Chapter- VII

*The City and the River* (1991)

Arun Joshi’s last novel *The City and the River* (1991), formulates a new dimension in Indian-English writings in which he expands his aura in manifesting man’s problem of identity. The novel itself reflects Joshi’s journey from individual to social identity. In a way unlike the other four novels, he amalgamates both the individual and social identity of people from different stratum of society. It is an outcome of Joshi’s pen in which he deals with multiple issues i.e. socio-political and individual, imbibing the problem of identity, dread, anxiety, rootlessness, ambition, passion, arrogance, rudeness, corruption, tyranny, hypocrisy, hollowness, freedom, class-struggle, and so on. As a socio-political novel, however it again touches the feet of existential loom. In fact, Joshi expands the aura of his vision of life indicating the identity problem of race, caste, community as well as individual in relation to Sartre’s ‘freedom and responsibility’. In nature, the novel is polysemic which refers multiple layers of meanings and interpretations. Like his earlier novels, Joshi in this novel too discusses the belief in God and His existence. Furthermore, he fuses the satire and philosophical discussions held together by a well-written story. Therefore, at the wider level, the nature of the novel wraps the assorted manifestation of life, which shows the maturity of Joshi that he moves rapidly from individual to social level. As about the nature of the novel, Siddhartha Sharma writes:

Narrated with humour and a gentle irony *The City and the River* strikes an entirely different theme from Arun Joshi’s earlier novels. At one level, it is a parable of the times; at another, it deals with how men, in
essence entirely free to choose, create by their choice the circumstances in which they must live. It also explores the relevance of God to man’s choices and whether all said and done, ‘the world indeed belongs to God and to no one else’. (Sharma 102)

As a political parable, the novel is fusion of fantasy, prophesy, and startling vision of daily politics. However it is not completely a political novel nevertheless, so much so, it is a parable of a particular time especially Emergency period during 1970s in India. Expanding the canvas of writing, Joshi crosses the territory of individual identity and meets with socio-political scenario of life. The novel, in fact, is harsh satire on the Emergency of 1975 during the occupancy of Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India. Joshi probably unfolds a wider backdrop correlating it with various dimensions: social, political, religious, spiritual, and economic. Exposing the condition of Delhi during 1970s and its beautification at the larger extant, M.K. Naik and Shyamala A. Narayan write:

. . . a scathing indictment of the notorious Emergency proclaimed by Indira Gandhi in 1975, mainly to preserve her power at all costs. The fundamental rights were suspended, and her brutal power- drunk son, Sanjay, let loose a reign of terror in Delhi, demolishing wantonly the huts of the poor in the name of beautification of the city and restoring to discriminate and forced sterilization as part of population control. (Naik 28)

The novel is a harsh commentary on the government during the 1974-75, whose declaration to erase the huts of the lower class people from Delhi, only in the
name of the city beautification. Despite it, the novel also delves that power corrupts everyone, even an over ambitious person in full of over-power forgets his limitation of being a human. Consequently, he becomes a hypocrite, tyrannous, selfish, dictator, corrupt, destructive, and rampant. On the social surface, it is Joshi’s innovative practice to look over the rampant change in society. As the novel directly shoots the corruption and malpractices of the politicians, police, businesspersons even the army chief. Showing the height of sycophancy, Joshi reveals its negative result on the common people. As T.K. Ghosh observes the novel, “A close study of the book will evince that despite its satire on the present-day political situation, it transcends the realm of political and explores the fundamental truths about human life with its spiritual destiny, and that its ultimate world-view is not political but mystical or metaphysical” (Ghosh 152). The novel is, in fact Joshi’s conception of totalitarianism in the politics and its harsh result over the democratic atmosphere.

The setting of the novel takes place around the imaginary city and river, which shows the conflict of faith and reliance between man of city and man of river or nature. Joshi adds the city with social, culture and civilization while in his earlier novels the protagonists discard these things. As Jasbir Jain writes in her book *Makers of Indian Literature: Arun Joshi*, “The City and the River is an ambitious novel of epic scope. It is complex, multilayered and parabolic” (61). In fact, the setting of the novel foregrounds Joshi’s vision of spiritual life moving through the way of turmoil and uncertainty of contemporary world. The novel is a ruthless note on monarchy where the power is put in one hand, and with the hierarchy, it moves from one to another’s hand. However, Joshi leaves individual predicament from his last novel, yet he is concerned with various generations and races. T.K. Ghosh cites Chatterjee and
Gita Hariharan’s remark in his book, “An allegory of Indian History and its mythical truth,” and Gita Hariharan says “a parable of political society-the endless variations of the relationship between man and power.”(153) His artisanship reflects in his last work in which he again tries to find out man’s existence from its mythical and religious perspectives. Like the earlier novels again, he works on the narrative framework revealing generation-to-generation relationship of Guru-Shishya. As Usha Binde writes the archetypal pattern of the novel in her article:

Archetypal pattern in The City and the River”, “I shall identify archetypal symbols, myths and legends and trace the “collective unconscious” which, despite national and cultural learning of the novel, helps to give it universal appeal. The purpose of this analysis is not to be reductive but to study the use of the author in perceiving links between the present situations in the past which gives continuity to human experience.”(Dhawan 258)

The novel starts with a prologue and ends with an epilogue in which Great Yogeshwara tells a mythical sorry-tale to his disciple Nameless-one. As a fresh note, the prologue puts a question on the identity of Nameless-one, who turns to his thirtieth birthday, asks Yogeshwara about his existence and acquaintance in the world reflecting his previous birth. An ageless teacher, Great Yogeshwara and Nameless-one are the symbol of regeneration and decay. Both dwell in the snow-covered mountain, until thirty-years. Joshi moves further, showing the old prophesy in the beginning and middle part of the novel in the form of an epigraph:

Who knows, who can read the signs
The working of immortal time?

A king I see upon the boatmen mourn

A thing of darkness growing dark,

On the city walls the shadow’s mark.

The river, I see, from a teacher rise.

The hermit, the parrot, the teacher dies.

