Chapter- VIII

Conclusion

Arun Joshi’s enigma of human existence consolidates in his five novels where he moves around multiple phenomenon of social and individual life. His novels and short stories are the manifestation of modern predicament of life. The protagonists of his novels confront the existential vision of life and their individual mindset reports the problem of loneliness, isolation, enigma of life, anxiety, dilemma, hallucination, dread, freedom and responsibility, voice of soul and self-realization. His protagonists are unhappy and unsatisfied not from any social norms and phenomenon of the society but with themselves, the voice of their soul, and conscience that they often fail to console. In fact, like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, they hate and reject the social, cultural and traditional norms of the society. Joshi, indeed, through his characters, attempt to manifest that it is only social and cultural norms, that suppress and kill man’s natural desire to recognise his or her self that both the Eastern and Western philosophers believe. He depicts belief and mystery of Indian philosophy in all his novels. Delineating the traumatic experience of modern men, Joshi, often, tries to illustrate the various conflicts at different levels such as conflict between science and religion, belief and disbelief, object and subject, social and nature, materialism and predicament and so on. His novels are indeed an endeavour of self-expression and self-understanding of human beings.

The art and vision of Arun Joshi sustain the philosophy of life. His exploration of existential philosophy in his novels is an interpretation of both the Eastern and the
Western philosophies. He follows the tradition of Sartre, Camus, Kafka, Dostoevsky, and other Western tenets but he does not leave his root from Indian aspiration fusing it with philosophy of Buddha, Bhagavad-Gita, Mahatma Gandhi, and Vedas. He raises the living and rampant problems of modern men especially upper middle class in his novels and delineate them from Indian body with the Eastern and the Western thoughts. The protagonists of his novels live in the revulsion of civilized world following its materialistic and hollow vision. They are in fact Westernised Indian who always tries to come out from the existential despair of meaningless life. In actual sense, Joshi probably tries to raise the issue of man’s individual identity out of the mass or crowd. He correlates it with spiritual and mystic approach of the Gita and Buddha’s philosophy that lead them towards spirituality of life. Having noticed the trivial look of the society such as ignorance and self-delusion, the contradictory pulls of reason and impulse, question on faith, rootlessness and meaninglessness approach have killed their individual’s natural feelings from its deep-rooted soul where modern men find themselves living on the dead land.

Joshi’s novels are the projection of human predicament that he deals with man’s individual identity searching out from the absurdity of life. He reveals in his novels some of the Western advocacy on the revolutionary or extreme situations such as ‘Leap of faith’, ‘Absurd belief in God’ of Kierkegaard; ‘Boundary situation’ of Jasper; ‘Will to power’, ‘Death of God’ of Nietzsche; Camus’s and Kafka’s ‘Rebellious attitude and absurdity and meaninglessness of life’; and Sartre’s ‘existence precedes essence’, ‘Freedom and responsibility’, and ‘Bad faith’. His almost all the protagonists confront the problem of existential agony, anxiety, and anguish. All of them are fed up with the materialistic and obsessive indulgence with
reason. They often suffer with some kind of unknown disease such as Sindi suffers from the problem of belongingness and alienation. Billy suffers with a sort of mystical voice coming out from his self or primitivism; Ratan suffers from the hollowness of the materialistic society; Som entangles into the labyrinth of life in searching out mystery of life while his last novels unfolds the conflict between Boatmen and Grand Master. All of them are failed to achieve the real objective and meaning of life even if they look unsatisfied with themselves until they meet someone spiritual or meaningful. Due to the lack of emotional, ethical and spiritual identification, they fail to get right way to cope with the contemporary world consequently their angst become deeper and deeper with the passage of the time. His protagonists are the contemporary Indian whose Individual ideology reflects their personal experiences of the materialistic world. His novels are the manifestation of an ongoing discourse of existentialism through the struggle of an individual rather than the mass. Joshi speaks in an interview on man’s individual freedom and isolation that Arvind Nawale cites:

I guess (or liberty, if you like,) which is both political and spiritual, I have not much dealt with. But the inner-liberation and the outer-liberation I guess are quite important to me. So inner-liberation without detachment is not possible and selfishness is always stopping you from getting liberated. Loneliness is the state where you become aware that you are not liberated and you also do not know how to get liberated. That is the loneliness stage in a man’s life. (Nawale19)

