to the winds his sacred thread and setting the University on fire with similarly disillusioned friends. The violence which ensued was so alarming that the Grand Master had to concede to their demands to form a new educational institution with the Education Advisor as its head.

The varied experiences of alienation and its diverse manifestations both among the protagonists and the antagonists in the novel throw light on its universal relevance having roots in the social, political and cultural contexts of the society. Under an autocratic regime where is no freedom of expression, one is apt to be confronted with disillusionment and melancholy in life, often leading to insanity. Dharma's father for instance, feels that his reflection in the mirror seems to stare at him from the hollowness of life and this evokes in him a neurotic dread of mirrors : "My insides are rotting. I too am just vanishing, thought father in panic" (133). His dread of mirrors soon spreads as fast as an infectious disease showing signs of a slow decaying of the soul with simultaneous malfunctioning of physical organs, reducing the person to a robot. Dharma's father watches with

awe as each part of his insides is eaten up, till he is left only with the mere skeleton of his body.

> The physician was helpless. "Here goes another," is all he can say. He advises him " Exercise your soul. Take it for walks. Let it speak when it wants to speak. Let it rip . . . You can only die once" (134)

As in his earlier novels, here too Joshi asserts that to preserve one's identity and at the same time remain optimistic in a malice ridden society is possible only by adhering to certain positive values in life. He believes in strict adherence to the principle of Nishkama Karma to attain the goal of self realisation, which means an awareness of one's own role, duty, as well as temporariness in the cosmic totality. The great sage, Yogaswara is the only character in the novel who has achieved this ultimate goal of self realisation that emancipates him from the worldly bondages and the resultant sense of alienation. Equipped with a positive outlook in life, he exhorts his disciples to alert the people of the city against atrocities. The training he imparts first to the Hermit which and then to the Nameless one has a striking resemblance to Prajapati's teaching of Indra and Virochana by turn and persuading them to do severe penance for twenty two years as mentioned in the Chandyogya Upanishad VIII, 3-4". He taught the secrets of the body, the secrets of the spirit. And then he had shown him how the spirit

gained control over the body" (10). He advises his disciples to "Keep the grain and chaff apart, always, for much harm can be done by their mixing"(10). To a confused Nameless one, who seeks clarification about his social responsibility, as does Arjuna in the Kurukshetra, Yogeswara takes up the role of Lord Krishna and consoles him. To his disciple's anxious question, "And would you always be with me?" (264), he replies calmly:

> What a question ! Of course I shall always be with you, my child. In any case we are only instruments, both you and I - of the great God in the highest heaven who is the master of the universe . . . His is the will, His is the force. (264)

Inspite of such rigorous training the Sage's disciples do not fully rise to the tacher's expectations. The Hermit, for instance, had once left the city in a state of alienation "in agony wondering if his beloved city was destined to be nothing better than the footstool of one asuric ruler after another" (65). But inevitably, he has to return on remembering his teacher's advice to wait for a chance to save the city. The Astrologer's callousness pains the Hermit mostly because only they both are comptent to interpret the city's prophecy. On watching the changing political scenario in the city, the Hermit is quick to fathom the Astrologer's narrow ambitions. The news about the Grand Master's ascendency as King and the consequent upheavals force him to turn towards the river with

anxiety. "He was tense and disturbed . . . 'What should I do?' he asked the river. 'Is there still time? Is there hope? Is there a point?" (216) He tries in vain to remind the Astrologer of his forgotten responsibility by sending him a copy of the city's prophecy. The events which lead to the tragic death of innocent boatmen as also educated youngmen like Shailaja's brother make the Hermit pessimistic about the city's future. "As he was leaving, the Hermit heard the river crashing . . . Inspite of himself, the Hermit tensed, his steps faltered" (251). Knowing that the wheel of Karma has to turn on as the Universe is an endless process alternating between time cycles, the Hermit ensures that he should have a successor to continue his mission in case he fails. Hence as a last resort he sends a boatman's child on his oarless boat towards his teacher to be groomed for the next trial. The culmination of the disastrous events on a positive note with the arrival of a new Hermit proves that progress of a community depends on its citizen's choice of a righteous path to achieve self realisation.

The two major archetypes of the novel around which the entire theme revolves symbolise the antagonists and protagonists. Joshi's choice of the city as a symbol of shallow pretences and the river as that of the profound culture of an ethnic community shows how deftly he conveys man's effort to blend his urge for progress with his love for peace by being part of nature. In other words, the fact that, notwithstanding their seemingly contradictory signals, the

city and the river have always stood side by side, reiterates the dual aspects of our psychic workings-ie man's inherent failings on the one hand and his yearnings for self realisation on the other. "The river has flowed by, saying things to those who understood her" (29).

References to the river as being sacred and a source of peace and prosperity are numerous in the writings from ancient days through folklores, historical evidences etc., down to the present day. In an enlightening article in the Encyclopaedia of Religions, Vol. II Eck Diana speaks about many tribal and ancient cultures whose orientation in the world is provided not by the four cardinal directions but by the river itself, upstream and downstream. This was especially so when they were dependant on the river for livelihood. It is due to this orientation that ancient civilizations came to be called river civilizations. For the Hindus, the Ganga is not just a holy river, but the embodiment of the Divine. She is called female energy and female Goddess, the counterpart of Lord Siva. She is often addressed as Ganga Mata . It is for the same reason that in this city also its divine music can be heard only by those who considered her their mother and owed allegience to her. In the prologue itself it is mentioned by the Great Yogeswara who asks his disciple "Do you hear music, my Son?" (11) .To this is the reply "Yes father, and the dancing of a God" (11) which atones to the concept of river Ganga as the

female counterpart of Lord Siva. This life-giving, sustaining force has its own way of responding which can be interpreted only by those who understand her. The Professor for instance, is one among the fortunate few who know her pulse.

> The music of the river changed a note or two. The Professor was surprised that he could percieve the change. It was after many years that the river was speaking to him, even though he could not yet make out her message (41).