Under the rain the waters burn

To his kingdom at least the king returns. (*The City and The River*)

For the first time Joshi modulates the novel in chapter form. Except prologue and epilogue, the novel has nine more chapters, which have their own titles. The omniscient narrator, Great Yogeshwara describes the picture of the city and river while his role in the novel is in fact inactive except prologue and epilogue. The novel starts with a delightful line, “Winter passed into spring” which indicates its hope and joy in the life that recalls the lines of P.B. Shelley’s poem “Ode to the West Wind” in which he writes,

The trumpet of a prophecy! O, wind

If winter comes, can spring be far behind. (*Fifteen Poets* 69-70. 341)

Depicting the background and image of the city, river and its dwellers, Joshi shows how the city is situated beside the river, which has three types of colonies, “First comes the narrow brown band of the mud huts, running from the end to end . . . on a
higher ground, lies the neat rosy pink oval of the brick. Colonies and their special schools, clubs, shopping arcades. Beyond the brick colonies stand the famous Seven Hills ranged in their picturesque formation” (C&R 12). Besides brick colony and seven hills, pyramids and goldmines are the places where prisoners are kept for physical and psychological torture. The Grand Master is the ruler of the city, lives at seven hills whose ambition to possess the whole power brings the conflicts between the lower class people known as boatmen and the upper class people. From its backdrop, Joshi frames identity of mass rather than individual personality.

The story moves advance with the dream of Gram Master that disturbs him a lot, in which Boatmen were nauseating him. Having conveyed his dream to his mentor like Astrologer, he comes to know its real meaning, who tells him, “The time has come to let you know that there exists a prophesy that speaks of the coming of a king. Your dream is the herald that we have been waiting for” (C&R 15). Astrologer, the personal assistant of Grand Master, always boosts up him to move forward his vision of life. He gives him always-right suggestion to sustain himself in any decisive stipulation. In fact, he is considered as the right hand of Grand Master. Both Grand Master and Astrologer pass a decree with the concurrence of the Advisory council of Minister for Trade, Master of Rallies, Police Commissioner and the Education Advisor. The brick people accept Grand Master’s proposal while the boatmen or mud-people throw out his idea. When Grand Master comes to know that boatmen’s population, which is escalating day by day, specify alarm of danger in future so he issues the official notice to control their population. Grand Master already knew that boatmen would definitely come against his objective, as he recalls his father’s opinion, “Boatmen are not as simple as they seem . . . they consider themselves to be
the children of the river, and to the river, and river alone do they hold allegiance” (C&R 14).

The echo of Emergency and population control, are somewhat come into sight in the form of parable by Joshi on which he circuitously attack over this ideology of Indira Gandhi. Grand Master says to Astrologer, “Let there be only one child to a mother or two to a home. Let the boatmen not exceed this limit until their numbers are checked” (C&R 16-17). As a political parable, the novel is a harsh commentary on Indira Gandhi who holds all the power with judiciary under her control and treats like a dictator. The novel puts the question of the philosophy of population control on which Joshi decries through the Headman, “You think an ant is born on this earth without God’s will? If it is, His will that there should be only child to a mother then surely it shall go off. There is no need for the Grand Master or you to pass a law” (C&R 19-20). Grand Master sends Astrologer to induce and cajole the boatmen by his political and religious tools. He tries to win their favour by saying:

My children, God have sent the Grand Master to be your servant. Looking after this city is like a ‘yajna’ for him, his life is the ‘ahuti’. These were words from an ancient tongue that no one understood, but there was a good deal of applause. So moved was an old boatman that he burst into tears . . . A large number of ‘asuras’ have taken human form and descended to disturb the ‘yajna’. (C&R 17)

At any cost, he wanted to win their conscience and ideology for which he uses all his experiences of life and further says in philosophical manner, “Anger kills a man, strife a nation. I propose, therefore, for your consideration, the Triple way or the way of the
Three Beatitudes” (C&R 17). Now, Astrologer directly comes to the point of allegiance, and persuades them to follow Grand Master’s order. He further tries to persuade them by saying, “One, the Grand Master of the city is the father and the mother of the city. All citizens are his children equally. Let them offer their allegiance to the Grand Master as a child to his father” (C&R 17). The opening of the new era is declared by Astrologer as “The Era of Ultimate Greatness” that boatmen could not exactly understand its meaning. Nevertheless, on the issue of population control and allegiance, they revolted against Grand Master. The Headman argues with Astrologer in a consistent and callous way, “We have no quarrel with the Grand Master and we have no quarrel with you. If it is a matter of allegiance, our allegiance is only to the river and cannot be shared, that is all that I want to say” (C&R 19).

The boatmen demonstrate the authenticity of their selves in Heideggerian and Sartrean terms. As Heidegger believes that, the authentic existence of man subsists in terms of ready to face death or sacrifice. Since boatmen are ready to die for the sake of their allegiance and always, remain in tap with river, which is liberated from any obstacle. While they knew that, the allegiance to Grand Master would make them like slaves. Through the Headman, Joshi presents a very strong female character in the novel, which surpasses all the other female characters in his earlier novels. Apart from, Headman, Dharma’s mother and Shailja are very remarkable and influential figures in the novel. Very often, the Headman defeats almost all the male characters only through her will power, confidence, and strong vision of life. She is portrayed as a very bold, courageous, active, confident, and powerful woman in fact she has masculinity to represent boatmen. Fearlessly, she argues with Astrologer on the matter of allegiance and does not yield before Grand Master at any cost. She openly
decries Grand Master by telling Astrologer, “Of the enemies within...you know best. I cannot speak on matters I know it is the boatmen’s blood down the ages that has saved the city from annihilation. There is nothing here that the Grand Master need teaches” (C&R 21). She is brutally treated by guards after being arrested with Professor. Although the guards afflict her, pierce needles in her eyes, and pours acid into her perforation, yet she only screams not because of its pain but in anger. Grand Master’s tyranny fails to break her will and confident and she dies later on in a tragic way. Similarly Dharma’s mother is delineated a shielding figure, who also works like a vigorous woman at every steps.