Except The City and the River, from first to the fourth novels, Joshi, probably, portrays his almost the whole experience of life by looking at subjective form that he
projects through his characters that is indeed the essential idea of the Western existentialists. The proper vision of his protagonists towards life perhaps reveals his own ideology that Joshi felt in his time. As he himself came to the upper middle class, educated in America and England, worked in India as a businessperson, therefore the upper middle class protagonists of his novels like Sindi, Billy and Som also get their education from the Western universities and settle down in India. Probably, somewhere, Joshi, pours his real experience of life in the Western and the Eastern world and how it affect the mentality of the people, in relation to both the cultural, psychological and social conflicts. Thus, the image of autobiographical elements also appears in his novels.

In spite of being an executive personality, Joshi appears an anti-rationalist that becomes the subject matter of his novels. The idea of belief and disbelief in relation to God, science, reason, ration, society, life and others run throughout in his novels. The protagonists like Sindi Oberoi, Ratan Rathor, and Som Bhaskar suffer only because of their excessive belief in rational world. Sindi fails to judge the love of June, Kathy, Anna only due to his habit of rationalizing everything even if human emotion. He always suppresses his spontaneous feeling only in search of his identity, existence living in isolation. His contact with others remains meaningless which is why the fearful and painful atmosphere hover around him, consequently, everyone meet with tragic end only coming in his contact. Som Bhaskar in The Last Labyrinth also tries to comprehend the meaning of life and its reality on the basis of rational aspects of scientific analysis. Sindi and Som are indeed tormented between belief and disbelief only because they studied scientific reasoning philosophies of Jung, Freud, and Darwin that stop them to move forward toward belief while in search out the meaning
of life, Billy leaves the civilized world. Through his protagonists, Joshi carries on interpreting the existential vision in reference to rational and irrational belief of life. Their existential problems remain constant until they connect themselves to the rational approach leaving man’s intuition and instinct.

Joshi had strong faith in Indian philosophy, religion and spirituality that reflect in the end of each novel. The earlier life of all his protagonists begin in the Western scenario especially in the world of materialism, capitalism, scientific inventions, rationalism and puzzled atmosphere, in such condition they remain far away from the spiritualism, mysticism, and religion. Joshi also questions to himself in believing in God that reveals his study at foreign land which become a sort of subject matter of his novels, therefore in his talk at Dhvanyaloka, he says, that T.K. Ghosh cites in his book:

For some years, I have been wondering how I can know God. I have had the feeling that God, the Divine Ground, takes its home in different degrees in different people, and it is spirituality the more advanced who serve as the agents, knowingly or unknowingly, of God and bring Him to other people. This is what I believe right now. There is also the question whether God can be known through reason or only intuitively. There is also the fear that while pursuing God might be thrown back to the archaic. All these strands in one form or the other have crept into the novel. (Ghosh 181)

Like the atheist existential philosophers, his protagonists often question on the existence of God. Instead of trust in God, all the protagonists have firm belief on his
will or will power. They always move from one place to another in search of the meaning of life and self. Death, life, soul, self, divinity, realization are the fundamental evidences of human existence that Joshi points out in his each novel. The dilemma of life of his protagonists moves around their worldly vision where for them, no actual place of God’s existence appear. Having gone through the philosophies of the Eastern and Western, Joshi realises that the solution of existential dilemma, puzzle, angst, anxiety, dread, realization, meaninglessness of life exist only in the Indian philosophy, spirituality, religion, Vedas, Bhagavad-Gita, and Buddhism. He adheres to Indian philosophy believing that Hinduism is basically a highly existential oriented philosophy and assesses that the true meaning of human existence consists in following path of spirituality. Only because of atheistic notions, Som, Ratan, Sindi and other characters suffer from the problems of hallucination, dilemma, and hollowness of life. In *The Last Labyrinth* and *The City and the River* Joshi’s approach to the mystery of life and God is well-defined look in a very typical level. Som Bhaskar surprisingly often asks the question of God’s existence to Anuradha at various places that reveals his atheistic outlook. Similarly, Ratan, initially moves away from the touch with God. Coming out from the Western world, his protagonists ultimately come in contact with the Eastern world. They almost meet the reality of life by following the spiritual path such as Sindi comes India and joins the business of Khemka, Billy returns to India and join as a lecturer, Ratan expiates by giving his service at the stairs of a temple, Som comes to know the mystery of life after coming in contact with Anuradha and Gargi. Thus, Joshi’s exploration of Indian philosophy and its impact on his protagonists reveal that Indian philosophy is the gate of hope, light, knowledge, and realization of one’s self.
The great impetus of Indian religious thought works in his the very first novel in the form of Karma or action. As in *The Foreigner*, Sindi always runs away to face the reality of the life who indeed hates the rules and norms of the society therefore he understands that detachment is, in fact, the panacea for life’s problem in which he always searches the meaning of life. However, at the end of the novel he comes to know through a lower class person named, Muthu that detachment is not the solution of his problem, the meaning of life prevails in right action or face the bitter experience of life. The wheel of Karma moves around Sindi’s life that he come to realise in the form of action by joining hopefully the management of the business of Khemka.

