CHAPTER THREE
SYMBOLS AND MYTHS

The second constituent element of this thesis pertains to the use
of symbols and myths as modes of narration in Arun Joshi's
novels. In as much as Arun Joshi has depicted the existential
dilemmatic situation of man in the modern age when he is
caught in labyrinths of isolation and despair and in so far as a
symbol represents, typifies and "signifies something else" by
possessing analogous qualities, he has found symbols a fit
medium for the delineation of this phenomenon. He has
harnessed the symbols through characters, events, incidents,
images, objects or complexes of these. These elements
constitute the areas of description and evaluation, with human
personality - the character - at the centre of things. Since
Arun Joshi's novels depict man's sense of alienation,
hollowness, labyrinthine confusion, anguish as well as quest for
values, and the essential matters remaining, here as always, all
internal and necessarily of the psyche, symbols have been used as "organic units of consciousness"\textsuperscript{2} to qualify (that) complex emotional experience. And, within these very dimensions Arun Joshi has equally well used myths to suggest and reinforce deeper intended meaning to the surfacial narration of his novels.

In point of fact, myths hold to the depth of meaning and aesthetics of presentation to the narrative dynamic of fiction. Myths are stories of unascertainable origin or authorship accompanying or helping to explain religious beliefs. Writers value myth positively because of its apparent spontaneity and collectivity expressing some lastingly and generally satisfying account of the experience of man. Equally attractive is the apparent universality and timelessness of myth. According to Wilbur Scott, "myth is a message from ourselves to ourselves"\textsuperscript{3} in as much as it connects our present with the past of our ancestors in relationship with certain basic instincts and tendencies that travel down from generation to generation. At the same time, myths form the underlying design holding
together all the digressions, and tales within tales thereby enriching the main structure of the novel. The symbols and myths used by Arun Joshi help him to depict in modern contexts the eternal quest for self realization and fulfilment and for a spiritual and cultural identity. Essentially, symbols and myths form the underlying design of Arun Joshi’s novels and enrich their main structure. Here, it seems significant to note that these elements of his narrative technique are effective tools rather master keys through which he unlocks the heart and mind of his characters and enables the reader to apprehend his art and ideas.

Thematically, Arun Joshi’s first novel, *The foreigner* (1968), quite like his other four books, deals with the modern man’s existential dilemma. However, in terms of narrative technique, this novel is fully revelatory of Arun Joshi’s deft handling of symbols and myths to depict man’s sense of alienation, meaninglessness, disorientation, confusion, suffering and anguish. Here, symbols have been used aesthetically and
effectively through characters, events, scenes, places, and by way of significant comments of the omniscient narrator, meaningful and pertinent observations of the protagonist and other characters closely connected with him. This novel and its symbols centre around Sindi Oberoi who encounters terrible meaninglessness in the early period of his life which eventually closes on a happy note in the later phase. In this total context, the vicissitudes in Sindi’s life relevant to his notions, feelings, emotions, and thought have been depicted through effective symbols.

The use of symbols in this novel is evident in its very title and perceptible in the name of its protagonist. Right from the early stages of his life Sindi is inexorably torn by “a strange feeling of aloneness and aloofness.” Meenakshi Mukherjee has pertinently observed that Sindi emerges before us as a foreigner, rather “a perennial outsider.” This trait of Sindi’s personality is symbolised by his continual movements from place to place like a leaf in a storm whether it is America, India,
Soho, Scotland or Boston. He had gone to America for higher studies but quite soon felt rootless and alien in that country but even on his return to India he found himself no less a stranger in his own country. On this background, India and America have been used as symbols of strange places that not only bewilder and perplex but also trap man in evil and anguish. Sindi’s feeling like a foreigner in America is symbolically paralleled by a highly suggestive, or rather, evocative description of the country as “a place for well-fed automatons rushing about in automatic cars”\(^6\) Similarly, in India too, he is appalled by “the stagnant deadness”\(^7\) of the place and evidently this feeling is pregnant with highly symbolic overtones.

Again, the very name Sindi Oberoi verbalised as “Surrender” is fraught with deep symbolic implications. In one obvious sense, Sindi seems to have surrendered to the overwhelming monomania of foreignness about any place he visits. This sense of surrender gets all the more symbolically intensified as he comes to experience strangeness and
rootlessness in the world around. Then, Sindi sums up his entire life as being “alone in the darkness”. And, significantly this phrase is deeply surcharged with symbolic overtones. In terms of symbols, Sindi’s feeling rather obsession of alienation and foreignness associated with such of the places as London, Soho, Scotland, and Boston, and his predisposition to surrender, point to the core of his character. And, he reveals and evinces these traits of his personality in different crucial stages of his life. For example, Sindi’s talk to Babu Rao Khemka that “you had roots in the soil you lived upon. Look at me. I have no roots,” reveals that Sindi had a reason to feel rootless and what is more, his “foreignness” lies “within him”. It is, indeed, an inalienable part of his personality.