The ideal mother that she is, she shares the anxieties and apprehensions of her children. She echoes the Hermit's concern about the city's impending disaster."The drumbeat at the bottom of the river came faster and louder and the river was troubled" (41). The boatmen's alienation too has its reverberations in the river. "Their song spread from bank to bank until the river herself seemed to be singing" (48). Unable to see the boatmen humiliated, she sends Bhoma, her foster son, to save them from the embarrassment of owing allegience to the ruler. Bhoma himself invokes constant inspiration from the river to carry on his mission undaunted. "In the troubled silence the river's was the only sound. Bhumiputra found himself listening to the river as he had done never before" (145). The music of the river is often identified in the novel with the divine musical rhythm which

controls the entire cosmic pattern, thus emphasizing the concept of the elements of Nature as being the manifestation of the Divine Spirit. The river and her song mean different things to different types of people. While she soothes and guides her beloved children with her melody, some find the song irritating. The Grand Master who fails to perceive the river as a manifestation of the Cosmic Spirit, identifies its music with that of scientific gadgets:

> I know I had heard the melody before. And now I hear it again. It comes from afar, from a spaceship perhaps. Or a dying star . . . I don't think I can stand . . . this relentless music. It is, for all we know, an evil caused by our enemies (203).

He wonders what makes the river sarcastic, not knowing that it is at his own foolish concept of man's domination over Nature: "I do not know why but I hear within its notes the echoes of a mocking laugh" (203). The river tries to dissuade the Trade Minister from his mischief by frightening him with an apparition of a boatman which chases him in the dark hours of the night. "Even when he went by the river, the boatman came steadily up, pounding the waves with his feet" (66).

The juxtaposition and interdependence of the super natural and the phenomenal worlds is a characteristic feature of the Indian ethos as Sudhin Ghose explains:

> "A constant communication is kept up between the visible and the invisible and such is their mutual interdependence each seems to need the other's help"[11]

The tension that mounts in the mind of Shailaja's brother even as he meditates in the pyramids is reduced by the river" . . . the first notes of melody came floating into the void of Shailaja's brother's mind as well. He was so alarmed or surprised but was filled with a peace that he had never known before" (204). Unlike the Grand Master or the Minister of Trade, he is able to decipher in this melody the universal rhythm played on a cosmic scale"" as though the whole universe was a one string and some forgotten God had returned and reclaimed it and had briefly toyed with it in the silent night" (205). The Headman who accepts her as a permanent reality reaffirms the faith of her community in her infinite qualities. "Boatmen are children of the river. They have learnt more from her than meets the eye. Each moment the river dies and each moment she is reborn" (208). The Hermit too turns to her for proper guidance in moments of confusion. "What should I do ?" He asked the river (216) which "only. . . knows the true meaning" (228). Before the final spate, it is the river herself which offers the ultimate redress to the city's problems by carrying the little child to the safest shore, the abode of the great Yogeswara. It burns in rage when lasers charr the boatmen. "As the wood caught fire they noticed that upstream the river too had caught fire" (229). The river which unleashes its wrath in the form of heavy

downpour reminds one of Lord Krishna's words in the Bhagavad Gita : "Whenever there occurs a relaxation or weakening of the principle of duty and rise of unrighteousness, then I pour Myself forth" (Gita, XIV, 6). The heavy showers which last for days stand in the way of the final operation to trap Bhoma and punish the members involved in it. "Because of the downpour, ten parachutes had refused to open. Another fifty commandoes had fallen into the river" (242). Yet the operation which resumes with increased vigour after a brief respite suggests a momentary dominance of man over Nature. This brief spell is perhaps the river's test to see if man himself will rectify his errors. When the Hermit performs the final rites of the city, which is "a Yagna of immortal Time and its symbol the river" (249) as well, "the sun rose lighting up the vast expanse of the river" (249) suggesting her benign tolerance of blasphemy. the brief spell is broken as the river resumes its spate with vengeance at man's outrageousness. "She lifts the embankment by its roots and flings it like a pebble into the churning whirlpool" (252) thus reasserting her permanance.

As in the Greek mythology, the Hindu Puranas also enunciate an eschatological scheme according to which Pralaya, akin to the 'doomsday' comes at the end of Kaliyuga, the last among the four Yugas. Kaliyuga is not the end of the road, but

the recommencement of the cycle of life, represented by the infant Lord Vishnu lying blissfully on a banyan leaf which floats on the calm seas.

Quite ironically, the administrators, celebrating the victory of their operation remain oblivious of the river's violent march over the city till they themselves are on the verge of death. They have to watch helplessly "as the river turned into an ancient sea, like the sea that had first condensed on the whirling planet a billion years ago" (257). Their futile attempts to escape death suggest how a gross violation of propriety gets immersed in Nature as seen often in religion and literature. At the time of Christ's death, "Then the curtain hanging in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split apart" (Matt. 27:51). The central event of the Fall in The Paradise Lost also achieves cosmic proportions.

> Earth trembled from her entrails, as again
> In pangs, and Nature gave a second groan,
> Sky loured, and muttering thunder, some sad drops,
> Wept at the completing of the moral sin.[14]

Mention of the river is made in the Epilogue also when Yogeswara explains to the Nameless One about his zKarma on the wake of the city's resurrection. "There lies the great river, shrouded in mist, eternal" (262). Thus the river once

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again prepares itself to act as a catalyst in the social and political upheavals of another ethnic community. The river here becomes a great fictional character like the river in Herman Hesse's Siddhartha. The divine properties of the river reminds the reader of other fictional parallels also like the river Ganga in The Serpent and The Rope, Himavati in Kanthapura and Sarayu in The Guide.

