CHAPTER TWO

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL OVERTONES AS A NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

The first specific aspect of Arun Joshi's narrative method is relevant to the technique called autobiographical overtones. This technique harnesses the role or actions of the leading character in a literary work as the narrator. This premise is used because of the one formidable presumption that the author himself talks through the protagonist — presents events, incidents, and characters in interactive relationships. The story is generally narrated by the hero or a character in the story, and the Narrator, speaks of himself as "I". In case of the first person narrative, the "I" point of view, may represent the author himself, but it is more often through the point of view of a character in the story that best serves the author's purpose. In this way, the first person narrative, with all its variations establishes a friendly relationship between the narrator and the reader. But, this in no way means that the "I" of the narrator
stands for the author himself simply because the incidents which happen to the narrator, actually happened to the author. Almost invariably, the similarities between the author and his protagonists do not qualify or render a work fit enough to be called an autobiography because a novel is usually a combination of fact and fancy.

The device of autobiographical overtones as a narrative technique has been used by Arun Joshi in all its variations. However, it merits mention that for Joshi this technique is not a medium of projecting the self or of mere self propagation for that matter. For him, it is something new and experimental. It is, as it were, one of the crucial evidences of his creative competence as a writer. Many of Arun Joshi’s protagonists undergo endless frustrations which the writer did not necessarily do in his life. And, it has been significantly highlighted by Taylor Stoehr that “a great deal of what comes to be narrated is not necessarily more than an attempt to surmise or parallel the author’s probable intention.” It may be
imagined that behind Joshi’s encounter with existential urgencies there looms his intense living in America and first hand experience of things in India down to the very actual humdrum level of life in its varied forms. Therefore, his fictional attempt in this regard can be best seen as an allegory of the artist, and no wonder, the details allegorize his unconscious conflict about the author’s diverse experience.

Arun Joshi’s novel, *The Foreigner* (1968) constitutes the first classic instance of the use of autobiographical overtones as a narrative technique. R.K. Dhawan has gone on record to confirm that this “novel about a Kenyan-Indian is largely autobiographical” in tone. Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist of this novel is highly educated like the novelist Arun Joshi himself especially in regard to his movement over the face of the globe obtaining academic degrees and practical experience of life besides acquiring professional expertise. This comprehensive aspect of the protagonist’s personality is vastly comparable, rather matches well with that of the author himself. Educated in
the United States of America with a degree in Engineering from the University of Kansas with further specialisation in industrial management of the M.I.T., and his assignment in a mental hospital in the States where his uncle was a psychiatrist dealing with chronic cases of schizophrenia, Arun Joshi grew to be a connoisseur of souls divided against themselves. This experience was bound to create and leave a potent and strong impression on his young, sensitive and receptive mind. And for this self-speaking reason Joshi’s protagonists and almost all his major characters across his fiction, are found involved in ticklish issues with their mind engrossed in labyrinths of existential dilemmas.

In this novel Surrender Oberoi, called Sindi for short, is the narrator of his own story and details out that he is a rootless, restless, and luckless person in the world lost in absurdity. On this background and in this context Thakur Guru Prasad has pointed out that Sindi is “an existential Everyman of our time,” and Sindi puts it himself in the course of the narrative:
I saw myself as I had always been. An uprooted youngman living in the latter half of the twentieth century who had become detached from everything except himself.\(^4\)

In early stages of Sindi's life he thought and behaved rationally, but did not know that "objectivity was just another form of vanity"\(^5\) but gradually he secured some light of knowledge and practical experience but became detached even from himself. Eventually, however, he comes to understand deeply the meaning of detachment and the pinch of alienation. And after this, from what is called the choking feeling of being "alone in the darkness"\(^6\) Sindi moves to what it known as the experience of all light and perception and in virtue where of learns the real meaning of detachment:

Detachment consisted of right action and not escape from it. The gods had set a high price to teach me just that.\(^7\)

In view of the above it should not be taken as a mere coincidence that Arun Joshi has put a great deal of himself into Sindi, who is quite like him, an America trained engineer who has finally settled in a business and industrial concern in Delhi of course with the difference that the former owns factories and
the latter serves in an establishment. It is also remarkable that the novel has been written in the form of reminiscences of things past, and has confessional mode, which by itself is an inalienable part of the narrative technique rooted in autobiographical overtones.