Similarly, the inner warring self of Sindi Oberoi is depicted through the symbol of “a battlefield where the child and the adult warred unceasingly”. His alienation and hollowness becomes all the more symbolically evident when he is contrasted with the Soho artist who cares neither for fine
things nor for sound human relationships but only "for her lost youth". In the same way, Sindi’s exhaustion after Babu Rao Khemka’s death has aptly been symbolised through his feeling “like a desert or like a vast field of naked oakes in winter time.” Again, in contrast to the fabulous riches of Mr. Khemka the abject plight and penury of Muthu and his family, as observed by Sindi, were symbolically seen as “accumulated despair of . . . weary lives.” From the foregoing narrative details it becomes evident that Arun Joshi’s technique of handling symbols through scenes and in correlation with character is thoroughly natural and artistic and entirely bonafied to his essential creative self. And, necessarily therefore, the general theoretical observation of Joseph Frank aptly applies to Joshi who, like others of his kind, never look at the corpus of his symbols merely as “a fascinating spectacle” or as “an entertainment for the eyes.” And, it is for an artistic accomplishment of this magnitude that Madhu Sudan Prasad has spoken highly of Arun Joshi’s “vast range of wide variety
of scenes for symbolic presentation”¹⁶ in his novels.

As in the case of earlier stages in Sindi’s life, the final phase of his character is also depicted through apt and telling symbols. Eventually, Sindi moves from egoistic ignorance to experiential openness and, in the process, transcends his proclivity to yield and surrender. He rises above his allergic indifference and pitiable helplessness to yield and submit. Instead, he grows bold and becomes wide awake. His inherent sympathy for others grows and matures into a regular humanitarian attitude. As Sindi has grown in morality and understanding, he realizes that “detachment consisted of right action and not escape from it”.¹⁷ This phase of positive change in Sindi’s character is depicted symbolically, especially in the context of his decision to take cudgels for the poor and the helpless when the Khemkas fell on evil days. Around that time Sindi got offer for a job in Bombay but he declined to join. His disinclination to leave the workers to their fate is construed as a clear and potent symbol of positive change in his disposition.
On the day of his decision to decline the offer he unpacked his things after dinner and put them "back as neatly as possible in their old places." This act of Sindi symbolises self transcendence and is obviously a symbolic affirmation of his new found sense of belongingness to the helpless and the needy be it Mr. Khemka with his ruined business or the hapless workers who earned their livelihood in that factory.

Besides symbols Arun Joshi has also used the device of myth in the presentation of his theme. It is an archetypal situation when Sindi feels rootless, restless, luckless and lost because of factors beyond his control and it assumes the dimensions of a myth when, gripped by depression, Sindi transports us to the timeless condition of man in reference to the flux of modern times. On the broad background of Sindi's "aloneness and aloofness" the recurrent image of the pathlessness of the road to New York points to a mythico-archetypal situation. Technically, the archetypal base has been created for the erection of myth through Sindi's recalling
certain lines from a popular song: "who knows where the road will lead? Only a fool can say"\textsuperscript{20}. Properly seen, the repeated mention of the concept of 'the foreigner', the "perpetual outsider"\textsuperscript{21} equally well constitutes a mythic reference through which Joshi plumbs such of man's perennial dilemmas as they prevailed in case of Sindi Oberoi who grows up without family ties and without a country. Likewise, the "pathlessness" of the road to New York is, in fact, Sindi's own pathlessness. And this concept of pathlessness seems to have been built on the myth of the stranded hero left high and dry in a desert or a jungle as Sindi gets stranded in the concrete jungle of New York. This mythic base is strengthened by a parable-like situation in Sindi's exhaustion. The essential symbolic tinge within the parameters of myth becomes visible, especially in Sindi's getting exhausted after the death of Babu Rao Khemka. This momentous occurrence has aptly been put on mythico-archetypal lines by highlighting his feeling "like a desert or like a vast field of naked oakes in winter time."\textsuperscript{22} May be due to
over sight about the deeply mythical pattern of this novel that Shyamala Narayan disparaged it as “not as powerful”\textsuperscript{23} in this regard. However, by now the fact stands vindicated that this novel is all the more strong because of the mythical elements interwoven in its weft. Still further, the element of foreignness as felt by the protagonist in a vastly inescapable manner, has the touch of the archetypal and the mythical in quality and tone of treatment. A telling indication of the mythico-archetypal base of this novel is contained in Sindi’s reply to June Blyth’s query as to for how long he had been afflicted with asthma: “As long as I can remember. They say my mother had it.”\textsuperscript{24} Again, Babu Rao Khemka’s notion of ‘the foreigner’ assumes the form of an archetype and a myth when it is often repeated and correlated with many other character in a story within a story that he felt like a fish out of water in America without the patronage of his father. Sindi’s position in the company of his friends and the fact of his ignorance of American pattern is given a mythical tinge and allegorised as “a square in a round
hole. All these feelings and experiences of Sindi have their roots in the myth of the perennial outsider.