The archetype of the city which appears as a foil to that of the river's simple nobility projects a world of shallow sophistication and artificial decorum. These contrasting archetypal symbols reveal the extreme polarities of the living conditions of the primitive and the urban respectively. While the political aspirants languish in marble 'white mansions,' the poor mudmen remain huddled in 'dark' mudhuts and are often thrown on pavements both factually and figuratively. For these hapless ones, it is a crime even to dream of luxuries like "The silk cushions and marble floors of the Astrologer's quarters" (19) or the "velvet divans" (61) in the Education Advisor's house. The Grand Master's palace which is "a marvel of modern architecture" (12) is just to be admired from a distance. "They have to spend their nights under lamplights in city streets which are studded with electric poles" (94) beneath skies flooded with laser lights. The mudmen who wear only

loin clothes are a disgrace to the well clad, who dress up in the latest fashion in "Jeans and Tight fitting shirt, leather jacket" (32) etc. For the boatmen who are destined to travel in overcrowded boats which carry "earthen lamps on their prows" (40) comfortable vehicles like jeeps and helicopters are inaccessible. While the rich waste their time "playing cards or bridge" (179), or learning Karate and other martial arts, the only pastime in which the boatmen indulge is either playing on their one stringed musical instrument, "singing songs or listening to stories" (208). Their primitive weapons and war strategies are in no way comparable to the highly advanced war techology of the Government like "laser planes" (226), gun boats, "machine guns" (934) "time bombs" (18) etc. The extravaganza of the rulers is appalling. The Grand Master's telephone transmitting messages through satellite videos" (47), the Minister of Trade's system of communicating with Pinstripe on the T.V. console, "soundproof rooms in the palace ," (257) elevators and water-sound-proof doors installed in the tunnel to the pyramids, earphones used by the soldiers to prevent contamination by the protesting boatmen's voices, Radar scanner planes, "The Eye" (198), etc. prove to what extent the city's scientific know-how has advanced. It also exposes the ugly face of the city hidden behind the superficial splendour, the face of spiritual deterioration. It is this aspect which causes the fact that amidst this sceintific achievement live the boatmen as if in an ancient

and historically different world untouched by these changes. Theirs is a unique world of their own---rich in ancient customs like sprinkling river water on their bodies to purify themselves. Deeply rooted in ancient myths and legends, they believe in the divine powers of the river that bless the benevolent and punish the wicked. It may be recalled that from the Vedic period onwards we have had several sacred rivers like the five rivers of the Punjab and the holy trio---Ganga, Jamuna and Saraswati. With the advent of the Aryans who settled down in the Ganges valley River Ganga gained prominence as the most sacred river. Many a myth has been woven round it and gained currency regarding its origin and interaction with man. These observations have been made to high light the fact that the boatpeople who hold steadfastedly to the traditional customs of our culture in the scientific age should not be looked down as anachronistic freaks. Far from that, they are live embodiments of rural simplicity and altruism. The benevolence of the boatwoman who gives away her child stands as a pleasant contrast to the hypocritical attitude of the rulers. By using the two major archetypal symbols of the city and the river, Joshi has succeeded in raising an existential commentary on the absurdity of human situation to epic proportions.

Another important aspect which deserves study is Joshi's consciousness of Time as discussed in The City and The River,

which evidently becomes his answer to the problem of alienation. Joshi agrees with the Eliotean concept that man is time ridden, as explained in Ash Wednesday:

> I no longer strive towards such things
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Because I know that time is always time
>
> And place is always and only place.[15]

The City and The River, like this poem of Eliot, offers a vedantic landscape of the familiar and the unfamiliar, where empirical distinctions of the temporal and the eternal, the particular and the universal, birth and death, flux and stillness, all are so blended as if to illustrate the principles of cosmic order, and man's role in it. Joshi too like Eliot, has delved deep into the Western as well as Eastern phiolosphies, and imbibed the spirit of the Bhagavad Gita, blending these into a rich synthesis in his writings. The City and The River, replete with philosophical observations subscribes to the principles enunciated in the Bhagavad Gita, especially the passage in which Lord Krishna enlightens Arjuna on man's role in the eternal time cycle. "Never was there a time when I was not, nor thou, nor these lords of men, nor will there ever be a time hereafter when we shall all cease to be."[16] In this novel, Little Star postulates this same theory in these words:

> Every one is thousands and thousands of years old, tied as we are to the wheels of Karma. Unfortunately we forget this. Kings and Grand Masters forget this the most. That is the world's misfortune (42).

The Headman too, in her own simple words explains: "Now the wheel begins to turn. And some day it must come full circle" (39).

The concept of Time which has links with man's alienation needs a close look in the literary context. Joshi, with his acceptance of the concept of Time shows remarkable affinity to Eliot who believed in its power to save man "who is lost in delusory and fantastic attempts at decoding the future".[17]

Jitendra Kumar Sharma, analysing Eliot's concept of Time remarks :

> He (too) avers that the alienation of man from the timeless sea constitutes severance from the ultimate cosmic principle. Salvation, under all circumstances, lies in accpeting the entire cosmos with its sea-terrors, risks and hazards . . . This conscious severing must be accepted that we may arrive at true knowledge and last liberation of the self from the tortures of time . . . Arjuna like ourselves, was confounded because he failed the Timeless in and through the flux of Time.[18]

This theory of Time factor as an element that shapes the destiny of man can be traced back to the pre-historic days of the Mahabharata. Thus according to the Bhagavad Gita recognition of Cosmic Time alone is a solution to the ills rooted in man's partial consciousness constricted by biological time. Viewed in the context of Cosmic Time, forms and appearances, birth and death, sorrow and exultation, victory and defeat appear in a new light. The Festival of the River celebrated in the novel was originally meant to honour Cosmic Time which alone is eternal. Ages before, a saint had advised the people of the City: "Let the celebration remind you and your subjects of your mortality and the mortality of all men." (60) The stoic calm which the sage teaches his disciples to keep while making wise decisions, reminds one of Lord Krishna's comment that "wise men do not grieve for the dead or the living".[19] The protagonists like Bhoma and the Professor, through their fearless protests against injustice convey the message that like Arjuna, we too should make bold efforts to carry out our commitments which must be to the new integral consciousness that is free from error and delusion. The concept of Time as propounded in the Bhagavad Gita commits man to every phase of cosmological process, imparting to him a new insight into the cyclic movements of history. Here, nothing need be rejected but all can be understood so that the individual, as a part of the whole, is enabled to play a significant role in the disarray

of universal forces. Yogeswara's comment that we are only instruments of the Divine Spirit is exactly what the Hermit states when he reminds the Trade Minister that, "In the drama that unfolds, you are a most important player"(69). These poignant words are in tune with the Vedantic concept of the universe as an intricate process without beginning or end, alternating between cycles of potentiality and projection. At the end of a time cycle or Kalpa, the universe is dissolved. This seed state of the universe in turn, thus awaits its next projection. This cyclic movement is aptly explained in the Bhagavad Gita thus:

> This very same multitude of existence arises again and again, merges helplessly in the coming night O Partha, and stream forth into being at the coming of the day.[20]

Inspite of his existential leanings Joshi takes side with Eliot, rather than Sartre or other existentialists in their concept of Time consciousness. Sartre's idea of consciousness is that of something projected upon man's existential existence which has no escape from the destiny of abandonment and despair which reduces consciousness into nothingness. His idea of rejecting all established values makes man a confused struggler groping in darkness till his end. Sartre's theory offers no answer to the frightening existential questions that

bewilder man. But Eliot upholds the idea that a solution to the existential dilemma is possible if man's quest is directed towards comprehension of his own self. It is this very same theory of self realisation that is emphasized in Joshi's The City and The River. In it, the Hermit reminds an irresponsible Trade Minister that

> There is nothing inevitable about the prophecy. The hand that made it believes, above all, in man's capacity to change his fate. So, even if it speaks of the coming of a King, man can so conduct that the king does not come or the king that comes is of the right kind. (68).

This philosophical statement of the Hermitimplies that there is a purpose leading the entire cosmos and that the meaningful continuity of life on it is possible only through right action. This necessitates total commitment to the ultimate goal which demands untold sacrifices. This principle is accepted by the protagonists in the novel who thus strive towards self realisation. Pathanjali who boldly accepts his fate, the Professorwho forces himself to fast unto death, Grand father who fights injustice tooth and nail, Shailaja's brother who commits suicide burdened by his guilt, the Headman and her race, all subscribe to the Vedantic doctrine that "Sacrifice is the law of the world and nothing can be gained without it."[21] They indulge in a ceaseless process of sacrifices, focussing its realm on the present, thereby

fructifying the lives of others as well. "The fire of sacrifice, agni, is no material flame, but Brahmagni, the fire of the Brahman, into which the offering is poured; the fire is self control."[22] The Hermit expounds this idea of sacrifice while commenting on the Professor's impending death in jail.

> This yagna of the mudpeople, Pathanjali, burns only on sacrifice. When the fire is low, when the flame is dying, must feed it with their own lives,and who knows, the Gods now call for the Professor's life (166).

The potentialities of such sacrifices are explained in the Bhagavad Gita also. As Arjuna stands facing his enemies, his mind is confused. However, his attitude changes as Krishna explains the gospel of Nishkama Karma which means, as interpreted by Swami Vivekananda that "the only true duty is to be unattached and to work as free beings, to give up all work unto God. All our duties are His".[23] While making repeated entreaties to the Trade Minister "to do the right action for what is involved here is the future of the city" (217), the Hermit echoes Krishna's advice that "Not by abstaining from action does a man attain actionlessness (Nishkama) nor by mere renunciation does he attain perfection."[24] The force that drives the Hermit to inspire Bhoma to 'action' and Bhoma to convince the people of their

ultimate purpose, the trials faced by the Professor and Shailaja's brother --- all convey the very same message---the validity of Nishkama Karma in any political context. Their self sacrifice proves that atmasamarpana alone helps to attain the ultimate goal of the realisation of the Divine existence within the soul. The Hermit says:

> God is here, there, in you, in me, in that beggarly boatman and his boat, in all that you see and that you do not see. The world belongs to God . . . God is the highest Truth as it is known to us (70)

This statement of the Hermit reiterates Lord Krishna's pronouncement: "I am the origin of all, from me all proceeds. Knowing this, the wise worship me, endowed with meditation."[25] In this novel too, we find the wise worshipping God through meditation---the sage, the Hermit and also Shailaja's brother sitting in a Yogic trance, waiting for the eternal sound which fills the entire cosmos, " a Nada, you might say, that is at the heart of all things . . . It already exists, is vibrating, has vibrated for several million years. It is just that we can't hear it" (52). It is to hear this Divine music from within, to realise the presence of this Divine spirit in our soul that we should strive while enjoying a temporary existence on the earth. But Joshi admits through the final catastrophe in the novel that this may not be as easily done

as it is preached. But we should go on trying, uncaring for losses or gains. That the trial itself is victory, is the message which the author intends to convey through the novel.

Joshi shows excellent craftsmanship in using myths, motifs and archetypal symbols against a contemporary political background, thereby blending smoothly the narrative peculiarities of the modernist stark realism with that of the post modernist metafiction. The City and The River reminds one of Patricia Waugh's theory of metafiction that

> Contemporary metafictional writing is both a response and a contribution to an even more thorough going sense that reality or mystery is provisional, no longer a world of eternal varieties, but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures.[26]

The illusory atmosphere created in the novel to expose the tension and conflict existing in contemporary society is true to Waugh's opinion that "metafictional novels tend to be constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition, the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and laying bare of that illusion."[27]

The fact that proper names are seldom used in this novel and instead strange coinages like the Nameless One, Grand Master, Grand Father, Dharma, Rallies Master etc., are found

in plenty is significant. The author chooses this method deliberately because

> In metafictional writing, proper names are often flaunted in their arbritrariness or absurdly omitted altogether . . . Or placed in an overtly metaphorical or adjectival relationship with the things they name."[28]

The City and The River is a fictional response to the sense of oppression created by the endless systems and structures of the present day society with its technologies, bureaucracies, ideologies, institutions and traditions--- by reconstructing a play world which consists of similar systems and structures. The plot structure of the novel attunes to the central theme of the endless cycle of Cosmic Time with the main plot fitted artistically between the Prologue and Epilogue, thus implying that the story begins where it ends and ends where it begins. The novelist's ultimate aim is to prove that the wheel of Time goes on turning with each cycle ending with Nature---the manifestation of the Divine --- establishing its supremacy over man. This message echoes Wallace Martin's comment that

> Perhaps our sense of a cyclic return that unites beginning and end comes from Nature---days seasons and years which provide a model for conception of human death and rebirth.[29]

The cryptic though ambiguous epigraph itself with which the novel begins sets it on its atemporal axis. The narrative style based on the element of fantasy, studded with beautiful surrealistic touches like the rose's wilting simultaneous with the boatmen's lament and the river burning while the boatmen are charred, as also the carefully built ambience of mystery pervading through out the novel as illustrated by the appearance of apparitions, child floating on an oarless boat etc. All these factors contribute to the appeal of the novel as one of universal relevance.