At another level also, Arun Joshi has used much in the novel to be perceived and comprehended by the reader what was imbibed by him directly or indirectly and which left a deep impact on his mind and art. In this regard he was profoundly influenced by the philosophy of Albert Camus (1913-60) and Jean Paul Sartre (1905-80) besides the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and the doctrine of the *Bhagawad Gita* that emphasizes mutual dependence and action without expectation, and that individual actions have their effect on others around besides one’s own life. That is why Joshi’s protagonist — Sindi Oberoi — could not afford to continue with irresponsible existence beyond a limit and had to commit himself eventually. At the same time, in this very specific context Arun Joshi seems
to have interwoven his humanistic values in the texture of his books. In reply to a pertinent query by M.R. Dua, Arun Joshi has pointed out that this novel is "primarily concerned with religious issues" rooted in "the problem of an essentially Hindu mind" which implicitly and explicitly attaches immense value to the right way to live. In this context, as a part of the vigorous investigation of the situation by the author and out of reaction in case of Sindi at once the protagonist and the narrator lets us know his own values and by implication those of Arun Joshi. For example, Sindi's heart bled at the sight of the wretched conditions of the poor factory worker named Muthu and Joshi indicated Mr. Khemka for exploiting his helpless employees out of his own sense of values.

It is you who have swindled miserable wretches in rags who push carts on your streets and die at twenty five.

Moved by the poverty, helplessness and deprivation of the factory workers, he makes up his mind to take up cudgels for them.
The use of autobiographical overtones as a narrative technique in this novel is further confirmed by the harnessing of autobiographical point of view. The narrator-protagonist Sindi Oberoi enters the novel as an “I” character. The purpose and effect of narration in this kind of novel demand this technique which necessarily presents the protagonist passing through stages opening out with myopia and closing with understanding and vision. Sindi Oberoi always felt like an alien and a foreigner. Sindi’s parentage and early life made him the ideal “foreigner”; the man who did not belong anywhere. He “grows up without family ties and without a country.”¹⁰ After his uncle’s death, who had brought him up, he felt that “the security was destroyed. Now I suppose I existed only for dying.”¹¹ His bitter and unsavoury experiences in Boston result in his decision to leave America in favour of India just by a flip of coin. He thought himself a misfit in the ultra-modern society of Boston but later he realized that his foreign background made him a misfit in Indian society as well. In this way, it
becomes evident that Sindi feels alienated continually and that
his alienation is of the soul and not of geography. Right from
the beginning, he is oppressed by the desire to find “the
meaning of life.”¹² Going back to the moment of his deciding to
leave America we get to know how Sindi had felt:

Like many of my breed, I believed (erroneously) that I could
escape a part of myself by hopping from one land mass to
another.¹³

A firm realisation to this effect concretises as he discovers that
this decision to shift from America to India was erroneous
because “it had only been a change of theatre from America:
the show had remained unchanged.”¹⁴ Here, the author himself
talks either through the protagonist or uses the first-person
narrative to put together fact and fancy. Keeping the idea of the
value of human personality which also is an inalienable aspect
of the autobiographical overtones as a technique, Arun Joshi
seems to point out that the main problem faced by Sindi arising
out of his awareness of lack of purpose in life is that “it stifled
the spontaneity of his personality - - initiative, feeling, wishes
and opinion." The author narrator compares the hero's meaningless existence to that of "an idiot without a keeper;" and the protagonist is depicted as one who feels "like a desert . . . in winter time." Then, using the first-person narrative he observes, "as if somebody had given me a big dose of anaesthesia." And his "existential drifting over the surface of the earth, and his experimentation with self" only intensify his dismal loneliness and acute sense of meaninglessness of life. In the process of exploring the problems of Sindi in depth, it comes to be seen that "a strange feeling of aloneness . . . permeates the entire narrative and provides the necessary texture and structure to the novel," and in her review of the novel, Meenakshi Mukherjee describes the protagonist as "a perennial outsider". In point of fact, Sindi is always ill at ease in the world he has to live and regards himself as "an uprooted young man living in the latter half of the twentieth century", in "a strange world of intense pleasure and almost equally intense pain."
Right from the early stages Sindi has been oppressed by the desire “to do something meaningful”, and by nature as also in requirement of such a proclivity Sindi was humane person. He sympathized with Babu Rao Khemka when he had gone to Boston to join college or when he failed in his examinations meeting the Dean to request him to save Babu from being thrown out, or with June Blyth on knowing that she carried Babu’s child and sought his advice and help in deciding to marry him and in feeling depressed rather lost to learn that she had died in the course of an operation for abortion. His essential humaneness is further revealed in getting involved with Sheila and her father’s business. Still further, this trait of Sindi gets revealed in his sacrificing his job in Bombay when misfortune descended on Mr.Kehmka to look after his business and work in the interest of the employees. In this context, The Foreigner has come to be widely acknowledged as a possible panacea for life’s problems since it “presents detachment as a remedy.” Sindi’s moral growth depends upon his search for detachment. He says: “I don’t want to get involved” but
“everywhere I turned I saw involvement.”  