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas (1971) is yet another novel in which Arun Joshi has used symbols and myths to aesthetically depict the quest for identity and sustaining values in the contemporary world of absurdity. The forte of Arun Joshi converges on probing the human psyche — man’s inner world — and the essence of human living. The omniscient narrator sets the symbolic tone of the novel as he comments about the essential role of Billy Biswas: "No other man" in this novel "so desperately pursued the tenous thread of existence to its bitter end." Billy Biswas, Billy in short, the hero of this novel is alienated from the reality of life though he is always in search of some sustaining moorings. Billy was born in a privileged family — with a silver spoon in his mouth, as it were — yet he had no interest in the attractions and fascinations of the civilized world around. As a matter of fact, things had come to such a pass that Billy developed a bitter aversion for
the civilised world and felt hypnotised by the “great force”\textsuperscript{27} of primitivism. Within this two-fold dynamic, different types of symbols have been used to depict the totality of his life, beginning with illusions from the worldly point of view, but closing with realisation as he perceived it. Billy’s wanderings in search of the mystical in - life is simply symbolic of his “interest in the primitive man.”\textsuperscript{28} It was in this context that Arun Joshi had clarified his position in one of his interviews how he was stimulated into writing to explore “that mysterious world which is the human soul.”\textsuperscript{29} This is how the germinal idea of this novel occurred and eventually found symbolic form. And it was for the depiction of this dilemma that Arun Joshi uses symbols in this novel by way of suggestively presenting the backdrop of the central issue in its comprehensive dynamic form through characters, scenes and events.

The sculptures at Konark gave Billy the hope of realising his quest. Infact, his feeling of success in regard to his search
and its likely positive fruition is highly symbolic of his seeing a solution to his nagging questions about the problems of his identity in his very feeling that “if anyone had a clue” to the solutions of his problems, “it was only the adivasis”.30 From all this there emerges a broad symbolism in the very incident of Billy’s disappearance in the saal forests of Madhya Pradesh in the Maikala Range and eventual mixing with the tribals - - the Adivasis in as much as the novel is “preoccupied with man’s mystical urge.”31 In the forest Billy wears “a lion cloth and nothing else”.32 Symbolically perceived, what he loses materially he finds instinctively. Billy’s playing on a pair of Bongo Drums at a music party in George’s Apartment for fifteen minutes and the consequent descending of hush on the scene inversely symbolises his mesmeric pull for the primitive mode of life. On the background and the premise that this novel depicts the inevitable coming together of the two different cultures - - the sophisticated and the primitive - - symbolically, the character of Meena, the sophisticated wife of
Billy Biswas symbolises New Delhi’s anglicized ruling class lost in artificialities of life and its phoney materialism, and in contrast, Bilasia of the Satpura Hills stands for the primitive and the instinctive self. After joining and fraternizing with the tribals Billy finds his fulfilment, rather the very quest and essence of his corporeal existence. Seen on the broad scale of symbolic organisation in this novel, Bilasia symbolises “the primitive culture, the untapped subterranean sources of psychic energy.” Like the other tribals Bilasia represents the primitive purity of culture. And, Billy likes to live with the foresters because they stood untouched by any artificial and materialistic values. This fact comes out in a chance meeting with his friend Romesh Sahai, when significantly, Billy informed him “Nobody here is interested in the prices of food grains or new seeds or roads or elections and stuff like that.”

As against the inhibitions and artificialities of the civilised people, the primitives sipped the unpolluted nectar of life in uninhibited drinking, dancing, and open orgiastic love-making.
It comes to be known that after the idealized union of Billy and Bilasia in the lap of nature, the mysterious glow of the chandtola peak revived. This flame had glowed during moonlit nights when the king and queen happily lived and it got extinguished when the king was poisoned. The element of symbolism in this scene is built on the belief that Billy was the reincarnation of their king since the glow had revived only after his joining them. With such scenes in mind Leo Bersani has aptly observed, though in a general theoretical way, that “beneath the realistic detail we discover the strong and basically simple outline of symbolic configuration.” And this comment is thoroughly applicable in case of Arun Joshi’s handling of symbols.

The final scene of this novel in which Billy Biswas is virtually hunted down is highly rich in symbols. The act of Billy being shot by a policeman symbolises intolerance of the civilised world represented, among others, by Romi and Billy’s wife Meena. It also symbolises hypocrisy lurking behind
Romi's words of regret feeling "as though we had killed one of the numerous man gods of the primitive pantheon." In this way, through scenes, and incidents co-related with ideas and characters Joshi almost always makes a sustained double reference to multi-layered symbols, and other supportive narrative devices to highlight that "all the things concerned tend toward the emblematic" and hence, at once to the symbolic, and the mythical.

Besides the element of symbols, Arun Joshi has used the device of myth in this novel. Essentially, this novel deals with Billy's mystical compulsion to move to the jungles and live with the tribals of Satpura Hills. The Bhubaneshwar episode speaks volumes of Billy's urge to live like a primitive in the jungles. Even the very first sight of the sculptures had made him feel "as though a slumbering part of me had suddenly come awake." Billy "always dreamt of music which exerted "a mesmeric pull" on him. Going still back, Bill's attraction for primitive life is construed from the fact that he loved to live in
the black ghetto of America, which he, tells Romi, was “the most human place”. This aspect of Billy’s personality is further confirmed in his decision to do his Ph.D. in anthropology and in his preference for the strange play Avocambo which he saw on the very first day of his stay with Romi, as also in eventually finding himself in Bilasia, with whom he felt connected acrchetypally. Ultimately, however, all these impelling urges of Billy are discovered to have their roots in the ‘Myth of Identity’. The feeling that the sculptures at Konark could give Sindi a solution to such of the questions as to his identity: “who was I? Where had I come from? Where was I going” naturally establishes his relationship with the myth that the Adivasis had a clue to it since they “carried about their knowledge in silence, locked behind their dark inscrutable faces.” It is also a part of the myth that one gets the clue, knowledge, and inspiration to join its real atmosphere through some experience of a phantom, as Billy had felt seized by a phantom when he finally decided to escape the world of
artificiality and hypocrisy to join the primitives.