All the same, we have to take note that some eyebrows may be raised against the novel mainly on two counts, that the characters do not rise up to the colossal dimensions of the plot structure and another that here too, the novelist is obsessed with the theme of alienation. As regards the second accusation it needs no explanation as such, for the theme of alienation has come to stay as a typical hall-mark of Joshi's novels. His fascination for the subject of alienation arises from his sensitivity to this ever relevant and most intricate problem. It is only that its manifestations as well as its contexts may vary depending on various factors. A socially alert writer can never run away from this burning problem.

To turn to the first part of the criticism, though the accusation may not seem to be unfounded, the portrayal of characters in a diminutive form cannot be considered a serious

draw back. This question is, however, a challenge for the critic's sensibility to comprehend the rationale behind Joshi's intention to stress the insignificance and transience of ordinary mortals compared to the everlasting supremacy of Nature, the embodiment of the omnipotent Supreme Being pervading the cosmos.

The novel becomes an enquiry into the very nature of change and rebellion, highlighting some major aspects and problems of the common people which lie undetected, simultaneously showing the impacts of the larger historical forces on their lives. As all good novels go beyond history and assert their relevance and certainty, the themes and problems this novel has tried to tackle will continue to haunt us in the manner typical of notable fiction.

Notes

[1] Brahma Dutta Sharma, "The City and The River as a political novel," The Novels of Arun Joshi, ed. R.K. Dhawan (New Delhi): Prestige Books, 1992) 241.

[2] T.N. Padma, "Crypto-Myth and Metanovel: Arun Joshi's The City and The River: An Appraisal," Framing Literature: Critical Essays, ed. Rama Nair, B. Gopal Rao, D. Venkateswarlu (New Delhi: Sterling, 1995) 107.

[3] Hansa Gautam, "Tension and Tonicity in Arun Joshi's Novels," Journal of Literary Studies 1.2-3 Winter and Summer (1992): 12

[4] Kuldip Nayar, "Towards Dictatorship," The Judgement (New Delhi: Bell Books, Vikas, 1978) 8.

[5] Dr. R. Nagaraja explains that in Bharatipura, "What is experienced as a momentary disappearance of the human element in Jagannatha solidified over a period of time in the history of "idiologies as a historic necessity."

Dr. R. Nagaraja. Foreword. U.R. Ananthamurthy, Bharatipura, trans. P. Srinivasa Rao (Madras: MacMillan, (1996) x.

[6] Tughlaq's obsession with his absurd reformations makes him a tyrant. One such illustration is when he warns his men: "There will be no more praying in the Kingdom, Najib. Anyone caught praying will be severely punished."

Girish Karnad, Tughlaq. New Delhi : OUP, 1994) 44.

[7] Arun Joshi, The City and the River (New Delhi: Vision Books 1990) 185.

All subsequent references are to this edition and are included paranthetically within the text.

[8] Erich Fromm, "Man in Capitalistic Society," The Sane Society (New Delhi: Ballantine Books, Holt et al, 1995) 139.

[9] Jan Hajda and Robert Travis, " Causes and Consequences of Powerlessness and Meaninglessness," Alienation: Problems of Meaning, Theory and Method, ed. Felix Geyer and David Schweitzer (London: Routldge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1981) 213.

[10] Richard Schacht, "Economic Alienation: With and Without Tears," Geyer and Schweitzer 59.

[11] Geyer and Schweitzer 61.

[12] Melvin Reader, "History and Freedom," The Enduring Questions: Main problems of Philosophy (University of Washington: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976) 714.

[13] Sudhin N. Ghose, The Flame of the Forest (London: Michael Joseph, 1[illegible]63.

[14] John Milton, "Paradise Lost,4.1000-5," The Portable Milton, ed. Douglas Bush (New York : 1977) 463.

[15] T.S. Eliot, "Ash Wednesday, "The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot (London : Faber and Faber, 1969) 89.

[16] The Bhagavad Gita 2.12

[17] Jitendra Kumar Sharma, "Time Spiritual," Time and T.S. Eliot (New Delhi: Sterling, 1985) 72.

[18] J.K. Sharma 72.

[19] The Bhagavad Gita 4.11

[20] The Bhagavad Gita 8

[21] Sri. Aurobindo, "The Significance of Sacrifice," Essays on the Gita (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1970) 114.

[22] Aurobindo 112.

[23] Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. III, (Calcutta : The Rama Krishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1964) 317-18

[24] The Bhagavad Gita 3.4 qtd in Swami Abhedananda, Bhagavad Gita: the Divine Message. (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1969) 1008.

[25] The Bhagavad Gita 10.8-9.

[26] Patricia Waugh, Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self Conscious Fiction (London : Routledge, 1984) 7.

[27] Waugh 6.

[28] Wallace Martin, "Endings and Beginnings of life, Literature and Myth," The Recent Theories of Narrative (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987) 88.

[29] Waugh, "Are Novelists Liars, "Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self Conscious Fiction, 90-91.

Conclusion: Towards Emancipation

Usha K. “The problem of alienation in the fiction of Arun Joshi” Thesis. Department of English, University of Calicut, 1998

Chapter VI

Conclusion: Towards Emancipation

The foregoing chapters have discussed in detail Arun Joshi's deep and sustained interest in the theme of alienation, emphasizing his affinity to Indian philosophical thinking, which is in contrast with the general concept of alientation based largely on western existential theory. This study has also attempted to examine the rich repertoire of his craftsmanship --- his equivalent of Soyinka's "quest for literary forms"[1] --- through which he has held on to his alienation theme. By focussing on this recurring theme, the study has tried to highlight the continuity of his texts and their wholeness as a unified corpus in exploring certain aspects of alienation in the Indian context. Not only the texts analysed in this study, but also extra textual evidences seem relevent to his views on the theme, thus affirming the argument that it has been deeply imprinted in his unconscious. Also worthy of emphasis is the fact that his writings focus on the need for individuals to submit to a process of self enquiry in order to emerge from the constricting state of anomie. Joshi's moving and positive response to the human predicament, as reflected in his fiction, is apt to kindle the literary interest of any inquistitive mind to make serious creative interpretation, on a wide range of issues. Every

effort has been made here to interpret his unique preoccupation with the theme of alienation which has defined and shaped his aesthetics, determined his settings and his protagonists and directed the turn of his plots and the texture of his imagery.