In one sense and upto the final stage of understanding and resolution he considers involvement to be the root cause of all problems but all problems got solved when he came to understand the meaning of detachment which lies in “right action and not escape from it.”

Then, among the different ways and patterns to use autobiographical overtones as a narrative technique, Arun Joshi has used a wide variety of settings and scenes. Though Sindi Oberoi disclaims: “I am not very good at remembering events”, yet he acquits himself as an effective narrator describing events through reminiscences. Down the pages of the novel, the autobiographical author-narrator using the “I” element or through the agency of certain character, takes us to Nairobi where Sindi, the protagonist as well as the narrator of the story was born; to London where he had been a student; to a night club in Soho where he worked as a dishwasher and bar man; to Scotland where he worked at a small village Library
and discussed religion and mysticism with a catholic priest; to Boston where he studied for six years and met Babu Rao Khemka and June Blyth; and to Delhi where he ultimately settled. In Delhi, the narrative technique through autobiographical overtones, is employed to describe a scene in the house of his friend Babu Rao Khemka which Sindi visited to give details about Babu’s death in a car accident. Naturally, he was apprehensive of violent expression of emotion there but to his great surprise he found that Babu’s sister Sheila and his father Mr. Khemka had accepted his death with calm resignation, and in his estimate things became ridiculous when they kept insisting that he have a drink. Earlier in America, he had felt perturbed at the artificiality and hypocrisy of participants at a ball arranged by International Students Association, who pretended to be courteous, promising even utter strangers to meet again, knowing thoroughly that it would be impossible. However, he found things no better at parties at home in India especially in Mr. Khemka’s house where people
were drinking, eating and talking of money, with Mr. Khemka absorbed only with accumulating wealth without bothering about means.

Unlike his first novel wherein Arun Joshi competently used such of the narrative variations as the first-person narrator, speaking of himself as "I", or through the protagonist where the author himself talks through the protagonist in terms of his actions, in his second novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) he has employed the witness-narrator's point of view. It is remarkable that here Arun Joshi has so handled the narrative paraphernalia that the witness narrator operates, as it were, as one of the major characters in the novel. In this novel the narrator is Romesh Sahai, called Romi in short. He is a close friend of the protagonist Bimal Biswas addressed as Billy. He had met Billy for the first time as a student in New York when he was searching for a residence in Harlem for his sojourn. Romi serves as a medium of narration in the spirit of autobiographical overtones by allegorising his unconscious
conflict quite relevant, if not close, to Arun Joshi’s diverse experience. In specific terms Romi performs the narrative function as an involved friend and a detached narrator though right in the beginning of the novel he disclaims to have understood Billy:

I realize that most futile cry of man is his impossible wish to be understood. The attempt to understand is even more futile. If in spite of this 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.

Very much like Joseph Conrad’s Marlow who repeatedly stated that Jim, the hero of Lord Jim “was not . . . clear to me”, Romi also disclaims, right at the start of the narrative, that he has never been able to understand Billy Biswas. On this general background Romi the narrator takes the reader to the particular perspectives of the text referable to crucial contexts, events, incidents and characters.