Almost in each novel, with crisis of identity of an individual, Joshi also works on the crisis of the self. To know the self becomes the motto of his each protagonist whether it would be Sindi, Billy, Ratan, Som or Bhumiputra. In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, Billy’s problem is not deep rooted in traditional values. He hates the civilized society in order to get primitive vision or to know the self. He believes that culture and civilization kill man’s instinct and his naturalness but when he comes in touch with nature, a sort of strange power starts working within him. He hears the voice of his soul by meeting the world of tribes. His quench of desire is fulfilled, when he meets Bhilasia, Dhunia and others tribes in the natural atmosphere. His rejection of the society does not mean to become an ascetic but merely to fulfil all the demands of his self, which in fact shows his integrity for the primitive values of sensuousness, passion and action. Apart from primitive approach, Joshi in it also talks about Sartre’s concept of ‘freedom and responsibility’. In which he manifests that man is free to find out his real existence and search out the meaning of life which is his individual right but he or she cannot run away from his social responsibility, and if
anyone does so, then tragedy would definitely occur somewhere with him. Billy’s revolt against the civilized and sophisticated society by taking shelter in natural world reveal that society is not right place to recognise his or her real identity. It is only nature where man can get eternity or long lasting of life.

Joshi’s all the characters somewhere come in touch with nature, which probably shows his own interest and love for nature. The description of the beauty of nature in each novel also indicates the significant impact of his ideology in connection to both the Eastern and the Western philosophy. Some of his protagonists watch the image of God in nature that indicates the pantheistic idea of Wordsworth. In his second novel, he thoroughly reflects the beauty of nature in the concrete form. He tries to indicate that in the world of nature man can also attain his real identity and meaning of life and self. In the lap of nature, human beings forget all the angst, ennui, dilemma, hallucination and question of his existence. In *The City and the River*, he shows the conflict and belief in man and nature. Like absurd belief in God, Joshi here shows the absurd belief in nature. The Boatmen for the sake of nature sacrifice themselves. He further shows both the constructive and destructive image of nature in the novel. In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, he depicts the Feminine Principle of the Sankhya system of Indian philosophy that is representation of two ultimate realities of Purusha(Self) and Prakriti(Primordial Nature) and meeting them in the form of human spirit and body. Indeed, he depicts modern man’s futility, hollowness and existential despair to find out the primitive value in life.

In search of the meaning of life, Joshi’s protagonists pass through all the negative aspirants like fear, angst, hallucination, dilemma, nothingness and
rootlessness of life. Anxiety, hallucination and fear become the part of Sindi’s life until he lives in America, even after the death of June, a sense of nothingness in this universe generates in his heart. In *The Apprentice*, Joshi depicts the clear picture of Pre and Post Independence India. He shows that how under some conditions man’s immediate honesty, truth, hard labour and idealistic notion are replaced by falsehood, flattery, immorality, corrupt notion deceive and fear. Even all the ways of knowing or realising the self or conscience is blocked that is what happens with Ratan.