The role of Astrologer is contradictory to his nature, which follows the wrong way after leaving the shelter of Great Yogeshwara. He for all the time tries to smother boatmen’s voice, and as a trustworthy person of Grand Master, takes every pronouncement in free approach. As he already expected that boatmen would not accept his proposal, therefore he gives the order to Commissioner to arrest the boatmen. The police commissioner appoints Dharma to arrest first Bhumiputra known as Bhoma, a mathematics teacher and disciple of Professor. In a general sense, Bhoma is the hero of the novel, also the ‘massiha’ of the boatmen. He was the staunch supporter of boatmen’s existence, identity, image, and their lives in the world. In his absence at his hut, he arrests his neighbour named Patanjali, a ninety-year-old man that designates its height of despotism. The arrest of Patanjali is both ridiculous and ironical, since his wrists were too thin to wear the handcuff so they tie him with a rope. On the very next day the boatmen become violent and starts smouldering the Grand Master’s effigies and police tries to crush their protest and caste them in the goldmine. The conflict between boatmen and Grand Master keeps its authenticity in
the Sartrean sense of term that Siddhartha Sharma cites Sartre’s view on it, “For the secret of a man is not his Oedipus complex or his inferiority complex. It is the limit of his own liberty, his capacity for resisting fortune and death.”(Sharma, 110)

The portrayal of the conflict between Grand Master and the boatmen are not just their own, in fact it is struggle of the city and river or natural and social world. For boatmen, river is like Goddess, even they worship Her, and for the sake of Her they always ready to sacrifice themselves. Since, river is symbol of fertility, joy, comfort, love, compassion for them, even everyone often see the image of his or her in Her. As they assume that except river, anything or anyone can cheat or deceive them, while the river always preserves them and brings up them like children. Their regard and conception for river sometimes recalls Wordsworth’s belief of pantheism, as he himself watches the image of God in Nature. Therefore, he is called the high priest of Nature, as he once says to his sister Dorothy in a poem, “Tintern Abbey”, “. . . . Knowing that Nature never did betrays /The heart that loved her.” (FP 126-27. 238) Therefore the Headman on the counterattack of the Astrologer says, “Nothing can change the boatmen’s mind, Astrologer, where his allegiance is concerned, always protects the allegiance to the river. As for the rest we are, all of us, in the hands of God. And now I must take your leave” (C&R 21).

In consequence of rejecting Grand Master’s yearning, hundreds of the boatmen are thrown into jail and goldmine. The disappearance of Bhoma creates problem to everyone, therefore in a very anxious condition Bhoma’s sister meets Professor, once Bhoma’s teacher and tells him about his disappearance. Here Joshi shows a very interesting technique of calling the names of his characters according to
their professions like: Professor, Grand Master, Master of Rallies, Headman, General Starch, Commissioner, and so on. Half of the novel moves around the Professor, Dharma’s uncle, a well-known astronomer. Bhoma was his favourite student, when he comes to know about his disappearance, he forgets eating and drinking in his search. His undisturbed life becomes full of problems even peace, pleasure, diminish from his life. His entire happiness vanishes and consequently illusion, hallucination and madness make room in him. In addition to often, Staff Secretary and Education Advisor in search of Bhoma humiliate him. His condition becomes like this:

. . . Professor lay sleepless in bed. Bhumiputra’s disappearance had upset his balance. His balance had been upset because the event did not reconcile with the laws that, according to his beliefs, underlay the working of the universe. . . How could men vanish without explanation if stars did not? . . . to the Professor the vanishing of the Master Bhoma was no different from the unexplained disappearance of the heaven. (C&R 45-46)

Dharma, his nephew always cautious him to leave searching Bhoma which would lead him toward the dangerous consequences but Professor was determined to find out Bhoma at any cost. In search of Bhoma, he meets a strange and mysterious little boy of the ten year old, named “Little Star” at riverbank. He watches a strange sense of humour, and light on that child’s face. On being asked about his age by Professor, he tells, “I am thousands of years old, Professor . . . everyone is thousands and thousands of years old, tied as we are to the Wheel of Karma” (C&R 42). The Little Star, a small boy, becomes the pioneer of the Professor, helps him at every step
that reminds, William Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, in which the speeches of Fool are very much philosophical and dynamic. As he tells old King Lear on his ravaged condition:

Have more than thou showest,

Speak less than thou knowest

Lend less than thou owest

Ride more than thou goest

Learn more than thou trowest. . . . (*Shakespeare* 1.4.)

Accompanied with mysterious Little Star, the Professor goes on hunting Bhumiputra from place to place, and time to time. Then on the annual festival of the river, everyone congregates on the bank of the river. People are expected to greet Grand Master and show reverence to him but boatmen were very angry with him on the arrest of their colleagues and increasing totalitarianism over them. Therefore, they rejected to salute him and to participate in boat racing. The enraged boatmen say him, “All their lives, for ages beyond memory, boatmen had to salute the great river, and only the great river, who was their mother. They saluted her morning and evening by taking her from a handful of water and letting it run down their close-cropped heads. They did not know how to salute a man, be he a Grand Master” (*C&R* 90). However, on the interference of the Headman, they consent to celebrate but paste the image of Master Bhoma instead of Grand Master on their boat that enrages Grand Master. Therefore, Astrologer tries to control the situation by giving the religious speech to
them. He calls Grand Master, ‘Lord of the city’ and persuades them by saying, “I saw
the master of the world, the Lord himself, locked in a deadly combat with an army of
asuras. The Lord came barefoot; the asuras rode in chariots of gold, drawn by black
shiny wind swift steeds” (C&R 98). Astrologer’s speech often recalls Lord Krishna
message to Arjun that He in Kurukshetra:

Yada yada hi dharmasya glanirbhavati bharata,

Abhyuthanamadharmasya tadatmanam srijamayaham.

Whenever it is fall of religion and irreligion practices gain ground,

O Bharata (Arjun), I create a human form of Myself. (Radhakrishnan

178 Chapt.4.7.)

Astrologer somehow convinces them that Grand Master is protecting them and for a
long times his father already served a lot for this city and now it is his turn to take
care of you people. While persuading them, he shows very humble, compassionate,
and soft stance as well as at last warns them ready to face the harsh consequences for
going against him as he further says, “Now, my children, I want to speak of another
thing. Sometime ago, you will recall, I spoke to you of the Three Truths on which this
city is founded. Some accepted these truths; others- I shall not name them- did not. To
them I can only I can only say, ‘examine your hearts. You have eaten the salt of this
city . . . .’ (C&R 98-99).