Since the narrator cannot write anything that he does not Know or can not legitimately imagine he turns out to be purely subjective and operates in the at once natural and self-devised
capacity of the first person singular. The use of the first person singular “I” is very frequent and textual instances to this effect are galore. Romi’s submission: “I had neither the imagination nor the obsessive predilections of Billy Biswas”30 shows how Joshi has employed definite mode deftly to emphasize that Billy possessed these attributes of character which Romi lacked. Then, it is narrated how the sculptures at Konark seemed to solve Billy’s problem of identity: “where had I come from? Where was I going”?31 Another example in this regard comprises the statement: “This is what I have always dreamt of.”32 Again, referring to his wife Meena he says: “The more I tried to tell her . . . the more resentful she became”.33 Then, while making a reference to the phoney atmosphere of the modern society Billy condemns it in utterly unequivocal terms: “I don’t think all city societies are as shallow as ours.”34 Then, another example in this regard lies in Billy’s observation that on return from expedition, “The curious feeling that trails me everywhere is that I am a visitor from the wilderness to the
marts of the Big City”. Going by the foregoing set of examples of a specific nature Joy Abraham has pertinently observed that “the narrative strategy in the Strange case of Billy Biswas” constitutes “an attempt to discuss and justify the primitive instincts of Billy.”

It is not merely the events in Billy’s and his own life that the narrator recounts but he also tries to find the truth hidden behind them. In one situation and in a specific reference to an event Billy told Romi that Harlem looked to him as the “most human place”. Then, the Bhubaneshwar episode brings Billy’s desire to the fore that he had the urge to live like a primitive man in a primitive world. In the event that Billy describes the primitive tribal life where nobody “is interested in the prices of food grains . . . or roads or elections”, with a view to highlight the meaningful truth behind the events the narrator puts that Billy’s whole life is organized “around his interest in the primitive man”. In the same way, as Billy came out of the railway station he felt: “It was as though a
slumbering part of me had suddenly come awake." he felt that
the Adivasis could help me solve problems of identity. In
contrast to the primitive life of the Adivasis Billy points to the
modern society as a world of "total decay". In reference to
Romi's unwitting role in reclaiming Billy to civilization, Billy
gets shot down by a policeman's bullet and it is ironically
pointed out by the narrator that Billy's case was disposed of "in
the only manner that a humdrum society knows of disposing its
rebels, its seers, its true lovers". In contrast to the false cords
of relationships in the so-called civilized world, the world of the
primitive is genuine where Romi points out: "I marvelled at the
intense beauty of this human relationship that was born out of
so much love". Going deep down into the essence of things,
this statement and others of this nature, is speaking by proxy as
it were, on behalf of Billy. After joining the tribals Billy takes
us to deeper areas of visualization than simply meeting Bilasia.
According to him "becoming a primitive was only a first step, a
means to an end". Billy further added: "of course I realized it
then that I was seeking something else. I am still seeking something else".44

Thus, instead of a straightforward narration of events in their chronological order, the narrator leads us through the introspective memories, innermost thoughts and feelings of Billy as also of other characters. For example, in reference to a music session, it is commented that Billy has the first glimpse of "the other side"45 of his personality at "a music session", which keeps on exerting "a mesmeric pull"46 on him. At the same time, there is an identicality between the autobiographical author-narrator and the character narrator in the book. Billy Biswas, like the author, is a man of brilliant intellect, and profound sensibility. Both belong to respectable, educated families, the author’s father, Dr. A.C. Joshi being a distinguished academician, and that of Billy a judge of India’s Supreme Court. Then both of them are concerned with Engineering, with Billy being a teacher of Anthropology at Delhi University. On this background, it can be said that Billy
Biswas is the prototype of Arun Joshi who writes for expounding his ideas vis-à-vis understanding his own true self, because he “essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and of himself.” In precise terms, Billy was a split personality -- split between “primitive” and “civilized”. In the perception of Elizabeth B. Hurlock, Billy Biswas is a “socially disinterested” character, and therefore rejects “the accepted cultural moves regarding behaviour”. As a student in the States, Billy had loved to sojourn in New York’s Harlem which is comparable to the innocence and freedom of the Satpura Hills. In a bid to justify Billy’s stand, D. Prempati points out that he was only a historical anachronism”. Billy’s wife Meena points out that Billy was “getting stranger and stranger with every passing day”. In as much as Billy craved to move to a world where he was not treated as an outcast, he eventually rejected the “pseudo western values” and moved where there was no rat race, where “friends can die for each other”, and where lies “not Bilasia . . . but (his) life”, and
where, like others, there was no "no ambition, none at all". It was probably here that Billy found his identity. And, in one respect, this feat gets remarkably accomplished through Arun Joshi’s narrative technique.