The myth of Chandtola Peak has been used to verify and testify that man really belongs to the primitive world because it was after Billy's union with Bilasia that he had discovered "that bit of himself . . . he had searched for all his life." O.P. Mathur and G.Rai have pointed out that Billy's strange case represents "the universal myth of the primitive in the heart of man ever alienating him from the superficial and polished banalities of modern civilization." This phenomenon is evinced by the phenomenal change in the texture and functioning of the Chandtola Peak whose mysterious glow had revived only after the idealized union of Billy and Bilasia in the tribal world. The myth in this regard and its correlation with the flame involved a story that the flame had glowed during moonlit nights when the king and Queen happily lived, and it got extinguished when the king was poisoned. The myth ran that thousands of years ago there lived a great King who built a temple for which he wanted to have the chief idol for the
inner shrine made by himself. He went on working, and the idol came to be so beautiful that God decided to enter it. That night the brothers of the King who got scent of this divine benediction poisoned him and the queen Devi, immolated herself prophesying that she would return when her husband returned to the forest. Dhunia identified Billy as the King. For the tribals he is a mythical king who was destined to return and on his return Chandtola Peak was to glow again on moonlit nights. In this way, Billy’s story parallels that of the King who attempted to sculpt the face of God, but is spoiled in the mid way in this absurd world. Its revival also leads to the belief of the primitives that Billy is the reincarnation of their King who was poisoned thousands of years ago.

This aspect of the myth is further proved by Dhunia’s claim about Billy having magical and supernatural powers. Dhunia went about asserting that he had seen Billy send away a tiger that had been roaming the jungle for a week killing the cattle and that he had brought back his grandson to life who had
been dead for two hours. The final part of the myth is communicated at the time when Billy was killed by an unaimed bullet of a policeman and Romi had felt “as though we had killed one of the numerous man-gods of the primitive pantheon.” Thus, the myth here is centralised in the conflict between civilization, and primitive life or say between art and nature. In the judgement of Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is “a compelling novel about a strange quest drawing upon myth and folk-lore to reiterate its elemental concerns”, and the dynamic of symbols and archetypes.

In broad line with the other four novels of Arun Joshi, *The Apprentice* (1974) too is oriented in symbols and myths. Metonymically, this novel is based on the image of the labyrinth which symbolises the nature, and function of the self. Its hero Ratan Rathor stands for “Everyman” in the context of things prevailing around and therefore within this ambit this novel is a creative comment on the crisis of character in the modern world. The entire story of the book depicts Ratan
Rathor passing through intense experience in three interconnected phases – first when he moved out of his village as a young lad fed on two self-contradictory ideologies, second when he fell into the overwhelming mire of corruption, and finally when he retrieved his old good self. The totality of the book’s theme relevant to these three stages has been presented through telling, recurrent images and apt symbols. In the opening stage Ratan’s mind was full of ideas and illusions, nourished on the idealism of his father and fed on the pragmatism of his mother. His father was a freedom fighter and laid down his life for the sake of national cause. In this frame of reference, Ratan’s father symbolises idealism and selfless sacrifice whereas his mother signifies money culture and expedience. Essentially, the entire symbolism of this novel centres around the concept of idealism, the power of money and its failure to give happiness. As an educated youth Ratan wanted some job in Delhi but he received humiliation and disappointment. Entirely contrary to his expectations, none of
his great father's friends helped him. Consequently, he felt deflated and disheartened and the world then appeared to him "a bundle of mirrors, tempting and somehow held together, but on the brink always of falling apart." Contextually perceived, to Ratan the world symbolises a place full of temptation where one just faced formidable failures and disappointments.

At long last, and that too through the instrumentality of a stenographer, who was once his room mate at the inn, Ratan got appointed as a clerk on temporary basis in a government office for war purchases. At this stage, he looked forward to rise in life through intelligence and hard work. Quite soon, however, he becomes a careerist, starts arguing that the world runs on deals, and becomes a "master faker". He was further expertly motivated by Himmat Singh called Sheikh, through reasoning however specious. He vehemently stressed that he had to pawn his soul to the system and ultimately succeeded in having Ratan "pawn" his soul. Ratan accepted bribe for approving the supply of substandard war material. Meanwhile, he also
developed interest in wine and women. All this change is symbolic of Ratan’s degradation. This resulted in Ratan’s alienation but instead of escaping from the world like Billy Biswas, he moulded himself to the ways of the world.