Joshi again demonstrates the philosophical vision of life from its intrinsic
perspective of human beings. Both Hermit and Astrologer were disciples of Great
Yogeshwara, and had a great knowledge of myth, legend, ethics and spirituality.
However, after completion of their education the path of both men become diverts. Astrologer starts living luxurious life just against according to his real nature while Hermit passes primitive life. He calls the revolted boatmen ‘asuras’ and further says, “In life and in death, I shall not rest, until the last of the asuras, the last of conspirators, the last of the traitors is eliminated from the city and laid in the grave” (C&R 100). On the river festival, he preaches them religious and philosophical ideas, and unfolds the Indian philosophical vision of life from its root of the men. Again, he teaches them, “Ours is a spiritual civilization. It is through prayer and through vows that a man perfects himself . . . And let no man remain silent because the silence of one man shall ring lauder than the speech of a million. So beware”(C&R100). All the efforts of Astrologer become fail to cajole them; in consequence, except Professor and Headman more than hundreds of the boatmen are thrown to jail.

The story takes a new dimension when at the next morning after the festival people come to know Bhma as a conspirator in newspaper who was making plan to kill Grand Master with the help of the other member of his group. Joshi shows the malpractice in the form of the restriction of the press; in the city, the media and all the newspapers were published under Grand Master’s order and control. In the form of parable, Joshi again satirises indirectly Indira Gandhi on the restriction of newspaper, as in novel Little Star tells Professor about the condition of press in the city:

There are two newspapers in this city. One of them is owned by a trust of which the Astrologer is the head, the other is owned by a girl. The girl is five years old and cannot manage a newspaper. It is managed for her by the master of rallies. The Master of Rallies also controls the
satellite. The satellite controls the radio and the video. The Master of Rallies controls the satellite on the Grand Master’s behalf because the satellite is the private property of the Grand Master.(C&R88)

After coming to know the reality of the press, Professor decides to tell people the actuality of Bhoma. So on the next morning he puts a lottery stall in support of Bhoma’s innocence, but people do not notice him. Meanwhile Dharma’s fiancé’s brother come forward and starts telling a parable. Thus through his characters Joshi has dovetailed another parable considered as parable within parable or story within story. He discloses his artisanship blending the fancy and reality of the world. He tells the story of the ‘naked king’ on that people start laughing at king that agitates Grand Master, Astrologer and others. Therefore, Headman, Professor, and other boatmen are arrested and are thrown into the goldmine. The boatmen are beaten brutally, and many of them killed on their Yajna. Little Star says to Hermit on tyranny of Grand Master, “This Yajna of the mud-people, Patanjali, burns only on sacrifice. When the fire is low, when the flam is dying, men must feed it with their own lives. And who knows, the gods now call for the Professor’s life” (C&R 166). However, very soon, Professor in absence of Bhoma leaves everything of eating, drinking and sleeping. Consequently, after some days he dies in a very pitiable condition leaving the world silence. Professor’s brother Grand Father already knew the consequences. Therefore, in a fearful condition he mourns over his death and tells Dharma, “There, he is gone now . . . The worst I had feared has happened. I shall probably never see him again . . . entirely his own fault . . . his stupid obsessions . . . end of a brilliant career . . . an early death . . . an early death . . . it is awful”(C&R 133). Further, in a panic moment he says, “My insides are rotting. I too am just vanishing” (C&R 133).
The story of *The City and the River* revolves around three distinct levels: mythical, primitive, and modern and the characters play their roles according to the condition. Great Yogeshwara, the Nameless-one, the Hermit, Little Star, and Astrologer represent mythic approach of life; boatmen are signified by primitive level while in third category Grand Master, Commissioner, Master of Rallies, Education officer, and General Starch come forward. Joshi has interwoven all the three levels in a concrete form. Using fantasy, prophesy, and reality, he does not forget to show existential vision at a larger bubble of life. As G.S. Amur writes in his article about the novel, “A New Parable”, “It is perhaps for similar reasons that Joshi chose for his latest novel the form of the parable with the hope where facts have failed fiction might prevail” (Amur153). The novel is an archetypal show of myth, legend, prophesy, and reality of the world that Joshi replicates in a deeper level. It is a realistic fiction of Joshi. Nevertheless, he does not stop his quest for the identity. Apocalyptic, demonic and analogical symbolism also runs through the novel ensuring its structural richness. The novel is the universal quest for purity through sacrifice and ego. To show the reality of a particular time of social, political, economic and religious conditions, Joshi employs Indian Philosophy, *Vedas*, and *Bhagavad-Gita* to humanity and unveils men’s ambition, egoism, selfishness, defiance of truth and the suffering of life. As Shankar Kumar cites the right perspective of in terms of R.S. Pathak in his book:

Joshi’s latest novel called *The City and the River* (1991) continues to treat, in its own ironical manner, the predicament of his characters in a hostile world. The crisis of individual, however, has been replaced by the socio-political crisis of the city, which is a conglomerate of
individuals and can be said to represent the whole humanity. In this novel also, Joshi poses significant questions about identity, commitment and faith. But these questions are approached from the standpoint of politics. The novel throws significant sidelights on the relevance of meaning in life. (Kumar152)

However it is a political parable, yet Joshi raises fundamental function of existentialism like fear, anxiety, identity, alienation, rootlessness, freedom, and so on. Even most of the characters suffer from weariness, boredom, and meaninglessness of their lives. As a child of boatmen, for Master of Rallies, life seems meaningless and barren, as he thinks, “His misfortune lay in the fact that instead of teaching him how to row boat his parents had wanted him to join the ranks of the brick-people” (C&R 71). Although for him all the paths were open to upgrade or uplift his status by joining brick people but his soul did not abscond boatmen’s lives therefore he always lives in dilemma and insecurity of life. Thus, none other than he himself creates his problem of identity. Grand Master also feels tiresome and anxiety very often during the clash with boatmen. As once he is addressed by Minister for Trade, “You are tired. In your weariness you let dark thoughts assail you” (C&R 203).