*The Apprentice* (1974) is yet another illustration of Arun Joshi’s use of autobiographical overtones as a narrative technique. At the very outset, the remarkable phenomenon that *The Apprentice* like *The Foreigner* and *The Strange case of Billy Biswas*, is a confessional novel, seems worth mentioning. This feature of the novel becomes evident when the omniscient narrator makes a significant observation that Ratan, the narrator “must tell all . . . . what use is a confessional if not total”. Here, narration has been given effect through the protagonist named Ratan Rathor. His listener is an N.C.C. Cadet from Punjab who has come to Delhi for Republic Day parade rehearsals. Ratan Rathor exhaustively narrates the tale of his life to this young cadet from Punjab who is present before him but maintains silence all through. Quite like the Ancient
Mariner in Coleridge who had mesmerised the Wedding Guest, Ratan too insists that his listener - - the N.C.C. cadet - - must hear him through and through. Ratan is a child of double inheritance - - the idealism of his father and the downright pragmatism of his mother. His father being a freedom fighter pleaded high ideals and spirit of sacrifice. On the other hand his mother told her son to be practical. So much so that she equated money with the worth of man and asserted:

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Many things were great in life, but the greatest of them all was money . . . . There were many laws . . . but money was law unto itself.```

As stated in the beginning of discussion on *The Apprentice* that it is a confessional novel, it seems necessary to point out that Joshi’s resorting to the confessional mode is by way of fictional experimentation. Chiefly, this part of the technique is harnessed through psycho-narration. Ratan Rathor narrates it in a manner that shows how Ratan becomes a victim of corruption. In the initial stages of his professional career he aspired to rise “higher than the others aspired for” by fair
means on the strength of his education and intelligence. Later he fully succumbs to the ways of corruption in a metropolitan society which is itself thoroughly corrupt rather rotten. To show this phenomenon the method here is like a catechism. The narrator himself poses the questions and expresses the doubts that may arise in the listener's mind.

*The Apprentice* in fact, conducts a vigorous investigation into the condition of the world which is equated with decaying values of a degenerating civilization. And, here, Arun Joshi has depicted his own sense of values. In observance of this technique Joshi has used the observation and comments of characters other than the protagonist to serve the author's purpose. Ratan begins his life with high ambition to make a mark in the world but as V. Gopal Reddy points out, "out of sheer exhaustion of joblessness and privation is forced to shed the morality of his father to become an 'apprentice' to the corrupt civilization", and adjusts fully to the guilt of the modern society in order to belong. He made compromises. He
learnt it thoroughly that “the world runs on the basis of deals”, and he struck deals freely and prospered.

After initial hesitation which was thrown off by Himmat Singh whom they called Sheikh, Ratan took to corruption. Himmat Singh admonished Ratan by telling him that God had not laid down any law for virtuous demeanour, it was written by “a silly society that would do anything for money” He falls so low that he accepts bribe even “when he least needs money”. Ratan undergoes a profound change. The person who grew rebellious even at the thought of “bourgeois filth” becomes in due course “a thick-skin and wash out”. Eventually, he tried to seek “solace from the annals of corruption”, and reasoned as to “what was the measure for doing things or not doing them?” After securing a permanent job Ratan became a practical person, grew into a hypocrite, a Sham and a “master faker”. He started justifying his misdeeds by reasoning that all corrupt men “acted in the public interest”, and admitted that he was “at the peak of the dung
heap that he "had been climbing all his life".68

