“An absorbing study...a moving story...represents the union of male and female in the final embodiment of the human spirit”.

-Statesman

CHAPTER - 3

ALIENATION IN THE STRANGE CASE OF BILLY BISWAS
CHAPTER - III

ALIENATION IN
"THE STRANGE CASE OF BILLY BISWAS"

Billy Biswas is alienated from the civilised world. He is also alienated from his own family. Billy bids good-bye to the so called civilized world, because of its false glitterings. His disenchantment with the world outside, is a clear alienation of Billy in this novel. Finally, he finds the essence of life in Bilasia in her unadultered form.

Billy suffers alienation because he finds society hung up on the 'Peg of Money', hypocrisy and shallowness. He overcomes his alienation in the sensuality of Bilasia and fullness of sensual life in Malkala Hills. In this way Billy finds his fulfillment in living with tribals in the Malkala Hills.

In the novel, "The strange case of Billy Biswas", Joshi reiterates the theme of alienation first pursued in the Foreigner. Based on the local colour of Bundelkhand, this is the story of horror, suspense, mystery and romance. A clash between 'nature' and 'art', art symbolised as 'tribal' and 'civilised' lives constitutes the pivot around which the theme of alienation revolves. Bimal Biswas (Billy for short), the only son of a Supreme Court Judge, with a pronounced, sophisticated English accent acquired in the schools of England, is sent to the United States to study Engineering. Soon on his arrival in New York he takes up lodgings in Herlem - famous for slums and abandons Engineering in

Alienation in "The Strange Case of Billy Biswas"
favour of his first choice of Anthropology and is already halfway through his Ph.D. That is where he meets Romi, the narrator, with whom he shares his lodging and forms a lasting friendship.

The death of the narrator's father compels him to cut short his stay in America and return home. Back in India, he joins the Indian Administrative Service. He is one of those handful young men churned out of a mass of four hundred million whose welfare they are meant to be entrusted with.

Billy, after doing Ph.D., in anthropology, takes to teaching in Delhi University. Married to an unusually pretty, aristocratic, convent educated Meena, Billy inwardly suffers from the pangs of conscience and the constant irritation makes him intolerant of the set-up of a society that smacks of pollution and is grossly ranked with its weeded institutions. The perpetual pricks of his conscience make Billy look strange. His sensibilities get blunted, as if some part of his being had gone on strike. Gone are the staggering intelligence, the spectroscopic interests, the sense of humour. The Billy that Aromi knew is "finished, snuffed out like a candle left in the rain" (P. 70)

From the extracts of the letters, Billy wrote to Tuula, his girl friend in America, we learn a great deal of the strangeness overtaking Billy. The raw beauty of the tribal nature seems to have captivated his mind. His cynicism borders on insanity so much so that he now questions his being, his parentage and his relation to his wife and child. Life at a lower ebb of the remote tribals of the central provinces now haunts him. He is frantically anxious to explore, to enjoy the beauty of the primitive world, the earth, the river, the moonlight, the
imperishable rocks, the touch and smell of the primeval night until his senses get
dulled. Billy, in short undergoes a deep metamorphosis. And Bimal Biswas, a
graduate of Columbia, the only son of a Supreme Court judge, husband of Meena
and father of a handsome child, seeks a perpetual refuge in the tribal wilderness.

During the tour of a severely famine stricken area, the narrator, 
now a collector, to his utter astonishment, meets Billy in the Malkala Hills and 
the officially recognised speculations of his death fall asunder. Billy is very 
much alive but with a different wife - Bilasia and with different children. The 
phantom that Billy once saw and described it to Tuula is vividly objectified and 
visualized in Bilasia, whose untamed beauty of "enormous eyes pour out a 
sexuality that is nearly as primeval as the forest that surround them". If the forest 
and the hills had earlier beckoned him from a distance, Bilasia is now leading 
him by hand. Bilasia is the essence of that primitive force that had been calling 
him night after night, year after year.

Billy is now completely transformed. He wears lion-clothes, grows 
beard, completely tribalised, giving the impression of great vitality with his 
darkened skin because of constant 'exposure to sun', but stretched tightly, 
emphasizing the muscles of his body. To the tribal people of the hills, Billy is 
"like rain or parched lands, like balm on a wound. These hills have not seen the 
like on him since the last of our Kings passed away." (P-160)

At the persistence of Billy's father, a retired Judge, and through 
interference of the Chief Secretary of the state, the entire tribal area is combed 
with the violent forces of police to restore Billy to the "Civilised Society" to
which he owes his birth. But the effort to capture him only leads to the final catastrophe. Billy dies of bullet wounds. Only his ashes reach the civilized world, from which Billy had opted out. The strange case of Billy Biswas has thus been disposed off in the only manner that a humdrum society does with its rebel's its seers and its true lovers.