The image of tyranny, harshness, brutal look, and inhuman treatments are shown over the boatmen as the police commissioner issues official order in order to maintain the law and order in the city. The inhuman and cruel image of police in the form of demon appears when a woman like Headman is arrested and treated like an animal that shakes the root of the soul. Another awful tyrannical image once stops man to think over satanic image in man whom God equally send to reside on the
earth. The commissioner appoints Flying Petrol with Dharma and two gunners to control the violence of boatmen. Taking action against them, the gunners kill two hundred boatmen while they were sleeping in hall that crosses the limit of humanity. Thereafter Dharma is appointed to perform the task of dumping the dead bodies into the river. The dumping the dead bodies affect Dharma in such a way that he loses his mental state which transforms his body without soul. Everything looks him rootless and meaningless, his condition becomes like Ratan Rathor in Joshi’s third novel *The Apprentice*.

The novel takes a new shape with the returning of the Bhumiputra who is cordially welcomed by Grand Father at his home. Boatmen celebrate secretly on the returning of Bhoma to the city as they consider that their leader has come back again after a long time to help them. Bhoma encourages them to stand against the tyranny of Grand Master and struggle for their right and existence in the city. He encourages them by delivering hilarious and enthusiastic speeches correlating them with its intuitive and religious perspectives. He tells them, “What does your soul care if a man is powerful and a man commands the guns. Guns cannot kill you, my brothers and sisters.... For if you are afraid to die then your soul is already dead and the great river, your mother cannot help you, nor can the Headman help you even if she were back from the dungeons of the shadow” (*C&R* 146). Further he boosts up them by saying, “I see a weight on your chest and shackled around your feet. Have no fear. All will be well” (*C&R* 153).

The Boatmen call him ‘Masiha’ and always cautious about his security. Joshi again walks on the foreground of action and inaction of human beings, as after
coming back to the city, Bhoma is very much confused to follow the further steps in life and lives in dilemma and illusion and unable to find appropriate path of life. In that indecisive condition, he is exposed to Hermit teaches him the duty of life, “The great river had ordered him to recite the king’s parable, and if in its telling the Headman had fallen, then the river must now give him the words with which to answer this luckless crowd” (C&R 145). The role of Hermit in the novel reminds Joshi’s earlier novels like The Last Labyrinth where Gargi helps Som to follow the right path of life. Similarly, in The Foreigner, a lower class person teaches Sindi Oberoi the importance of action ‘Karma’. Joshi hereby probably leaves the message of the Gita, through Hermit and sometimes by Astrologer. Hermit becomes the pioneer for Bhoma that reminds the message of Bhagavad-Gita where lord Krishna preaches Arjun the importance of action or karma:

Niyatam kuru karma tvam Karma jyoyohyakarmanah

Sarirayatrapī ca te na prasidhyedakarmanah.

Do thou thy allotted work, for action is better than inaction; even the maintenance of thy physical life cannot be affected without action.

(Radhakrishnan154 Chapt.3.8.)

The hermit teaches him that the meaning of life exists not in renunciation and escape but in action. Playing the active role in the novel, Hermit is also shocked by the tyranny, corruption, inhumanity and wickedness in the city. Both Little Star and Hermit have divine power, as they do appear to everyone unless they wish. By Hermit, Bhoma comes to realize the scheme of Almighty and His power, light, and
knowledge. Having returned after a long time, Hermit makes him realise his duty by saying, “You have been chosen to speak with the tongue of men what they cannot hear in her troubled lament . . . Having spoken, you will feel lighter. The weight shall dissolve, the shackles fall” (*C&R* 153-54).

In spite of political parable, the novel also discloses the spirituality of life on the basis of its philosophical outlook in connection with the *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Ramayana*, *Bible*, and *Quran*. These spiritual visualization somewhere touch man’s inner conscience of selves which still moves around man’s existential vision of life whether inner or outer way. In order to persuade boatmen, Astrologer delivers a speech on spiritual vision of life. In criticising Bhoma, he speaks in mystical and spiritual manner, “Ours is a spiritual civilization. It is through prayer and through vows that a man perfects himself. So that you may not falter I shall now administer to your oath” (*C&R* 100). Further, on the festival of river, he again speaks on sacrifice in spiritual terms to the boatmen:

The question, however, is how much can one man do? Man grows old. Man dies; even though our beloved Grand Master is almost immortal . . . You will be happy to know, my children, that our ‘Sadhana’ is now complete, our ‘yajna’ done . . . the Dharma Rajya that he has established. We know what we are asking. We know we are asking for great sacrifice. No sacrifice is greater than the sacrifice of a young son. But we know we are asking for this sacrifice from a family that has far a hundred years sacrificed its men, its women, its children, its wealth, its very all for the sake of this city” (*C&R* 101).
Joshi’s portrayal of Astrologer is also a harsh commentary on religion with its hypocrite contractors of religion. Astrologer’s role in the novel in the form of parable is ridiculous and satirical that produces a question that such a religious person also becomes corrupt and tyrannous. On the contrary, Hermit already knew the future of the city, and the consequences of the conflict between boatmen and Grand Master’s men. As Joshi himself writes in the novel about Hermit role, his vision of life and people belief on him, “Hermit had wandered the world in agony wondering if his beloved city was destined to be nothing better than the footstool of one asuric ruler after another. Now and again he had studied the prophesy to see if it contained a clue to the future” (C&R 65).