Joshi manifests in his last three novels that money corrupts everyone that comes under its grip. Ratan, Som, and Grand Master forget human values only in hoarding money to become rich. Corruption, bribery, tyranny and inhumanity are the negative aspects of materialistic world that make man’s life tragic and fearful that actually happens with Ratan. In the beginning he leads the life between the illusion of idealistic ideas of father and mother’s practical view, later on confronts the reality of life. After the death of Brigadier, life seems him ‘zero’, ‘nothing’. Even civilized society looks as whore that has killed man’s emotion, feeling, affection and ideas. Later on, realisation and expiation become the only way to come out from the maze of life. Both Ratan and Billy are contrasted characters, one dwells in materialistic world and involves in hoarding money while other one hates the materialistic world. Ratan’s following the path of spirituality and Billy’s taking shelter into the natural world become the different ways to search out the meaning of life, realization of sense and existential aspiration. Similarly in *The Last Labyrinth*, Joshi depicts the existential despair in the figure of Som Bhaskar, for whom life also seems meaningless, rootless, and a sense of despair, angst, nothingness also generate in him when he loses Anuradha in a mysterious condition. Thus a sense of realization generates in Joshi’s
each protagonist’s life when they lose someone very close to them such as Sindi realises after losing June, Ratan after Brigadier’s death, and Som comes to know after losing Anuradha.

Joshi’s existential vision however moves on certain limitations, as his characters belong to certain strata of the society, but he does not only move around Indian tradition, art, and culture but also individual feelings. Unlike Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao, his characters seem largely different in behaviour and outlook. Confining his vision around individual existence and identity, feeling, emotion, Joshi somewhere does not relate them with social identity. His protagonists are probably an outcome of Sartre’s concept of ‘existence precedes essence’. Apart from the East and West cultural conflicts, Joshi also delineates Marxist approach of class-conflict in all in his novels. His characters like Khemka, Billy, Som and Grand Master belong to upper class or upper middle class, whose outlook regarding lower class is negative and arrogant. Their ego, selfish desire, and pride always suppress and create trouble in rightful desire of common people.

Joshi’s *The City and the River* also deals with problem of belongingness in terms of social identity of mass or Boatmen instead of individual identity. As a political parable, the novel unfolds the vivid picture of 1970s India. Joshi uses harsh satire on man’s ego, ambition, desire, and passion that in fact lead man towards the destruction where by one’s mistake everyone has to suffer. Apart from social depiction, the novel is very much philosophical. At the end of the novel Joshi points out the concepts of reincarnation, regeneration, reestablishment and rebirth of the world and men of Indian philosophy. He talks about Indian legends; myth such as
after the destruction of the city, new city emerges with new Grand Master, Bhumiputra, Astrologer, and Hermit that refers the interest of Joshi in Indian philosophy in his novels.

The impression of Camus and Kafka also reflects on the novels of Arun Joshi. In *The Foreigner*, Sindi often thinks of committing suicide only due to being fed up with the question of his belongingness. In his education period, he directly asks his uncle of committing suicide that reveals his strange behaviour and hollowness. The positive attitude of committing suicide of Camus also works on Joshi’s characters like Sindi and Ratan. Joshi’s all the protagonists look selfish. They remain indifferent to others feelings and emotions whether that would be his wife, parents, friends or others. Sindi does not care about June’s feeling and love who for the sake of him looses everything. Similarly, Ratan also does not care about Brigadier’s honour and position in the society; Som Bhaskar is more selfish than other protagonists are. He does not care about the future of his wife and children only to know his self. Billy’s condition also appears same as Som. In *The City and the River*, Grand Master’s selfishness leads the destruction of the city. In fact, due to the selfish notions of Joshi’s characters the suffering, angst and fear revolve in each novel that also affects the peaceful life of minor characters.

In *The Last Labyrinth*, Joshi shows the mystery of life in forms of human soul, death, and mysterious world of spirit. The term ‘Labyrinth’ in the title of the novel refers Joshi’s mindset which is an equivalent change like ‘maze’, ‘impasse’, ‘tangle’, ‘bhul-bhulaiyan’, and ‘entanglement’ in which Som Bhaskar entangles in search of his individual identity and meaning of life. The perplexing question of knowing the
self always haunts him, which is why he nowhere gets satisfaction. Joshi’s depiction
of two cites: Mumbai and Benares have its symbolic look that Joshi manifests in the
novel. His heroes are basically trapped or deadlocked only due to the ignorance and
illusion of life therefore their quest to know the meaning of life and self-knowledge
always remain problematic. Except The City and the River, the heroes of his first
fourth novels suffer from psychological problems, illusions, egocentricity, pride and
problem to confront the reality. Their life remains pessimistic, tragic and full of
problem until they take shelter in Indian philosophy. Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’ also
becomes the thematic part of Joshi’s novels. The concept of ‘will to power’ reflects in
characters like Ratan, Boatmen, Bhumiputra and Som. All of them believe in their
free authentic will power.