Consequent the wheel of fortune having run full circle, Ratan finds himself devoid of individuality. In symbolic terms, he becomes easily comparable with a weather-vane or a blotting paper. Apt symbols have been used to show the eventual identicality of the basic traits of the character of Ratan and Himmat Singh. For example, the image of “filth” has been repeatedly used in the making of Himmat Singh’s character. It has also been repeatedly stressed that Himmat Singh became what he was because he “was born in filth and in filth he had grown.”\textsuperscript{51} As a parallel of Himmat Singh, though in contrast, Ratan Rathor started with a clean mind and unstained soul but landed in stinking filth. Ratan’s material prosperity gave him spiritual bankruptcy, and the feeling of happiness, the pursuit of which had degraded him, eluded him all the more painfully. He
himself says that the more money he accumulated the more dissatisfied he felt and more determined to enjoy life, but all the time he thought of death. The word death here obliquely suggest that a distracted life is death of the self.

A time, however, came when Ratan Rathor rose above self interest and transcended his self-created myopia. His realisation that he was “at the peak of the dung heap that I (he) had been climbing all my life,” gets all the more deepened when he saw that the noble Brigadier who had once saved his life met with ignominous death due to his getting late as a crucial witness when he had to confess his guilt. This deliberate delay symbolises Ratan’s infirmity and cunningness. This led to confusion, pangs of conscience and eventual realisation. Then, he comes to his own and this symbolises the natural process of his growth through vicissitudes. In the end, he could tell others that whatever they did touched someone somewhere. This understanding, evidently symbolises self realization. It is in this context that the omniscient narrator has
significantly pointed out that *The Apprentice* reveals how this is one of the ways of coming out of "the crookedness of the world and the crookedness of oneself."\(^{53}\) The narrator-protagonist becomes an apprentice in order to learn the method of retrieving his soul. Naturally, therefore, with a view to restore normalcy and peace of mind, every morning on his way to office, and without letting his wife or anybody know, he made it a practice to sit on the steps outside the temple and dust the shoes of the congregation. In the context of this development in his life, Ratan informed his listener how in that process and in that ritualistic atmosphere he told others as also himself: "Be good. Be decent. Be of use"\(^ {54}\).

This symbolic act of penance, he thought, would bring him humility, purity of mind besides spiritual peace. In any case, this retrieval to the virtuous philosophy of his father and to the positive humble ways in general, constitute a highly symbolic event in Ratan's life. Symbolically perceived, the shoe shine business is obviously Ratan's confessional unto himself. And, seen in the total
context, Ratan’s freedom lay in his choice.

Besides symbols Arun Joshi has equally well used the device of myth to give a more subtle and aesthetically enriching treatment to the complex theme of this novel. The lure of money is as old as mankind. The likes of Ratan’s mother have always been experienced and encountered by mankind. In the archetypal context, Ratan’s mother represents the traditional model of a woman who hammers into her son’s mind that a man without money was as worthless as a beggar’s shoe. On the same scale of things but in contrast, Ratan’s father has been introduced as the archetype of goodness and sacrifice. Both of Ratan’s parents influenced the course of his life, and their impact confronted him as a labyrinth and a muddle. A solution and a way out was needed and Arun Joshi has used the Myth of Quest Incognito as a mode of resolution of the tangle through the first hand experience of Ratan himself. This myth involves three stages – Initiation, experience, and vision. And necessarily, it revolves around Ratan Rathor, the book’s hero.
In the first stage Ratan is an impoverished but innocent village lad to whom the beauty of life lay in the notion and practice of sacrifice. In terms of the quest myth, it was the stage of initiation in the long journey of the protagonist. Owing to his failure to get a job in Delhi which “was a city of opportunities”, his faith cracked up, and he felt that he was caught up in a “society without norms ... even, perhaps, a purpose”. Then, in the second stage he became practical, started greasing his palm, and in the process his spirit came to operate under the spell of the pragmatic ideology of his mother who had told him that “money was a law unto itself”. Gradually, he became “a thick-skin ... and a wash out”, and came to understand that one could not make a living “except through deals”. All this knowledge and practice covers the second stage of the myth, broadly called experience. After this deviation, there came the stage of vision. Now despite his chase of wine, woman, and wealth, discontentment became his way of life. The reader comes to know through the narrator that
secrets of guilt so close to his heart turned him to ashes. Infact, Ratan felt hollow and moth-eaten and found himself "at the peak of the dung heap that" he "had been climbing all" his "life". With a troubled conscience he regretted what he had made of himself. From the living example of his own wasted life, Ratan rued and realised that "there is nothing in the three worlds to match the sorrow of a wasted life." Finally, however, Ratan’s long apprenticeship and quest brought him to a stage of understanding and realisation that life may well be a zero, but "it need not be negative." Through first hand experience Ratan realised that life was not merely sound and fury but it signified much. Thus, at the end of his quest, wisdom dawned on him, and in the form of defence mechanism he took to the ways of humility and confession. This realisation of his blunder and misdeeds and the consequent effort to make amends constitutes the third stage of the myth when the hero comes to be blessed with vision. With this end in view, he made it a practice to visit a temple every morning and dust the
shoes of the visitors. To use the mythological terminology, Ratan’s soul is now retrieved which he had earlier unwillingly pawned to the goddess of evil, as it were for quite sometime.