After coming back to city, Bhoma becomes beloved to everyone’s eyes. He is overwhelmed with the hospitality of the Grand Father who believes as if Professor himself has returned. Through Grand Father, Bhoma comes to know tragic and pathetic condition of Professor on his dooms day with his mourning, “Forgive me. Forgive me, my brothers . . . I have spent my life in sleep. My life has been a jock even as the lives of brick-people are a jock. God gave me life that I might serve this earth. I have squander it a baubles . . . I am lost . . . I do not know what to do” (C&R 163). The death of Professor Jolts the whole city, people laments over the lost of great astronomer even Grand Master could not remain untouched. Therefore, after his death, he issues a notice to set free every boatmen and Headmen telling them their crimes to win their prop up and to remove his spotted tyranny. The Little Star and the Hermit both talk in Gold Mine on the condition of human suffering at its larger background. He tells Hermit about the Professor’s will power and his suffering in search of Bhoma with boatmen, “This man’s suffering is very great, for he is not used
to such things. Hour after hour he steps from this world, shrinking within from the touch of pain that now suffuses his very calls” (C&R 165-66). They talk on philosophical vision of man’s ‘yajna’ and its consequence on human beings. In fact, both are the mouthpiece of Joshi’s real and staunch supporter of religious conception of man’s life. The sacrifice of Professor for the evolution of the city reminds Jesus Christ who also sacrifices himself for the elevation of the humanity.

After the death of Professor the boatmen go on violent strike, therefore, the whole system of the city is stops. The plane of Grand Master fails. The city looks in danger even police also could not control them. So in order to maintain peace and tranquillity in the city, Grand Master calls Army. Joshi hereby again satirises all the politician, executives, police and even Army with its higher officers like General Starch, Flying Petrol, lieutenant, and others. They also demand money to interfere the clash between boatmen and Grand Master. Joshi here comments in the form of parable that the Indian Army, which is famous for its honesty, has also become corrupt. As when Minister asks Pinstripe about Army’s interference into the city, he says, “They all want a share . . . They said they are tired of being honest. They were, they said, also tired of being poor”(C&R 188). Nevertheless, Grand Master deploys Army around the city to suppress boatmen’s agitation and violence by accepting General Starch proposal of share. In the meantime, in an official meeting, Grand Master, with the consent of Advisory Council, announces himself the king of the city who gives all the administrative power to General Starch to control the situation of the city.
On the other hand, staying at Grand Father’s house Bhoma talks to him over the issue of truth and realization of human soul. Grand Father shares his experience of life with Bhoma by saying, “I saw that where men had thrown off this blanket of fear there alone truth had triumphed and great civilizations flourished and man had taken another step toward Gods . . . But knowledge and its realization are different things. A moment comes when knowledge must realize itself in action or else become sterile” (C&R 156). Like Hermit, Grand Father also teaches him the reality and motto of life. His own aspiration of life was very much primitive, so he further says, “But the almighty can manifest through men only what men allow Him to manifest. That is why men, cities, and nations must choose. There is the upward path that leads to freedom and there is downward path, for the moment at least, must lead to perdition” (C&R 156).

Like his first novel The Foreigner, Joshi again here raises the issues of class-conflict and class division of society. As in the very beginning of the novel Joshi depicts the people living in three parts in the city such as mud people living beside the river, brick people, the Seven Hill people. Boatmen are lower class people, who always fight for their identity. In fact, they are exploited by the upper class like Grand Master. Joshi presents the hierarchal structure of the city dominated by class and caste. As he writes, “The squalid mud-quarters inhabited by the boatmen who are also known as the Nameless-one because outside their own inhabitations no one knows their name” (C&R 13). As T.K. Ghosh writes about them, “The Nameless boatmen may be called the non-descript/anonymous ‘Janata’ (the proletariat) and the brick-house people the ‘bourgeoisies’ in political parlance”(Ghosh157).
With the title of the novel, *The city and the River*, Joshi reflects the image of the city and river in the very beginning of the novel. The city has its picture of barrenness, artificiality, roughness, and toughness without green trees and flowers. Bhoma exclaims while watching the image of the city, “The palace lawns, however leave much to be desired. All brown and yellow. No trees, No flowers, Not a patch of green.”(31) His unnatural and chaotic portrayal of the city often recalls T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*:

Unreal City

Under the brown fog of a winter noon

Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant

Unshaven, with a pocket full of currents

C.i.f. London: documents at sight, . . . (60-64. 97)

On the other hand, the river symbolises as Goddess and mother for the boatmen. They use to talk with river and get inspiration and courage from Her. They have unbreakable allegiance with the river for which Grand Master compels them to bow before him but they are not ready to do so at any rate. As Professor thinks, “When he was a student the great river had spoken to him” (*C&R* 29). Even when he feels much exhausted in searching Bhoma the whole day, he used to sit on Her bank and talk to Her silently, “Isn’t it this that you want? Something like me, peaceful and infinite and free?” (*C&R* 29). Now it is generally considered that whenever tyranny, corruption, and inhumanity cross its limit then God takes a new incarnation into the world or
Nature Herself becomes destructive. Therefore, in the novel Joshi presents both destructive and constructive image of Nature. In the meditative mood, Hermit realizes the destructive function of nature and Her image, that Joshi writes:

At this point, the Hermit opened his eyes, stood up and stepped out the riverbank. The sky had once again become overcast. The clouds hung low and they were black. More clouds were rolling in from the horizon. Below him the river was rising. Her farther bank now stretched to the horizon. Against the embankment, though; she was still below the danger mark. (C&R 227)

The violence of the boatmen disrupts the peace and prosperity of the city. They had already taken oath to fight against Grand Master until the end of their life. Bhoma was worried about their life. Being a teacher, Bhoma himself believes in non-violence, therefore, he convinces them to wait for right moment of time but the Headman pines to take revenge of her insult and death of the boatmen. She tells Bhoma, “There are perhaps other ways to fight this, but we do not know of them. It is an ancient evil that has come out of the Seven Hills. So let the boatmen fight it in their ancient way . . . The king that was naked still naked. Death, I say, is preferable to surrender to this king” (C&R208). Being a teacher, his tendency towards looking at peace and non-violence reveal Joshi’s perception of life that he discloses in the novel. It also depicts the impact of Mahatma Gandhi’s ideas over him. On the condition of the city, Siddhartha Sharma remarks in his book, “In its demonic image, the city becomes the city of destruction, a great ruin of pride” (Sharma117). Bhoma convinces Headman to stop the boatmen increasing violence lest they could get the space or
opportunity to repent or expiate. However, Headman was affirmed on her decision and says, “Boatmen are children of the river. They have learnt more from her than meets the eye. Each moment the river dies and each moment she is reborn. Death is certain to all and there is a reason to die . . . the course of our struggle is set. Let it run” (C&R 208).