What happened to Billy was, perhaps, inevitable: as inevitable as the star-constellations in which he came so absolutely to believe. If life's meaning lies not in the glossy surfaces of our pretensions but in those dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish forever, hidden from the dazzling light of the sun, then the narrator knows of no other man - who sought it more doggedly and having received a signal, abandoned himself so recklessly to its call. In brief, Billy, as Romi believes, desperately pursued the tenuous thread of existence to its bitter end, no matter what trials of glory or shattered hearts he left behind in his turbulent wake.

Sindi Oberoi, the hero of "The Foreigner", had little to offer to his fellowmen. Where love was concerned, he was invariably at the receiving end. It is altogether different with Billy. True, he abandons his family in favour of primitive delight; he plays with his life when he renews his link with civilization urged by an impulse to save his friend from a violent death. Neither the divine incantations nor the urges of spirit will be found responsible for this strange case of Billy. Is it then pertinent to ask whether it is gross sexual lust which makes him desert his wife for the dalliance with Bilasia? The answer obviously is no, for the primitive constitutional elements of men force him according to the innate
nature and "What is done by him is the manifestation of those organic impulses. Justly while making those psychic secrets of his hero the author ungrips the imaginative control as sweep of the conclusion renders its replete explication. Manifestation of certain coincidences betrays their inefficiency and resultantly proves incredible".

The author's imagination has been kindled by a passion for the tribal life and the adventure of Billy it is nothing but an objectification of his wish fulfillment. But with the sacrifice of values of civilized world only to cling to the same values at a lower ebb swayed by primordial urges is undoubtedly an atrocious crime under the situation which encompasses the plot. Thus, the story displays a gross misrepresentation of the natural order of life depicted in the novel.

One more flaw. The over-scrupulousness for a compact plot construction makes the author loosen the essential hold. So, although begun consistently, it leads to a preposterous jumbling of incidents, dispelling the impeccable epiphany maintained earlier. It is only nearing the end that the construction regains the strength. "The depiction of the forest life and human sufferance is of course enthralling and stands sufficient evidence that the author has had the occasion to observe it at a very close distance unlike those who present such depiction merely from an imaginative store-house."

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas fulfils what had been initiated at the end of 'The Foreigner'. Billy, who is an engineer and anthropologist and comes of a high family, is all of a sudden seized lay a phantom from deep within
himself. "A great force, unkraft, a primitive force" (23) which makes him anxious to leave the so-called civilized world of creed, avarice, riches and hypocrisy. The significance of the novel is that unlike Sindi, Billy hears the voice of his soul. There is a power manifest in himself which in an attempt to express itself makes him run into severe fits of rage. He has unusually sharp eyes, a sense of premonition and intuition and love for the primitive in life. While Sindi was worried of taking any action, Billy is bubbling with courage to take action. There is something inside him which beckons him towards the primitive riches and pleasures of life and one fine morning he leaves his wife and child and disappears in the saal forests of the Markala Hills. From some of the letters written by Billy to a Swedish girl, Miss Tuula, it is revealed that he left this civilization, which was nothing "more than the making and spending of money" (96), because "We are swiftly losing what is known as one's grip on life. Why else this constant blurring of reality? Who am I? Who are my parents? My wife? My child (97). He took this action because an unending chain of questions, fantasies and charms had kept him restless till he went where he belonged. As he once stood by the side of a temple "It suddenly dawned up upon me that it was all a great waste, that the God who awaited me now was one of which no temples could be built. What awaited me now : I realized, was Fate" (98). He renounced this materialistic society and civilization not to be an ascetic but to fulfill all the demands of his self to a perfection of participated joy.

Soon after the disappearance of this rich, sophisticated and America educated anthropologist, an enormous search is launched by the police

Alienation in "The Strange Case of Billy Biswas"
and in the end he is declared killed by a tiger. But Romesh Sahai, the District Collector, who had been his friend since their meeting as students in New York, had not given up hopes of tracing him back. Once on a tour of the Mainkala Range he all of a sudden sees Billy wearing "a loincloth and nothing else"(102). He lived by the side of a white chief called Chandtola which he believed to be the work of some supernatural force" (105).