The Sahitya Akademi award-winning novel *The Last Labyrinth* (1981) constitutes yet another example of Arun Joshi’s use of symbols, and myths. These devices have been used to depict the modern man’s labyrinthine confusion and acute feeling of alienation represented by Som Bhaskar. Som was relentlessly tormented by “emptiness of voids within and voids without.” Here, it is significant to note that by the time of writing this novel Arun Joshi had attained a high technical stance through intense experimentation and experiential maturity. Naturally, therefore, he had come to successfully invest highly subtle and relevant meanings on the recurrent central metaphor of ‘labyrinth’ and the pivotal ‘void image’ to depict the existential phenomenon in this novel. The phenomenon that Som Bhaskar is caught in the labyrinth of uncertainties, and that he runs after almost everything in life
though without knowing what exactly he wants, has been presented through apt symbols. Broadly, symbols here operate, shape and reshape within the crucible of Som's deeply ironical situation contained in his impetuous cry: "I want. I want".63 This deeply internal call haunts him incessantly, and in this respect, Arun Joshi has compared Som with Billy Biswas, the protagonist of his second novel, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas. In an interview with Purabi Bannerji, Joshi gave her to know that "the faceless god is prominent in Billy Biswas's finer thoughts. One finds the same facelessness in Som Bhaskar."64 This aspect of Som's personality is symbolically summed up in the expression that he was always in a hurry "like a hare chased by unseen hounds."65 This observation equally well symbolically points to the secret and mysterious feeling of intense dissatisfaction, and lack of happiness despite the tangible fact that he had acquired almost everything sufficient for happiness quite early in his life. In point of fact, Som was at war with himself, felt fully exhausted and hollow like a
conch. On this background, his hollowness has been symbolised by the comment that he heard nothing but "empty roaring, like the roar of the sea in a conch." His rational approach and scepticism only aggravate his problems, and at best he compares his struggling self only to "an ant threading through a maze, knocking about against one wall, then another." He could not make any head way in understanding the meaning of life and despite best efforts the mysterious world remained to him "as pretentious and meaningless as the holy bulls of Benaras" where tantara was practised. In a description like this, symbolic connotations go even deeper in the process of revealing the essential character of Som Bhaskar. Closely seen, Som became the very incarnation rather the apt symbol of the quest for joy in life. In ironical terms, Som's hectic activities are comparable with man's roaming about in the lanes of Benaras. Since Som's movements range from Bombay to Benaras this novel can be seen as a tale of two cities. In this context, Bombay symbolises the western, the
rational, the industrial and the technological world, whereas Benaras stands for the oriental, occult, feudal and treacherous culture. Between these two cities, and even otherwise in regard to his other activities, Som "was always running a hurdle race." Symbolically, all these things mean and imply that for him life had nothing straight about it. Therefore, in symbolic parlance Som's life has grooved into seeking someone who had the capacity to resolve the contradictions of his life rooted at once in the world of matter and the world of spirit:

What I needed, perhaps was something, somebody, somewhere in which the two worlds combined.

In this long quest for such a person Som comes into contact with Leela Sabnis, Anuradha, and Aftab Rai who themselves were struggling to find answers to problems peculiar to them. The odd attitudes and queer thinking of this trio are symbolic of their hollowness and lack of direction. Going by their inexcusable lapses and irremediable inadequacies, one was bound to form the impression that expecting anything positive from them was comparable with
the situation when one blind seeks light from another blind. The entire description to this effect is symbolic of their hollowness and worthlessness. Gargi is yet another mysterious character that gets connected with Som in his search for an anchor but she was discovered to be terribly estranged and in that light she symbolises total purposelessness in life.

If Anuradha symbolises the “elusive” and the “unattainable” in life, then Gargi symbolises existentialist purposelessness and mystery in life. Another symbol frequently used by Joshi is of labyrinth. Joshi uses “labyrinth” as a symbol for soul not only in this novel but in his other novels also in *The Last Labyrinth*, it appears as a creative comment on the void image. Soms “voids”, obsessions and fornications impinge on Aftab Rai, Anuradha and their residence Lal Haveli in Banaras. The image of Lal Haveli is used aptly and effectively to heighten the symbolic effect of this aspect of the novel. In the total context, “the house image has been used to heighten the tone and dimensions of symbolism by
way of naturally introducing the Lal Haveli built as a maze."\textsuperscript{72} In fact, the complex structure of the Lal Haveli constitutes the central motif of the novel and is symbolic of the confused self of Som Bhaskar as also of others who get connected with it. This haveli, like Benaras and the persons who reside in it, is at once a latent and loudly visible symbol of life itself, the last labyrinth of decay and death. Eventually, in the way that the Lal Haveli evinces signs of decay, Som started nurturing self-pity like one who has been completely vanguished by life and is on the verge of collapse. He utters the terrible death wish because “he is mercilessly torn apart by his doubts.”\textsuperscript{73} Once, Som Bhaskar enters a temple and finds that it is a day for vows. On enquiry, if people’s wishes get fulfilled there, the panda, the temple priest replies: “It depends on their faith. Faith can move mountains”\textsuperscript{74} The reply is highly symbolic of the essential character of Som because inversely seen Som’s wishes will not be fulfilled because he had no faith.