Joshi, like his earlier novels, again raises the issue of God’s existence or Nietzsche’s “Death of God” in both its inclusive and exclusive forms. The Hermit writes a letter to Astrologer, “The wheel has nearly come in full circle. The hour of God is upon us and the time is short. As you had hoped, a king now sits on the throne. My death and the death of the teacher are certain” (C&R 217). After coming back from the meeting with Hermit at Great Yogeshwara’s cottage, Astrologer’s mindset is very disturbed. Therefore, in the council meeting with officers, he raises the issue of God’s existence, “And God-What is God? Where is He? Does He even exist? He must surely have other things to worry about than intervene in the affairs of this city where we in any case now rule” (C&R 219).

Grand Master’s ambition to rule over the city brings a change in all the strata of the society. He hails monarchy declaring himself the king of the city. He and his location of the Seven Hills mark the higher ground for human beings, but pride, ambition, ego lead toward the wrong path that reminds “The Revelation of John” in The Message of Love. The section refreshes the notes when Christians persecuted because their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. Similarly the tyranny over boatmen in the novel, however recalls the ancient moment, the time of Jesus that Siddhartha Sharma cites in his book:
The spirit look control of me and the angel carried me to the desert. There I saw a woman sitting on the red beast that had names insulting to God written over it; the beast had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and covered with gold ornaments, precious stones, and pearls . . . And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God’s people and the blood of those who were killed because they had been royal to Jesus. (Sharma120)

To control the agitated boatmen, Grand Master appoints the army officer named Flying Patrol who always shows strict loom to everyone. In the mean time in an official meeting, Grand Master, the new king of the city issues a decree to arrest Master Bhoma at any cost only within seventy-two hours. On the other hand, Hermit, in a disappointed and disturbed mood talks river, “What should I do? . . . Is there still time? Is there hope? Is there a point?” (C&R 216). The Grand Father thinks a lot to save Bhoma from the eyes of police. He did not want to lose Bhoma like Professor, therefore he says, “I have thought at length about Bhumiputra’s problem. My conclusions are as follows: one, Bhoma will not be allowed to surrender because there is no cause for him to do so. Two, as Bhoma himself has said, he will not run away and hide. Bhoma is a teacher of men, not of thief” (C&R 233). The joint police and army come to arrest Bhoma at Grand Father’s farm where he fight with them but very soon they are defeated by police and in consequence everyone in the farm is killed. The army and police kill every boatman to erase them from the city. Bhoma’s death remains so much pathetic, horrible and compels everyone to weep once, as it appears in the novel:
As the rifle hit his cheek, the mathematics teacher felt a dozen teeth fall into his tongue. The second blow fell on his ear and his eardrum exploded into his skull. His eyes bulged at the pain but he did not utter a sound. As though a tap had been opened, blood gushed out of his ear and nose . . . Vasu had to hold Bhumiputra’s battered head. Master Bhoma had fallen unconscious. (C&R 245)

From beginning to the end, the novel forms the dystopian image of the city which somehow again makes fresh the image of the destruction of the Post-world war situation that indeed produces terror in the heart and mind of anyone. The novel also reflects the image of dehumanization. The novel recalls the modern English novelists like Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945), and *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949). The ending of the novel also shows nihilistic vision of human destruction. In respect to the backdrop of the novel, Jasbir Jain writes in her book, “*The City and the River* is, at one level, about the madness of mankind, at another, about it mortality. And it is also about the cynical nature of civilization. They fall and rise inevitably because of human greed and come alive again to test new waters” (Jain 69).

The ending of the novel remain very much horrible, as after the death of everyone in the farm, Hermit reaches there and start performing ‘yajna’ of the time. The Little Star, seated on the granite pillar on the bank of the river, contemplates over the destruction of the city. The Hermit greets him and moves further to perform ‘yajna’ of the immortal time. He says, “My children, I shall now perform the ‘yajna’ of the Immortal Time and of the great river who is his consort. It was performed on
the Annual Festival of the river by the court Astrologer but the court Astrologer has blasphemed. So to erase the blasphemy, I shall perform it once again” (C&R 249). The conversation between Hermit and Little Star denotes Indian myth and genesis. In the symbolical way, Hermit says to Little Star, indicating him illegal child:

Now listen to this. You see this illegal child. With a great love has the great river loved him. She will send him a raft in the middle of the coming night. The raft shall have a light burning in its prow but it will not have either oarsmen or oars. You will put this illegal child on the raft and you will not ask questions. Nor will this woman ask questions; and none of you will ride on the raft beside him. This is my final word.

(C&R 249-50)

Revealing the ancient Indian myth in the novel, Great Yogeshwara is the ‘Puran Purusha’ and his disciple is Nameless-one is symbol of Manu on the raft on the day of Deluge-Pralaya. After completing ‘Yajna’ Hermit moves toward his cottage. In the evening, he prays to God for the peace of the soul of everyone died in the clash for the sake of right or wrong.

Nature does not leave even a single thing when She takes destructive look. As Joshi presents the destructive image of nature at the end of the novel where river engulfs everything as granite seat, garden, brick people and their houses, club, road, the whole city, even it reaches Seven hills to annihilate his kingdom that Grand Master and his forefather constructed for decades. Joshi shows awesome look in such form, “For seven days and seven nights it rained without a stop. On the eighth day, the sun rose and from a clear sky stared down at a vast sea of water. The sea was calm
and gave no hint of the agitation that had gone into its making of the Grand Master and his city nothing remained” (C&R 260). Regarding the image of the city, T.K.Ghosh quotes Mazumdar’s opinion on destructive look of city and river, “The river, thus, becomes a source of ultimate realization and the symbolic anchor of man’s tranquillity” (Ghosh155). The world is creation of God, therefore without His will nothing happens. This philosophical religious vision reveals that Grand Master whose passion to rule over the city was not indeed agreed to God. Therefore, Nature, God’s symbol, annihilates everything and everyone from Her way. This conception recalls Lord Krishna teaching to Arjun at Kurukshetra, that Radhakrishanan writes in his book,

Maya tatamidam Sarvam Jagadavyaktamurtina

Matsthani sarvabhatani nacaham tesvavasthitah.