While Joshi's resolve to focus on a particular theme has been lauded by many, the very same issue has caused some disappointment to a few who look up to the writers for more variety and colour. However, that the concrete richness of his expression of alienation, the roots of which are found in western existential theory and Indian philosophical thought, offers a deepening of our understanding of life, is beyond dispute.

Arun Joshi's rise to fame in the literary world was not meteoric. He made steady progress as he moved from one novel to the other. The Foreigner examines the problem of alienation with a remarkable degree of maturity and technical competence. The story unfolds in a series of flashbacks with the events placed in a cyclic order, juxtaposing various diametrically opposite elements like fancy and reality, past and present, thus evolving a pattern which was to be utilised fully and more effectively in later fiction, especially in the last novel. The novelist's choice of apt language and well-defined strategies has from the beginning helped him to meet E.M.

Forster's standards to "create curiosity and sustain inquisitiveness"[2] by retaining the element of suspense till the very end. The first person narrative does not in any way reduce the writer's distance from the protagonist who narrates the story. Instead, the author makes an objective analysis of Sindi's predicament resulting from the East-West encounter. Sindi's alienation is self-inflicted and not so convincing because the society from which he distances himself hardly treats him as an alien, as he himself confesses: "They had fervently hoped they would give me a place to anchor in this lonely planet" (The Foreigner, 186). Hence, as a study of alienation, the novel does not make the same impact as his later novels do. But we admire Joshi's craft in sustaining the reader's interest. By using a brisk and vigorous narrative style that "transmutes a philosophical concept into fictional enactment,"[3] he makes The Foreigner a remarkable novel. The story surges forward with all the scattered events moving simultaneously and converging at a point. The novelist shows remarkable maturity in handling dramatic situations with stoic control and clinical objectivity. Through the deft handling of characters and situations Joshi exposes the frailty of human relationships and attitudes particularly in the American context. While he satirises on the one hand the Indo-American snobbery and prejudices towards India, he has no inhibitions, on the other, to mock the attitude of many a young and rich Indian abroad who shamelessly declares, "I

would never go back to India if I had the choice" (The Foreigner, 89). Vedic parallels are rather scarce in The Foreigner when compared to the later novels. Its only suggestion would perhaps be in Sindi's realisation that feigned indifference to problems is a mark of ignorance, on seeing the idol of Nataraja in Khemka's room. That the dance of Lord Siva who combines in himself the dual functions of destruction and construction is meant to save the mortals from the abyss of ignorance and illusion enlivens Sindi's dying spirits. So also, the progress of Sindi from a state of innocence to experience symbolises a pilgrim's quest for meaning in life that we read in the puranas.

The crisp and matter-of-fact syntax chosen by the novelist to express his vision of alienation aptly conveys the message. Symbols, images and metaphors which impart relevance to the novel in the large context of human emotions enrich the entire atmosphere of the novel. Images related to industry and technology reveal Joshi's affinity to the world quite familiar to him. He himself confesses, "The world which I knew well is the industrial world which has not so far been handled in a novel"[4].

The identification of the protagonist with a rootless tree and the caricature of his parents as a couple of wrinkled

and cracked photographs are nothing but symbolic representations of Sindi's alienation. The title itself transmutes the feelings of alienation and absurdity of human situation in the cosmic context. The novelist deftly steers the action in the novel to a positive end disclosing a unique existential concern which yearns for affirmation. The protagonist feels the inevitable native cultural thrust that overcomes the dualism that breeds anguish. The absurd hero thus transforms into a Karmayogi overcoming despair and alienation.

If Sindi oberoi in The Foreigner is alienated from society in general, Billy in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is isolated from the whole apparatus of conventional and ritualistic upper class society. Here again, by resorting to the first person narrative, Joshi explores the psychic trauma of the protagonist. The subtle interplay of situation and character makes Billy a complex protagonist. The novelist here chooses to avoid narration from a single plane but makes it as intricate as a jigsaw puzzle. The very same incidents are analysed by different characters from various angles to stress the many facets of reality. Ample use of images, local myths and allegories and a careful choice of authentic language which speaks of the author's command over the rhythms of the spoken voice are the merits of this novel. The central image

of the Chandtola on the Kala Pahar can be taken as Joshi's aesthetic symbol of man's search for a spiritual fulcrum however difficult it may prove to be from his ethnological power to resurrect it in his own mind.

The image of fire is Joshi's language to explain the elemental fire burning in Billy's consciousness. In Jungian terms it is his anima which pours to blend with the female counterpart, whose animus is waiting for the same. The symbol of fire indicates the immortality following purification by sacrifice, by burning everything impure and igniting everything in which the sacred seemed potential. "It burns for the maintaining of the sacred, ineffable, substantive venture; that which has gone through the ordeal of fire has gained in homogenety and hence in purity."[5] The tall flame in the hill temple in The Last Labyrinth, the laser beams which become the funeral pyre of the boatman, as well as the flames of the Hermit's yagna in The City and The River are all further illustrations of Joshi's faith in the ineffable divinity which Som fumbles to achieve while Billy and also the protagonists in The City and the River consummate it.