Finally, Som Bhaskar makes a suicidal gesture, probably
trying to end his life by putting the revolver casually to his temple. At that moment he is stopped by his wife Geeta, who shakes him "gently as though rousing a man from sleep." This incident is symbolic of Som Bhaskar's preparedness to change and annihilate his earlier self and of his wife's keenness to help and evince her loyalty. This incident makes the reader reminiscent of the archetypal situation when one gets prepared to annihilate one's old self in the mode and manner of the mythical phoenix that rises from its own ashes. In view of Som Bhaskar's earlier revelation of his feeling "as though I was asleep," his wife Geeta's shaking him at that crucial moment is symbolic of her timely help and positive role in shaking him into preparatory to a new start of life on positive lines.

In as much as *The Last Labyrinth* concerns man's mystical urge to understand the labyrinth of life, it has earned the claim to be presented through the mode of myth. Also with a view to add deeper meaning and further aesthetic elegance to his creative accomplishment, Arun Joshi has used the mythic
mode. Quest myth and the myth of labyrinth have been used to depict the modern existentialist situation of man. Despite possessing everything that man can think of in life, Som Bhaskar suffers from a terrible sense of dissatisfaction and emptiness. And therefore, he is in search of some effective medium of some person who had the capacity to resolve the contradictions of his life. In this regard, he seeks solution to his perplexing problems through Anuradha, Leela Sabnis, and Aftab Rai. However, these persons proved ineffective because they happened to be hollow and rootless like him. Ultimately, he decided to solve all his riddles by ending his life. However, when he put his pistol to his temple he was stopped by Geeta. This she did by shaking him “gently as though rousing a man from sleep” and thereby also shook him to reality around as also about the reality of her personality as a loyal and sincere wife ever prepared to play a positive role in his life. The very name Geeta symbolises action, selflessness and exemplary loyalty besides tolerance and courage to stand by her husband
despite his extremely erratic conduct. Though Som refuses to see any worth in his wife, the fact remains that it were her only sincere efforts that brought Som on the right course. Then, the significance of the quest myth is supplemented by the myth of labyrinth, and is symbolised, among other agents, by the mystery of the Lal Haveli. Descriptively, the Haveli is an antique and a quaint house "built as a maze" and "a labyrinth". It is symbolically significant because persons of complex and enigmatic character such as Anuradha and the fox-like Aftab Rai live there. Further dimensions of the archetypal and the mythic mode become evident when Som Bhaskar failed to understand the superstitious faith of his mother in Krishna that he would cure her cancer, or of Anuradha in the astrology of Benaras Sadhus, and the tantara mantara goings-on in Aftab Rai’s Lal Haveli about which there run numerous stories that confirm the myth of labyrinth about it and with which Som’s quest myth gets naturally connected in the creative process.

Finally, Arun Joshi’s fifth novel, *The City and the River*
(1990), has the distinction of special accomplishment regarding its narrative technique. In fact, it is a class by itself in terms of its thematic depth, narrative diversity and cohesion, besides distinct aesthetics in the handling of symbols and myths. It is widely acclaimed as the most symbolic Indian English novel because it employs patterns of symbols in perfect consonance with the device of myth. It would not be out of place to say that in the matter of handling these devices, this novel compares well with western literature. These devices have been used to effectively crystalize the archetypal conflict which is polarised between the itch of the powerful to dominate and the urge of the sincere, but the less powerful, to assert their identity. Significantly, it is around these two mutually contradictory urges that the entire pattern of symbols in this book is built. Its multi-dimensional theme comprising complex inter-personal relationships and the web of such fundamental questions as faith, commitment, and identity has been revealed fully and artistically through highly evocative symbols.
The operation of Arun Joshi's wide and comprehensive range of symbols in this novel starts right with its title. Seen closely, the title of the novel is symbolic in more ways than one. In constant reference and relationship of symbols embedded and implied in the book's title, the two central characters -- the narrator, the Great Ageless Yogeshwara, and his devout disciple, the Nameless one -- are the two centrally symbolic figures. In virtue of the symbolic centrality of these two characters, the book's narration through them constitutes a recurring rainbow pattern of the forces of decay and regeneration. In this context, the consequent cyclic revival of the city, the multi-hued function and diverse role of its inhabitants have been depicted through apt symbols in this novel. All this connotes considerable complexity and confusion in the thematic pattern of the book but it certainly means and reveals artistic patterning at the symbolic level. Therefore, the one overwhelming qualitative impression about the city which continually evolves is that here the phenomenon of chaos has
"piled upon chaos." In order to depict this complex absurdity of human situation, the archetypal parable of the River and the Time has been used in this novel. Then, the implicit organisation of symbols in the title of this book finds further proliferation in the social stratification of the city codified and symbolised by the attitude of the different classes and categories of people in proportion to the different altitudes at which they live. It has been pointed out by the omniscient narrator that "the level of authenticity varies in inverse proportion to the social position of the different categories of the inhabitants." Should we see the interconnection between the city and the river and remember that it is between these entities or forces that the central action of the novel takes place in terms of symbols, then the two forces represented by the city on one side and by the river on the other clearly emerge as opposing symbols. The dynamic of conflict between these two forces constitutes the very predicament of mankind and Joshi has dramatized it deftly with a great deal of imagination and
deft use of symbols.