He knew the entire difficult and unapproachable terrain very well and seemed to share fully in the spirits of the primitives, the forest and nature. He seemed to be in secret communion with the forces of nature and knew the course of events to come. The reason why Billy liked living with the foresters was that "nobody here is interested in the prices of food grains or new seeds or roads of elections and stuff like that. We talk of the supernatural, violent death, trees, earth, rain, dust, storms, rivers, moods of the forest, animals dance singing ..... a lot about women and sex" (113). He had gone there in search "of my identity. Who was I? Where had I come from? (122) till "Layer upon layer was peeled off me until nothing but my primitive self was left trembling"(121). He liked the tribal uninhibited drinking and dancing and the open orgiastic love-making. He was madly in love with a tribal girl Bilasia, an "untamed beauty that comes to flower only in our primitive people" (143). It is on meeting her that "he has suddenly discovered that bit of himself that he has searched for all his life and without which his life is nothing more than a poor reflection of a million others. Bilasia, at the moment, was the essence of that primitive forces that had called me night after night, year after year" (142). For this reason he was against the
brutal feeling of forests by the contractors and "the children of Kings condemned to exile by those rapacious representatives of civilization who have ruled the throne of Delhi and still continued to do so" (143).

Billy, by now, had acquired magical powers. Dhunia had seen him send away a tiger who had been roaming the jungle for a week killing their cattle" (152) and bring back his grandson to life "who had been dead for two hours" (159). He had acquired certain occult powers and was regarded as the mythical king by the tribals. They ascribed to him supernatural powers. Billy too was happy living with these persons who lived closer to the elements and ways of nature, responding with all their senses to the living presence of the spirit pervading existence and universe. Thus, in the character of Billy, Arun Joshi opens a new vista of Mathew Arnold's "Scholar Gypsy" and the Lawrentian search for the essence of life. Billy is new type of character in the whole range of Indo-English fiction. He is not a stereotype of a traditional Indian here posing wisdom through philosophical speculations but a character effecting metaphysical manifestation. He is a rebel. He had no cowardly compromises like Sindi nor pity for himself. Unlike Sindi he has a strong will and determination. He has passionate resentments against modern Indian Society and says "I don't think all city societies are as shallow as ours ..."

I am, of course, talking mainly of the so-called upper classes. I didn't really get to know others. I don't think I have ever met a more pompous, a more mixed-up lot of people. Artistically, there were dry as dust. Intellectually they could no better than mechanically mouth ideas that the West abandoned a
generation ago. Their idea of romance was to go and see an American movie or
go to one of those wretched restaurants and dance with their wives to a thirty
year old tune. No-body remembered the old songs, or the meaning of the
festivals. All the sensuality was gone. So was the poetry" (179). Although he was
good at analysing the evils infecting the society and civilization he did not have
the inter oppection of Sindi capable of exposing the hidden motives directing
human behaviour. He had his anxieties but he was not a drifter nor a loner. He
was a man of conviction capable of his vision into reality.

While Billy has warned Sahai not to disclose his whereabouts to
anyone, the father of Billy had clamped on Sahi for his indifference tracing out
Billy. Mr. Biswas had got the whole government machinery moving. During one
of the raids on the tribal people a constable had been killed and it was reported
that, the constable had been speared to death by Billy. The Superintendent of
Police, Mr. Rele, was bent upon nabbing the culprit dead or alive and despite
Sahai's best efforts to avoid the tragedy Billy was killed. On seeing his dead body
Sahai felt "it was as though we had killed one of the numerous man-gods of the
primitive patheon"(236) and regrettably enough "the strange case of Billy Biswas
had at last been disposed off. It had been disposed off in the only manner that a
humdrum society knows of disposing its rebels, its seems, its true lovers" (240).
If it was Sindi who was responsible for the tragedy in society, it was now the
society, which was responsible for the death of Billy.

From The Foreigner to The Strange Case of Billy Biswas (1971) is
a movement from the almost contemplative world of Sindi to the dynamic, vital
and active world of Billy (Bimal) Biswas. It is a tale told with excellent craftsmanship maintaining the contrast between the impulsive and seemingly eccentric behaviour and actions of Billy and the cool, collected account of Romi (Ramesh) Sahai, the collector friend of Billy. The novel begins with a very human and natural association between these two Indian students in America. Romi makes out at the very outset that Billy belongs to the 'upper-upper crust of Indian society'. We find gradually that such aristocracy is not limited to his material background but finds a natural expression in his ideas, behaviour and attitude to life. One also notices, as Romi does, several paradoxes in Billy in the wake of their friendship when Billy takes him to his room in Harlem in New York. Billy's justification for living in the slums of Harlem is that 'white America is too civilised for him.' Billy's lodging is an evoked presence and the evocation has its basis in a fine observation of the authentic details of this American subculture:

His apartment was appealing. It was on the second floor of a tenement house that housed at least a dozen other families. It was situated in what must have been one of the worse slums of New York City. Such paint as still remained on the wall peeled day and night, falling in pinch-sized heaps of powder. The shutters hung loose; so did the mail boxes in the hall. Nearly all the glass in the front door had been knocked out (during a gunfight, I was later told) so that it had to be boarded up with cardboard pieces cut out of cartons of Heinze tomato soup. The stairs were cluttered with empty beer cans, newsprint, children, and an occasional condom.
It is an appropriate choice for Billy what with his aversion to the civilised world and a strong streak of primitivism in him, as we learn later. Only Tuula Lindgren, his girl friend, and Roni sense the creative force in him. It is instructive to take a look at Billy's library in his apartment indicative of the wide and varied interest of this students of Anthropology working for a Ph.D. in an American University:

Two of the stacks were devoted exclusively to anthropology. The third presented a melange, that to my mind, made no sense at all. It contained everything from old copies of the National Geographic Magazine to the latest pornography that was being peddled in Times Square; from learned treatises on black magic and witchcraft to a critique of the theory of relativity. What struck me most was a series of nearly forty biographies including several on Van Gogh whose turbulent career, I learnt later, held considerable fascination for Billy at one time. On top of one of the bookcases were piled at least a hundred albums of 'jazz music.' These were played almost non-stop when he was in the apartment. (p. 9)

What impresses one here as elsewhere in the novel is not Billy's scholarship but his passion to penetrate deep into the human psyche and not just skim the surface realities of the civilized world. Another early evidence of such primeval longing in Billy, Urkraft (Primitive force), as Tuula puts it, is seen in a 'music session' he has at a party in his friend's apartment:

Billy's session - for that was how it came to be known subsequently -- lasted for nearly a quarter of an hour. I am certain it was nothing very
skilful or sophisticated from the view point of music. What it had, I think, was a mesmeric pull that helps us by its sheer vitality. Little packages of sound detonated in the smoke filled air in quick succession, falling in one rhythm or another, creating patterns of sound that deep down I knew were not merely that but carried a more fundamental message although what it was I, or Billy for that matter, could not have said. They blazed through our liquor-stimulated sensibilities like little meteors through the astral night, lighting up landscapes, hills and valleys, gaping chasms of the mind that are otherwise forever shrouded in the black mist of the unconscious. They had brought into the room a reality that had not been there before or, if it had existed, it had existed so deep down that nothing, not even the hand of God, could have ferreted them out. (p. 17).

The recognition of a new region beyond the frontiers of ordinary human consciousness is here presented with such ease, retaining in its tone, all the dry normalcy of the apartment atmosphere with Romi sitting on an empty crate of California oranges.

What makes the story terribly fascinating and convincing is Billy's brilliant, rational outlook and the Urkraft that triggers off his creative energy which prompts him to do what he does. The way he argues with his Justice father about ordinary human laws being inadequate to judge people who live and act under extra-ordinary and non-human circumstances as well as his letters to Tuula bear testimony to his seemingly eccentric but inwardly rich life. The most important act of Billy in the novel is, however, his disappearance from home,
family and the civilised world and whatever he says or does earlier is but a
movement in that direction. One receives confirmation of Billy’s motives in
escaping into the jungle from the following extract from Billy’s letter to Tuula:

When I return from an expedition, it is days before I can shake off the
sounds and smells of the forest. The curious feeling trails me everywhere
that I am a visitor from the wilderness to the marts of the Big City and not
the other way round. (p. 9)

It seems my dear Tuula, that we are swiftly losing what is known as one’s
grip on life. Why else this constant blurring of reality? Who am I? Who
are my parents? My wife? Child? (p. 93)

I sometimes wonder whether civilization is anything more than the
making and spending of money. What else does the civilised man do? And
if there are those who are not busy earning and spending—the so-called
thinkers and philosophers and men like that—they are merely hired to find
solution, throw light, as they say, on complications caused by this making
and spending of money. (p. 92-93)