In the end but especially after the tragedy at the death of the noble-hearted Brigadier he realized that he was "a bundle of Shams".69 Eventually he confessed that his life has been a total waste and he found it difficult to reconcile:

There are many sorrows in the world, but there is nothing in the three worlds to match the sorrow of a wasted life.70

Eventually, he realized it fully that one can not live for oneself because no human act is performed in isolation. Therefore, in order to restore mental peace and to expiate his sin of commission and omission he took to the ways of humility. He made it a practice every morning to visit a temple and dust the shoes of the congregation. This act of penance was undergone just out of sheer humility and without expectation. He earnestly pleaded with the young that "there is nothing wrong to make a second start",71 and hoped while telling the young listener that the youth "might yet hold back the tide".72

Once again, the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award
winning novel, *The Last Labyrinth* (1981) forms the fourth example of Arun Joshi’s use of autobiographical overtones as narrative technique.

In specific terms, this novel has been narrated in the tradition of the first-person singular. Outwardly seen, this book looks like a long love story but perceptive reading reveals that it is rooted in an exploration of the protagonist’s quest for meaning of life. To begin with, the narrator and protagonist of the novel, Som Bhaskar is presented as a millionaire at the age of twenty five. In terms of worldly possessions he can boast of owing everything--Harvard education, a beautiful, faithful, and temperamentally earnest wife, interest in philosophy and faith in religion. Besides all this, he has the aspiration to grab failing industries to his dominion. Despite all his appearance and worldly success, Som has no sense of satisfaction. Numerous houses, cash, cars, and carpets carry no meaning for him. In fact, Som’s “orchestras of discontent”\(^{73}\) have become so frighteningly ceaseless and oppressive that at the age of
thirty five he feels like “a worn-out weary man incapable of spontaneous feeling”.\textsuperscript{74} The entire truth in this regard has been sought to be universalised through the succinct observation that Som felt like one who “was always running a hurdle race”.\textsuperscript{75} Som’s condition and situation matched well with a terribly confused, and self-conflicting and entirely exhausted human organism. To him every thing in this world looked “a haze”\textsuperscript{76} and he experienced and confronted nothing but “voids within, voids without”.\textsuperscript{77} Despite this utter rufflement and horrifying void in his life and circumstances he went about in search of new and yet more new experiences concerning business and fornication.

It is significant to note that the fourth novel of Arun Joshi has a striking and significant similarity with his first book, \textit{The Foreigner} in so far as he has put as much of himself in his protagonist named Som Bhaskar, in a way, as he had put into Sindi Oberoi. Som Bhaskar, Som in short, too, is a western-educated industrialist. He also like Sindi, though an Indian by
birth and domicile, and a Brahmin at that, is unable to make head or tail of the numbo-jumbo of Hindu religion, depending on which his mother sacrificed her life as a victim of cancer, nor of tantara practised in the ancient city of Benaras. He is unable to believe in God, and contemptuously treats the idol of Lord Krishna as just a "wooden creature". and the mysterious disappearance of Anuradha on Janmasthmi night due to her impregnable superstition, he squarely blames on this wooden creature, as much perhaps as he blames on it his mother’s death. Though he has learnt the business acumen of cornering companies, it is by no means on the pattern of the murky business ethic of Mr. Khemka, but by relentless application of business administration learnt in the states that even Sindi might have learnt.

In the context of this broad perspective the narrative technique widely called autobiographical overtones has been used by Joshi by way of experimental variation of narration by creatively interweaving his own conclusions about life into the
fabric of incidents, characters and ideas through memory, exploration of psyche besides emphasis on values. Arun Joshi discharges such a narrative function in reference to Som Bhaskar who had been blessed with the best of things around. All the same, he felt bored, and terribly “dislocated” rather gripped in intriguing juxtaposition. He was relentlessly impelled and driven by undefined hungers but ironically enough, he was “getting nowhere”. He felt drained rather bled of all energy and realised that he had nothing inside him except “an empty roaring, like the roar of the sea in a conch”. Still later he got more confused the way one does at the sight of a “world spinning all by itself”. Som searched and sought for a person who combined the best of the material and the spiritual world and therefore the one who could resolve his problems and sustain him. The first such person of Som’s visualization was Dr. Leela Sabnis who significantly summed up his character: “you have built a shell around yourself”. Coincidentally, the other person in this regard was again a
woman named Anuradha through whom also he sought resolution of his dilemma. She told him that the reason for his dissatisfaction was that "you don't know what you want".84 The tone of these observations shows that the author talks or comments through them. The third fruit of Som's intense search appeared in the form of Aftab. However, Aftab's observations and suggestions proved still worse.