Again, the concept of the city which is the centre of action in the book has come to assume a rare symbolic significance. It is at once a nameless 'No-where city' that stands for the entire world and hence symbolises at once the particular and the universal. It is at once the seat of political power, and the hot bed of corruption. Significantly, it is governed by the Grand Master who is "the son and grandson of the Grand Master" in hierarchy. To present this factual situation in this manner is evidently the symbolic way to say that these are professional politicians of long standing. As a den of intrigues and manipulations the city also symbolises the covert mastery of the human hand behind overt action on the part of the ruler and his coterie. Then, the city is depicted as a wasteland. Its unnatural atmosphere is tellingly symbolised through the significant description that despite the most strenuous efforts of the chief Horticulturist, "neither grass nor flowers grow on the Seven Hills". Symbolically, the
wasteland phenomenon becomes all the more acute when the professor, for all his equipoise felt "weary" and "tired" of the world. Still further, crushed by solitude and the burden of human misery, even Bhoomiputra "felt very alone". Out of the disgust of loneliness he often felt forced to roam about in the wilderness. Then, the impelling feeling of "wandering through a desert land," irresistibly filled him with a sense of overwhelming futility, and he "saw no point in loving". All this is symbolic of man's general indifference to objects, places, and persons around.

Another distinctive salient feature of this novel is the use of symbols to qualify characters. Invariably, the entire set of major characters in the novel symbolises much more than what they appear to be. For example, the Great Yogeshwara, the Nameless One, the Professor, the Hermit – all stand for and symbolise the different approaches to life. The names of characters bear echoes which Joshi needed to use symbolically to communicate their further narrative connotations and
thematic implications. In this regard, Stang’s observation can be aptly applied to Joshi’s novel that in such circumstances the novelist centres his narrative in “the growth of his protagonist’s consciousness ... and the consciousness makes its most dramatic advance through the subtle aesthetics of symbols”.

The introduction of the Era of Ultimate Greatness under the obstensible slogan and promise to commence the golden era of reforms ironically turns into an era of gloom and suppression because it was followed by arrests of the innocent and torture of the helpless. When the Grand Master and the Astrologer stood fully exposed, there started resistance from the boatmen. The Headman pointed out that their opposition to the rulers was on principle and it was unequivocally stated that “it is a matter of allegiance (and) our allegiance is only to the river and cannot be shared”. This statement is symbolic of resistance on the issues of commitment, and in this context the river comes to be discovered as “a symbol of the divine mother”.

Then, exploitation followed torture, further followed by
incremental suppression until the very system collapsed. This phenomenon of destruction is symbolised by the great deluge that swept away the dirt lying there. In turn, the deluge symbolises how, "power-struggle and infighting leads to complete annihilation and the city is ruined". The river thus becomes a source of ultimate realization that not only washes away all dirt but eventually ensures purity and the cyclic march of humanity. Through the application of deep symbolism a new city is reported to be born in the manner of the mythical Phoenix which rises from its own ashes. Symbolically seen, the Phoenix rises from the ruins of the old and hence points to continuity of life.

Here symbols and myth have common roots and hence naturally share the structural tradition and richness. In this context, the city is associated with its buildings and other man-made things. The human world has two dialectically opposing forces operating within: the Apocalyptic and the Demonic. Apocalyptic imagery is suitable for mythical structure. The
grand father's rose garden, for example, at once symbolises a state of innocence and a source of temptation that rouses the destructive mind to spoil and annihilate. Thus, in symbolic and archetypal terms, if the rose garden was created by the well-meaning grand father, then it was destroyed by the Satanic forces of the Grand Master's son. In the same measure, the Seven Hills are symbolic of both mythic heights from where a ruler is supposed to rule, and the demonic regime which sinister forces bring on human beings to inflict suffering on them. Then, the use of conglomeration of symbols, archetypes, and myths comes to be exemplified through the city dungeons called Gold Mines. On the archetypal pattern and in the line of contrastive symbols, the Gold Mines are used to intern and destroy people by weighing them down with iron chains. On this background, it is highlighted symbolically that in those dark prison houses "the idea of self (was) suitably dissolved".91 Contextually, this reminds one of Dante's Inferno which is the myth of hell, man creates on earth to torture others.
It can be taken for granted that when mythical parallels, represented by the Great Yogeshwara, the Namless One, the Hermit, the Little Star, and the river besides the archetypal and primitive forces signified by the boatmen, their rites and rituals are woven with the lived reality do raise certain controversial issues but then certainly give the work an existential orientation which finds aesthetic depiction through symbols and myths. Evidently enough, here the initiation myth has been used in the process of narrating the tale through the Great Ageless Yogeshwara to his disciple, the Nameless One while initiating him into his life-mission. Thus, this novel has been handled on the mythical narrational pattern of a story within a story told by an old wise teacher. With his keen understanding of the subject matter, Arun Joshi has raised this novel to a level of politico-allegorical satire in the archetypal and mythical mould. It is shown how ultimately the sinful city – at one stage wiped out by the deluge – once again experiences sun shine, gradually develops the entire paraphernalia needed to rule it. At a deeper
level, this novel is also an allegory of Indian history. All put together, Arun Joshi’s deft use of symbols besides the harnessing of the elements of archetypes, and myths in the aesthetic crucible of his narrative technique raises this otherwise political novel “to the level of great literature”.
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