By Me all this universe is pervaded through, My unmanifested form.
All beings abide in Me but I do not abide in them.(Radhakrishanan282 Chapt.9.4.)

Further Lord Krishna Himself discloses His appearance in Nature, preaching Arjun He says,

Prakrtim svamavastabhya Visrjami purah purah
Bhutagramamimam Krisnamavasam prakrttervasat
Taking hold of Nature, which is My own, I send forth again and again all this multitude of beings which are helpless, being under the control of nature ‘prakriti’) (Radhakrishanan284 Chapt.9.8.)
Grand Master’s pride, ego, and arrogance engulf everyone and everything, his tyranny reaches its climax from where Nature has to take Her destructive form.

Arun Joshi incorporates mythical approach of the Bible from its Old Testament and depicts its angel in the forms of Great Yogeshwara, Hermit, Little Star, Professor, and at some extent Bhumiputra. They are something like angels of the city especially for the boatmen. However, all of them do what God orders therefore it is generally considered that man is merely a puppet in the hand of God with whom He plays. In the epilogue, Great Yogeshwara says to Nameless-one, “In any case we are only instruments- both you and I- of the great God in the higher heaven who is the master of the universe. How perfect we are as instruments is all that matters. His is the will, His is the force” (C&R 264) Yogeshwara’s opinion thus remarks that human beings only an instrument recalls Shakespeare’s tragic play King Lear, where Gloucester speaks almost similar thing in poetic form, “As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, they kill us for their sports.”(Shakespeare 4.1.) It is in fact ridiculous line, which shows a mirror to man’s incapacity of doing anything according to his/her will unless God will. Hermit who gets rid of his state of hollowness by connecting it with God’s existence manifests Bhoma’s illusion and His predestined happenings, as Great Hermit says, “The Almighty can manifest through men only what men allow Him to manifest. That is why men, cities, and nations must choose. There is the upward path that leads to freedom and there is the downward path, for the moment at least must lead to perdition. The city is free to choose either” (C&R 156). Hence, the novel probably reveals the vicissitudes, rise and fall of human civilization. On the philosophical sphere the novel frequently uplifts the mystic impact of Bhagavadgita that Shri Aurobindo writes in his Essays on the Gita, “There are always these three
eternal states of the Divine Being. There is always and forever this one eternal immutable self-existence which is the basis and support of existent things. There is always and forever this Spirit mutable in Nature manifested this transcendent by as all these existences” (579).

Joshi finishes the novel with an epilogue, when Great Yogeshwara ends his sorry-tale and puts his yellow book behind him. In a very slow and tired motion, he shuts his eyes, while many questions start flowing in Nameless-one’s mind. His curiosity pushes him to get to know image after the destruction of the city. He asks Yogeshwara, “And are the ruins of the city still there father?” (C&R 262). The answer of Yogeshwara is the reversal of the novel that he speaks in philosophical manner:

On the ruins of that city, as always happens, a new city is risen. It is ruled by another Grand Master, which, of course, need not always happen. In the new city is another Professor, another Bhumiputra, another tribe of boatmen. There is also another councillors. The men have other names but the forces they embody remain unchanged. And into all this when you go you will; perhaps, be known as another Hermit of the Mountain. And it is possible you will have a disciple whose name will be the Little Star. (C&R 262)

Everything moves in cycle, the creation and recreation of things or city or world in a new and fresh form. Joshi leaves a divine message through this novel only to make men better human beings. As Great Yogeshwara reveals the spiritual phenomena of
life, “The city must strive once again for purity can come only through sacrifice. That perhaps was meaning of the boatmen’s rebellion” (C&R 263).

Thus, the novel unfolds the ascetic vision of Arun Joshi, which is optimistic reception of Indian Philosophy, myths, legends. As T.K. Ghosh quotes Gita Harihara opinion regarding the novel, “The solution may appear ‘politically naive’ as it provides ‘little consolation to Joshi’s boatmen or their real life counterparts” (172). Joshi was never interested in politics, yet he shows political scenario of India in a parable form, which has both political and spiritual appeals. The novel ends with the purification of man’s egotistic vision of life, selfishness, and stupidity. Indeed, sacrifice of human beings opens the path of his salvation. His suffering and his sacrifice, connects him with Brahma or God, to judge man’s purity. Interpreting the message of the Bhagavadgita, Shri Aurobindo write in his book, “From food creatures come into being, from rain is the birth of food, from sacrifice comes into being the rain, sacrifice is born of work; work know to be born of Brahman, Brahman is born of the Immutable; therefore is the all-pervading Brahman established in the sacrifice” (114). Similarly, at the end of the novel Great Yogeshwara teaches the importance of purity and sacrifice, for which boatmen fraught and ultimately met to death. As O.P. Mathur reveals the essence of the novel writing in his book, “Any attempt to usurp the souls of men is stupid and is doomed to failure but not without much avoidable suffering, death and destruction” (Mathur 63).

Thus, Joshi’s The City and the River is an eternal conflict between allegiance to man and allegiance to God or river. It is after all a political parable and the representation of spiritual and philosophical vision of life. The metaphysical truth,
purity in man’s work, and his sacrifices are left back for human salvation at the end of the novel. O.P. Mathur again writes the philosophical perspective of life, “Man can attain salvation and conquer the recurrent cycles of birth and death, creation and disintegration, through self-purification to be attained through suffering and sacrifice” (100). Leaving behind the individual identity now, Joshi dwells over the identity of mass and community. On the primitive ground, they fight for their identity in the city. Like his second novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, this novel is also a journey of materialism to primitivism. As T.K. Ghosh writes, “As a parable of political society- the endless variations of the relationship between men and power-*The City and the River* is honest, ironical and rewarding” (173). Hence, the novel explores the political and religious perceptions of man where ego, overpowering desire, over-ambition, and selfishness lead him towards destruction where only suffering and sacrifice purify and leads him towards divine path.
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