Consequent on this varied experience Som felt convinced that life is full of complications - - "a labyrinth within the labyrinths"85 like the meandering lanes of Benaras. He felt always urged on by a keen desire to know the meaning of life but the world vastly remained to him "as pretentious and meaningless as the holy bulls of Benaras".86 In the process, he seemed to have lost his moorings and bearings and felt just not himself. For him, the greatest sorrow was the sorrow of idleness. His feelings came to be expressed all the more bitterly:

I was just not myself... just idling about like a stationary engine, getting involved with nothing. It made me feel as though I was
Through his odd behaviour and aberrant attitudes Som's roaring business came to be reduced to "a big mess". He himself was eaten up by his own "strange mad thoughts". In his desperation, Som planned to visit temples every morning but ultimately he started nurturing self-pity, and felt torn apart by his doubts. Resultantly he expressed the terrible death wish. And eventually, he tried to kill himself. Significantly enough, in that moment he was stopped by Geeta, his sincere, sagacious, and loyal wife. In her shaking Som "gently as though rousing a man from sleep" reminds the reader of his feeling "As though I was asleep". In Som's getting awakened from that sleep of ignorance the novel seems to close on the suggestion, if not a definite note that he had been restored to peace through the unquestioning trust of his sincere, trusting, and well-meaning wife.

Arun Joshi's use of autobiographical overtones as a narrative device in *The City and the River* (1990) comes closest to an allegory of the artist. As an aspect of Joshi's endless
experimentation the onerous task of narration in this fifth and final novel has been assigned to the Great Yogeshwara. He narrates the story to the Nameless one, his disciple, on the occasion of initiating him into life. The Great Yogeshwara gives effect to his narrative function through events, incidents and characters in interactive relationships. Unlike his other four novels, herein Arun Joshi has built his theme on a vaster scale, moving from the private concerns to the issues of public interest. Contrary to this, R.K. Dhawan has pointed out that the theme of *The City and the River* "does not have a streak of autobiography; nor is it a story of personal, private lives".92 Dhawan has also pointed out that here Joshi is pre-occupied with the historic past and has ignored the private life of his characters. From these observations it becomes evident that a formidable fact has escaped R.K. Dhawan's notice that by the time Joshi wrote his fifth novel he had attained vaster experience and deeper maturity. And, on this background he had conducted exclusive experimentation on the narrative front.
Therefore, departing from comparatively straight narration of the earlier novels, Joshi has chosen an incomparably vaster canvas and deeper undertones in this novel. And, in view of the dimensions of the book's complex weft Joshi has depicted its theme through the mythical pattern introducing story within story besides interlacing the total treatment with such of the narrative devices as parables, folk-lore, allegory, archetypes and irony so as to render the narrative exercise compatible with the tone and quality of the theme.

Arun Joshi has vigorously investigated human psyche and, in the process, depicted his sense of values by showing the impact of historical milieu on the living present. History stands testimony to the fact that autocratic, egoistic rulers can hardly think in terms of social welfare. In this novel the Grand Master, who stands for the patriarchal politician and ruler in an invulnerable position, in connivance with his chief Adviser, called the Astrologer, announced a welfare plan called 'the Era of ultimate Greatness'. A plan to this effect is officially
heralded but, ironically enough, it comes to be launched with the arrest of boatmen. The boatmen here symbolize the selfless citizens. The falsity of the outwardly attractive and ameliorative programme gets exposed, the boatmen raise the banner of rebellion and because of their honesty, firmness and incorruptibility they are branded as “a disgrace”\(^93\). To facilitate narration Arun Joshi has deliberately placed his action in an imaginary locale with a view to indirectly highlight a political point-of-view and the relevant socio-economic and ethical values. It has been widely agreed that besides entertainment “instruction is the most valued virtue of historical fiction”\(^94\) and in this context Arun Joshi has narratively blended history with ethics to give depth to his novel.