Thus The Strange Case of Billy Biswas turns out to be a compelling novel about a strange quest drawing upon myths and folklores familiar tc the Indian mind. The union of Billy

and Bilasia reminds one of the union of Radha and Krishna in which culminates the human soul's longing to unite with the divine. The tribals consider Billy as the human incarnation of God true to the Indian concept of avatara. Another mythical motif that recurs in the novel is the concept of matra, the natural limits overstepping which man is punished. Joshi shows excellent narrative skill in maintaining contrast in various aspects in the novel. He has succeeded in convincing the reader of the contrasting elements of Billy's impulsive character and Romi's rational thinking. Contrast between Billy's divided selves is also maintained with equal dexterity. It reveals the gulf of difference between the two distinct cultures that these two geographic locations have come to expose what has been lost and to reinforce the utter falsity of the so-called refinement of the Indian upper crust. The novel lives through a tension between the two extremes of a given civilisation, the two distinct tribalisms spanning the complex devide of a strange society. A rare spiritual regeneration is what the novel structurally aims at, each device dramatising the central contradiction between spiritual regeneration and spiritual decay. Myths and legends form the underlying design, blending together all the digressions, the tales within tales enveloping the main subject of the novel. Dramatic situations, including the most dramatic story of Billy's reappearance are narrated without an iota of

sentimentality. The first person narrative is well suited as it effectively transports the incidents to the reader after being filtered through the consciousness of the narrator. The impact of alienation which affects even the minor characters imply the universality of the problem. However, it is gratifying that thanks to the spell of the Sankhya Philosophy and Vedantic doctrines, the novelist directs the action towards a positive end. But since Billy's search for meaning is conducted in a very hostile atmosphere, he has to pay a heavy price for it. Yet Joshi prefers the protagonist to die 'established' rather than live 'rootless', It may also be noted that the title itself has a thematic significance in the sense that Billy's case is considered to be strange by the materialistic society. The word 'case' which normally means a psychological case study is also appropriate as Billy's search is after psyche. The crisp and precise dialogue which sometimes rises to poetic heights suits the intense mood of the novel. Wit, humour and irony also help to throw light on the peculiarities of the Indian sensibility. The opening epigraph embodies the gist of the novel directing our attention towards the cultural traditions and rituals of the tribal community. All in all, this novel, built on two major narrative streams running parallel to each other till they converge in a poignant denouement is a more powerful and better constructed novel than The Foreigner.

Joshi's only collection of short stories is also in the true style of his favourite theme of alienation caused by the affluent society. In creating such finished stories as "The Home Coming" and "The Only American from Our Village", Joshi seems to agree by and large with Eudora Welty's definition of the short story as "something that begins and carries through and ends all in the same curve."[6] "The Only American from Our Village" narrated in a typically Indian interminate and breathless tone places him among those writers for whom a short story can only gain vividness from "a looseness of structure"[7] as Alberk Cook maintains, or from what Eudora Welty regards as an unmitigated shapelessness of narrative.

In "The Home Coming," Joshi cruises on the experiment of interspacing two parallel streams of narration, one about the gruesome experiences on the warfront and another of the alienation felt by the protagonist on returning home. The polarities in the attitudes of the protagonist about the same aspects of life before and after the traumatic experiences as a soldier are graphically portrayed in the story. He who was once eager to get married, now hesitates and wonders about "the meaning of marriage, one man's life."[8]

"The Gherao" is an objective analysis of the tension caused by the confrontation between the two generations ---

the young and the old --- the reader realises the wider implications beneath the plot as he reads beyond the seemingly simple story of the conflict between the Principal and students of an educational institution. "The Survivor" is yet another narrative experiment dealing with corruption as its main theme which interestingly happens to be the topic for the next novel, The Apprentice. Leela in "The Frontier Mail is gone," Kewal Kapoor in "The Survivor," the peasant boys in "The Harmik," as well as the protagonists in "The Servant" and "A Trip for Mr. Lele" are all alienated characters rebelling against pseudo-westernisation that mutilates the individual by curbing his creativity and identity.

Joshi's short stories show him to be singularly conscious of techniques and experimentation, often varying the style-sometimes adopting a free style and sometimes making it as sharp and candid as Poe wants a story to be. Poe prescribes a tale to be short enough to be read at one sitting. In his review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Twice Told Tale Poe remarks: "Like an arrow, the short story should fly straight to the very centre of the target."[9] The variety of narrative experiments in style---of crisp English prose or traditional and rhythmic Indian story telling--- along with the easy handling of narrative devices like first person narrative, objective and clinical analyses, parallel

narratives converging at a climactic point etc., prove that Joshi believes in no fixed pattern of story telling except that it should have to be our effective literary medium. He himself says:"Each has its own place. In my case it is the theme which determines whether it would be a short or a novel,"[10] Though his contribution to the genre of short fiction is meagre in number, a good many of his stories contained in this collection are excellent contributions, enabling us to rate him as one of the best Indian story writers in English.

The Apprentice which followed the collection of short stories can be classified as a confessional novel written in the psycho narrative pattern. This fictional experiment is a commentary on the theme of the decay of the self in a corrupt society. The narrator is a victim of corruption engulfing a metropolitan Indian society against the backdrop of the Indo-China War. The story of Ratan Rathor's life, beginning in a state of innocence which gradually drowns itself in the sea of corruption, and narrated to a passive audience, is reminiscent of Browning's dramatic monologues. The brilliant portrayal of characters like Himmatsingh, the Brigadier etc., transforms a social study of the genesis and causes of corruption into a moving novel of remarkable credibility. The

novel is a truthful commentary on the tensions between the inherited and acquired values of an innocent youth leading to his alienation.

Inspite of sacrificing his true identity, hoping to conform to society Ratan Rathor finds himself a misfit. As he himself unabashedly admits: "I had become at the age of twenty one, a hypocrite and a sham . . . I had become a master faker."[14] The protagonist who cherishes a feverish passion for careerism turns a conscience-torn person only when his corrupt deals take the life of his closest friend the Brigadier. The ambience of the novel is suffused with the images of conflict between idealism and hypocrisy, corruption and humanism, vanity and humility. The novelist presents a bleak picture of India corroded with corruption in all fields of life including religion. This is illustrated through the depiction of a tainted priest who offers a bribe to Ratan to save his son who is a criminal. It is significant that though the events occur in a pensive set up the novel ends on a positive note as in the earlier pieces of fiction, thus affirming the novelist's hope of India's regeneration with men like Ratan seeking redemption. Ratan's remorse and his urge to purgate his soul through an act of sacrifice is true to the Indian concept that sacrifice is the loftiest means to attain self realisation. This novel also propagates the theory of Nishkama Karma which has already influenced the first novel.