As a technique, these letters achieve the desired effect in throwing
light on the inner recesses of Billy’s mind without making him verbalise such
vulnerable thoughts even in private conversation. It is these private thoughts that
support Billy’s exit from the civilized world when he escapes into the jungle
courting the company of Bhilasia, who symbolises primitive culture, the
untapped subterranean reserves of psychic energy. He makes this decision not in
sheer impulse as it appears to be on the surface. He fails to establish any communication with his wife and the life around him because of his uncompromising character, a distinct innate originality. So far as Billy is concerned it is not an escape from the realities of life but an escape into real life from the sordid, meaningless existence in the so-called civilized world. This exit reminds one in a minor way of Siddhartha's renunciation of wife and child in search of enlightenment. To Billy, it is a movement from darkness to light. The dark jungles hold forth immense promise of a primordial force that can nourish him and the relaxed but vibrant life that he leads as a tribal indicates the remarkable change in Billy serving as contrast to his earlier restlessness.

All this takes place behind the screen of the daily world which is only curious about the mysterious disappearance of the son of a judge. Various theories about his disappearances are advanced such as his elopement with an American girl or that Billy is turned a spy for the princess of Bastar. But the theory adopted by the C.I.D. that Billy was killed by a man is accepted as official and hence the case is closed. The strange case of Billy Biswas - that's how it appears to the civilised world. And as for the account of this case study, one is astonished by the remarkable control of the novelist in handling his theme objectively but without so much as suspected of being wooden. The story has not a trace of sentimentality but all the same one can sense the deep concern of Romi, the collector, who is involved in the official search. It is with Billy's disappearance, not on the face of the open world but only in Romi's presence, that the second phase of the novel begins. We are gradually introduced to Billy's new
life which is starkly simple and vital at the same time. Billy's own narrative which has the same modesty and sense of humour as well as Romi's seemingly formal deport reveal this important phase of Billy's life. The night before Billy took the momentous decision to escape is presented as if it were some sort of a mystic experience:

I came out of my tent and once again sat on the rock. The moon was nearly full as today. Its light was everywhere drenching the tree-tops, softening the stone, bathing the bush with mystery. They all seemed to be waiting and watching and staring at me. It was as though I was not Bimal Biswal, graduate of Columbia, the only son of a Supreme Court Judge, husband of Meena Biswas, and father of a handsome child; it was as though I were not all this but the first man on earth facing the earth’s first night...... The wind cried in the leaves, the little insects in the underbush; the water trickled over the rocks, and they all said, ‘Come, Come, Come, Come. Why do you want to go back? This is all there on earth. This and the woman waiting for you in the little hut at the bottom of a hill. You though New York was real. You thought New Delhi was your destination. How mistaken you have been ! ...... Take us, until you have had your fill .... It is we who are the inheritors of the cosmic night’ (p. 118-119).

Once he joins the tribals in the forest with whom he had a nodding acquaintance on earlier expeditions we find Billy behaving just like them, drinking liquor, participating in their rituals, and waiting for the moon to rise. He catches himself actually waiting for the moon to rise. He catches himself actually
waiting for the moonrise just like all the others assembled there as if it is the only thing in this world that is worth living for:

Earlier he had waited for degrees, for lectures, for money for security, for a middle-class marriage, for the welfare of his child, for preserving the dignity of his family, for being well-dressed, and for being normal and all those things that civilized men count as their duty on the foundations of their happiness or both. (p. 135)

All this process of becoming a primitive is for Billy a quest for something beyond oneself as he tells Romi in his characteristically modest way:

I don't want to sound too pompous, old chap. Becoming a primitive was only a first step, a means to an end. Of course, I realized it only after I ran away. I realized then that I was seeking something else. I am still seeking something else.

'What is that?'
He seemed to be thinking. 'God?' I prompted.

'There, there, old chap that is too big a word'.

'Something like that?'

'Yes, something like that'.

It is not escape from order and form into reckless freedom and wilderness that we see in Billy's life now, for interestingly enough, his second phase as a tribal reveals order and form of a different kind. We gather from
Dhunia, Billy's closest friends among the tribals as well as Bhilasia's uncle, that Billy has been a priest and some kind of magician to these tribes. And more:

He is like rain or parched lands, like balm on a wound. These hills have not seen the like of him since the last of our kings passed away. (p. 157-58)