In this total context, Arun Joshi seems to have used his own intense experience of life in the depiction of human personality through the actions, visualizations, and intentions of his characters in the creative process of vigorous investigation into the very caves of their psyche. Thus, in this novel Arun
Joshi has harnessed autobiographical overtones as a narrative technique through the artistic presentation of the comprehensive personality of principal characters including the Great Yogeshwara, the Nameless One, the Great Hermit, the Grand Master, the selfless Professor, the Astrologer, the Bhoomiputra, Patanjali, and the Boatmen. Arun Joshi also seems to point to a situation narratively that through concentration of power in the hands of autocratic politicians and their coterie, the people for whose welfare any government is constituted, come to be the target through suppression, oppression, and exploitation. In scientific terms, the main plot of the novel revolves around the familiar theme of power struggle. At a crucial juncture in this novel ‘the Era of Ultimate Greatness’ is heralded under the pretext of far reaching reforms. Soon, however, it gets exposed when people come to know that under the attractive banner of progress citizens are harassed, and oppressed. Gradually, from the boatmen to anybody around, become the target of the oppressive mechanism of the rulers. Even Patanjali, Bhoma
and the Professor, whose mission was to work for the welfare of others, are not spared.

Arun Joshi’s experimentation and achievement in his mode of narration referable to autobiographical overtones has claimed the appreciation of Karl Kroeber. Kroeber’s observation seems to be highly pertinent:

Point of view functions as an indicator of the novelist’s relation, more exactly his conception of his relation, to his readers. Secondly, this type of narration which is oriented in intense personal experience as against the first person narration, through one of the major characters such as the Great Ageless Yogeshwara, has superior benefits of its own. One of the benefits of this aspect of the total technique is that it renders the book more aesthetically detached in terms of presentation of the theme. Again, it also provides a vaster scope of presentation and penetrative analysis. Its superior quality in terms of applicability becomes evident by having a closer look at the very basis of the first person narrative. This mode also enables a writer, as it does in case of Arun Joshi, “to keep his characters
neutral, who can have their own identity as much separately as from other men and women in the book as from the author himself and render only what they can hear, think, or feel”. 96

The narration proceeds further to depict how the so-called political adversaries are sent to the Gold Mines, the underground State prisons where “the idea of the self (is) suitably dissolved”, 97 and where a long detention causes a slow but steady decay of body and mind, and where one’s personality is destroyed systematically. Pointing to the ill consequences of repression even Dharma’s father feels and admits: “My insides are rotting. I too am just vanishing”. 98 Likewise, the Professor, a strong-willed person bewails: “God gave me life that I might serve this earth. I have squandered it on bauble”. 99 On the background of such a consequence, things ultimately fall apart, and there occurs a mighty deluge which wipes out the City’s sin. After incessant rains, the sun rose on the eighth day and another city in place of the old appeared along with persons of all categories and status in place of the
old. And thus, the river became a source of man’s ultimate realization and the symbolic anchor of tranquility for troubled souls. In final analysis, Arun Joshi, who has employed autobiographical overtones as a narrative technique and has chosen the Great Ageless Yogeshwara as narrator, leaves a distinct stamp of his sense of values. In the interest of the specific depiction of values it has been emphasized that if the city is not to dissolve again, it must purify itself:

The City must strive once again for purity. But purity can come only through sacrifice.¹⁰⁰

All this pithy form of conclusion regarding the way to preserve the city through assertion of purity yields the clue that any attempt and success in this direction is possible through continuance of the positive system. By way of maintaining or retrieval of this kind of continuance the perennial scope of values in human life is possibly ensured and secondly, the unfailing knowledge of the scheme of cosmopolitan powers that point to the unending cycle of decay and regeneration, never
escapes the ken and understanding of humanity. In this way, the comprehensive handling of this novel as also of the other four in terms of their thematic dimensions and narrative innovations, has found presentation through the technique of autobiographical overtones in its various forms and shades.
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