Joshi scales greater heights in craftsmanship by exploring new vistas of narrative strategies in the next and much acclaimed novel, The Last Labyrinth. The central idea of the novel is undoubtedly the theme of alienation, probing deeper into the intricate workings of human psyche. The protagonist strains to find some meaning in life, being torn among various conflicting experiences such as faith and reason, dream and reality, the western and eastern attitudes, the ancient and modern concepts, belief and doubt, resistance and submission etc. The protagonist, who is on a perpetual quest falls back to the initial stage of mental trauma at the end of the novel. The retrospective narration without a proper chronological order does justice to the agonised working of the protagonist's mind. The action is compressed into a circular movement within a compact framework. The reader is led through the labyrinths of Som Bhaskar's soul using symbols, fantasy and the language of dreams. Som's alienation results from his inability to believe in the invisible presence of the Supreme Being. His confusion owes to the confrontation of various kinds of convictions during the different phases of his life---such as his mother's blind faith in Lord Krishna, his father's preoccupation with the First Cause, Leela Sabnis' obsession with science, as also Aftab and Anuradha's belief in the supernatural. These

conflicting convictions continue to haunt him all along, thus creating difficulty for him to distinguish between the seemingly similar Upanishadic ideas of the 'Being' and 'Becoming' --- the latter being only the manifestation of the former, which is the Divine Spirit. The very fact that Joshi graphically depicts the mental anguish of Som Bhaskar in a few deft strokes is ample proof of the strides of progress he has made as a master craftsman of fiction. In the novel, which also tells the tale of the contrasting cities of the westernised Bombay and the feudal Benares, Som appears as the symbol of continental angst, juxtaposed against a mysterious and alien world symbolised by Anuradha and Aftab. Subtle interplay of voids and labyrinth which also act as complimentary to each other offers more meaning to the novel. It enables a discerning reader to equate the mysterious labyrinths of the Lal Haveli with the microcosmic labyrinth of life and reality which provide nothing but emptiness and despair. The peacock figure in the carpet denotes the psychic duality in Som. His incessant cries, 'I want, I want, I want,' is an expression of his hunger for some remedy for his spiritual anguish. The doctor who explains that "Psychiatry doesn't allow certain approaches to a problem like yours"(The Last Labyrinth, 180) stands as helplessly as the one in The City and the River who fails to solve the psychic problems of

Dharma's father thus throwing light on the extremities to which alienation can affect man in the present society. The dreams of death and labyrinths suggest the protagonists fear of the inevitable and ignorance of man's ultimate goal of uniting with the Divine Spirit. it is through the language of dreams that Joshi projects Som's disturbed mind placed against the social and ethical contexts. They consist mainly of unrelated images scattered through out the novel without a proper chronological order. The pessimistic dreams are to him an act of punishment while the brighter ones make him hopeful. The recurrent dreams of flying high in the sky denote his soaring ambition to achieve material success. The snow covered mountain top symbolises peace and quietude which in reality are inaccessible to him. Gargi appears in the dream as a mother symbol. The dreams are descriptive in language, and often characterised by dialogues between different characters. The dreams abound in surrealistic situations where places and contexts change within no time. Strange coinages like 'Suns', 'Skies' etc., are used deliberately as metaphors for a unique effect. Needless to say, these narrative devices smoothly blend with Joshi's unique handling of the subject of alienation. Here, Joshi adheres to the Upanishadic doctrins which advocate escape from the bondage of ignorance or Maya and stress the need for faith in the Supreme 'Being' which manifests itself in the different 'Becomings'.

In tandem with his growth as a master story teller, Joshi's perception of alienation has acquired greater dimensions as he moves from one novel to the other. The theme of alienation attains a wider centrality in his last novel, The City and the River. This novel manifests greater maturity in Joshi's art. The entire novel is built on post-modernist techniques, focussing on the subject of alienation experienced by the common man reeling under corruption and power struggle. Breaking away from the usual pattern of story telling in the first person narrative, here the poignant tale of an unknown city unfolds through the narration of a sage to his disciple, both being symbols of immortality. The story that emerges with clarity and depth is a myth of death and resurrection which implies the endless cyclic pattern of the universe. It is also concerned with a process of conflicts between dominance and resistance, corruption and innocence, death and eternity, science and myth, fact and fantasy. These conflicts being the fundamental causes of the ultimate conflict between 'The City' and 'The River,' quite paradoxically, it is also a tale of harmony where Time merges with the Timeless, death with immortality, and truth with fiction. All these contribute to the final merging of the entire city in the river in the deluge.

The political back drop is woven with such dexterity that the 'Nowhere city' evolves into an 'Everywhere city' thus

attributing to the novel a universal significance. Joshi deploys some very beautiful motifs and archetypes to develop the theme of alienation from different planes of action.

The most striking among them is the quest motif, exemplified by various characters tormented by existential predicament. The major archetypes of the city and the river grow with the help of symbols like the Rose Garden, the Seven Hills, the Gold Mines etc., as also the characters of symbolic significance. The mythical characters like Yogeswara, Little Star, the Nameless One etc., and the mythical parallels to the river Ganga and infant Lord Vishnu drifting on the calm seas after the deluge give the novel a typical Indian ambience which reveal Joshi's pronounced faith in Indian mythology and ethos. The chronological order maintained in the novel is reminiscent of the first novel, The Foreigner. The events are so arranged that the main story of the city's fall and rise is fitted compactly in nine chapters between the Prologue and th Epilogue. By blending fantasy and realism smoothly, the novelist reveals his unwillingness to confine to the pattern of realistic fiction. Instead, he resorts to a pattern of presenting a perceptive record of a number of incidents cast in a structure that is more cyclical than linear, and repetitive than singular.

Unlike the realistic novels of the early twentieth century dealing mostly with social problems, those written in

the second half of the century have shown a marked preference to dwell on problems of the psyche and rightly so because, this is an age of tensions when the common man is caught in a psychic trauma - an inner crisis, "a conviction of isolation, randomness, (and) meaninglessness".[12] In such a situation no committed writer can shirk his social responsibilities or concerns. The same reason forces Joshi too to aim at projecting this besetting problem through his compelling novels and short stories. By successfully exploring the various facets of this problem, Joshi has engaged himself in a search for the essence of human being.

The conclusion of the study carries the suggestion that Arun Joshi, a master story teller, with his untiring search for new ways to find expression, his efforts to graft the western sensibility on Indian thinking, his innovative techniques of narration using myths, motifs, archetypes etc., and above all the positive dimension given to the concept of alienation has not only caught the imagination of readers but has also been well received by the literary circle.

Notes

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