Joshi’s protagonists are very strange from other characters and common
people. Only because of their behaviour and attitude, they are often considered
strangers in their own communities. Like an alienated and isolated atmosphere, the
pleasurable moments of life also fails to please them. In party, function, and club and
among the family members, they look exhausted, useless, tasteless, and meaningless
therefore their thinking leads them towards emptiness, hollowness of life. Actually,
the world appears to them a sort of dream, illusion, fancy, and nightmare as if they are
living on the metaphysical ground. His portrayal of female figure is stronger than
male. They are not submissive, or dependent on others. They look confident,
courageous, active and firm to face the reality of life, such as June, Bilasia, Anuradha,
Gargi, and Head Man. Through them, the protagonists of the novels come to know the
meaning of life.
Joshi in all in his novels talks on absurd belief and disbelief in the existence of God, philosophy, mystery of life and in river and nature. Most of his characters have absurd and blind belief in God and their existence such as Ratan’s mother, Anuradha’s mother, tribes, and boatmen. Their absurd belief also leads them towards tragic land while Sindi, Billy, Som, Ratan, and Astrologer have no belief in God’s existence. Joshi probably tries to show three ways to come out from the maze of life that are realization, expiation and sacrifice. Sindi’s realization, Ratan’s expiation and Boatmen’s sacrifice for their identity reflect meaning of life. Since Lord Krishna Himself says to Arjun in his hallucination that sacrifice is the way of man’s redemption and salvation and through it man can get eternity therefore his protagonists somewhere go through a sense of realization of life.

Thus, Arun Joshi’s novels are apparent fusion of the Eastern and the Western culture, tradition, philosophy and spiritual vision of life. In search of the meaning of life, individual existence and identity, his characters move from place to place, person to person. Joshi employs both the Eastern and the Western philosophy in terms of subjectivity, suffering, sacrifice, identity, anxiety, dread, suicide, freedom, belief and disbelief, selfishness, primitivism and pragmatism, courage, will power and a sense of realization. His all the protagonists move ahead in search of their existence, and voice of their soul in realization of the self.

Joshi himself accepts in an interview that his purpose of writing novel is the essential attempt to lead a better understanding of life. His depiction of nature in his novels to generate the interest in men to again come in touch with nature whom they have forgotten in hoarding and race of life. Apart from existential despair, the
glorification of primitivism, futility and hollowness of civilized materialistic society and human values are also the major themes of his novels that Joshi deals them at a deeper level. Therefore, Joshi’s novels are the manifestation of various level of life in terms of looking into man’s inner voice rather than ideas.

*The Foreigner* refers to lord Krishna’s message of action (Karma); *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* delivers the message of primitive look for everyone; *The Apprentice* refers Ratan’s sin and expiation; *The Last Labyrinth* indicates the mystery of life to follow religious garb while his last novel, *The City and the River* projects a satire on man’s inhuman state. Joshi says that desire, over ambition, pride, lead men towards destruction. Thus, the thesis explores Joshi’s new vision of life in relation to Individual aspiration of men and their understanding. In order to live, a better life one need to come out of the mess of the materialistic world that he expresses through his personal experience of life with his protagonists of the novels. In an interview, Arun Joshi delivered a message as follows:

There are two things that I have consciously tried to convey. I strongly believe that individual actions have effects on others and oneself. So one cannot afford to continue with and irresponsible existence but has to commit oneself at some point. From that angle, one can say that Hinduism is hugely existentialist-oriented philosophy since it attaches so much importance to the right way to live (to exist). Secondly, it is very difficult to steer one’s ways through life right or wrong. (Jain 97-98)
Work Cited