Dhunia also comes out with a folk-legend that there was a king who lived thousands of years ago in these parts. He was a great king, an ardent lover and an excellent sculptor. He wanted to build one temple which would excel all the others he had built and so he undertook to make the chief idol himself. He worked on it day and night and ten years passed and on the last night of the last year, under the light of a full moon, the king produced an idol which was so beautiful that the God decided to enter it and told the king to ask for a boon. The kind did not have anything to ask for but the God gave him a day to think it over. That night the brothers of the king who got scent of this divine benediction on their brother poisoned him, and the queen, Devi, immolated herself prophesying that she would return when her husband returned to the forest. And at her return Chandtola, the peak, would glow again on moonlit nights. And so, Dhunia continues, Billy is that king after whose return Chandtola has started glowing. When Romi asks him why Billy took that momentous step in his life Dhunia comes out with an explanation that is so poetic:

When the kala pahar calls you, Collector sahib, there is nothing you can do but go. The first time I heard his drumming I knew the Rock had called
him. It is like a woman calling you. You become blind. All you see is the Big Rock. All you hear is its call. Day and night it calls you. Night and day. And you go like a fish hooked on a string, in spite of yourself, bound hand and foot. There is nothing you can do but go, when the Kala pahar calls you. Yes, Collector sahib, the Black Rock is the master of us all. (p. 158).

The short sentences here suggests the nature of the over-powering effect of the big Rock on Dhunia who verbally sways to its spell. Dhunia with his tribal instincts can sense the extraordinary rhythm of Billy’s drumming which, after all, is a powerful medium of expression for the tribal.

For Billy, however, this choice of his is not especially drastic. He can analyse the working of the human mind with such clarity and wisdom justifying at the same time his own action:

Any choice worth its name is drastic. It is another matter that we whittle it down or gloss over it until it ceases to be drastic. At the same time it ceases to be meaningful, either. Sometimes, I think the human mind is equipped with a built-in apparatus for compromises. As soon as you are faced with a difficult choice this apparatus is switched on. It runs about here and there, brokering between various parts of man, rationalizing this, postponing that, until what is left is the conventional expedients of the age and hardly a choice. Deep down we are afraid that the price of making...
such choices is terrible, not realising that the price of not making them is even more terrible. (p. 188).

The price of not making such choice is 'corruption', says Billy answering Romi's query as to what that terrible price is. It is this corruption of the civilised world that Billy shunted to lead a rich and meaningful life as a primitive but what follows in the novel shows the strong clutches of such a world to retrieve Billy into its deadly fold. Romi, the only link from civilisation that Billy can trust has all the admiration and sympathy for Billy and strives to protect him from the recalling arms of civilization. The irony is that Romi too is a part of it -- a bureaucrat to boot. Things get beyond his control when through Romi's wife the secret of Billy's reappearance is shared with Billy's father and wife who are determined to get him back to his normal life. There is a search again for Billy, now more vehemently than earlier and that ends tragically in the death of Billy when a havildar shoots at him. Billy's dying accusation, watching his close friend Romi approach him, is - 'you bastards'. It is a significant utterance which acquires multiple meanings in the context. It is at the same time a direct abuse, an expression of anger at the betrayal of friendship and the meaningless assault of the civilized world in his creative privacy. It is all this and more. It is Billy's final verdict on civilisation which to him is not natural but bastardly.

It seems to be the novelist's judgement too but presented so dramatically and movingly in this strange tale of a king of the underworld, as it were. What may appear to be a thesis novel on the surface is saved by the mode of narrative, the tone of which has a combination of concern, disinterestedness,
casualness but all under superb control. It has the facade of a formal report of the strange case of Billy Biswas but the important achievement of the novel is the dramatic presentation of the complex character of Billy whose values are profoundly human and yet aspiring after something beyond the human. Even this aspiration in Billy is shown in the novel as a mission or a seriously worked out system of living but as a very natural and spontaneous reflex without any cerebration. The fact that Billy's reappearance is only accidental and that he had already lived like a tribal for ten years away from the gaze of the outside world signifies the undramatic manner in which the most dramatic act of Billy is presented. What we also notice here is that the novelist has no recourse to images and symbols to achieve objectivity in his art, but that he relies solely on the controlling force of the narrative to achieve such an objectivity is perhaps the chief merit of the technique. Throughout the narrative there is a creeping scepticism of the narrator which acts as an antidote to the possible sentimentality arising out of situation such as Dhunia's interpretation of Billy's powers and his identity with the mythological king. Mr. Aurn Joshi has exploited the resourceful technique of the first-person narration in this novel more than in his other two novels -- the pulls, the checks, the seemingly meandering yet controlled style and on the whole a technique which creates all evident in the work of this gifted writer.
REFERENCES

1. The Strange Case of Billy Biswas: Arun Joshi, Delhi, Hind Pocket Books, Delhi, 1971.

