Chapter-IV

THE STRANGE CASE OF BILLY BISWAS
(Indigenous Ecocritical Study)

The Lives of the Natives in the Maikal Ranges

Kala Pahar in the Maikal Ranges in Chattisgarh
Arun Joshi (1939-1993) was an Indian writer of English often hailed as a ‘prominent’ English writer within Indian literary circles of the last decade. His work received little or no attention in the Indian writer’s list outside India. He is popularly known for his extraordinary novels, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* and *The Apprentice*. He won the prestigious the Sahitya Akademi Award for his novel *The Last Labyrinth* in 1982.

Arun Joshi was born in Varanasi, completed his higher education in the U.S. and returned to India as an industrial manager. In today’s world of book-promos and P.R. Arun Joshi would be a misfit, as he kept himself out of the limelight, writing in the pre-Rushdie era. His novels deal with existential choices a man has to make won him huge critical appreciation in India but he remained practically unknown in the West. Joshi’s diasporic experience is imprinted into his writings and the dominant trope is that of the Western experience of development and urbanisation and the worst perils of modernisation.

Joshi has much derived from Western existential literature, but he had consciously reworked it to suit the postcolonial Indian setting. His main search was to reach out to the truth of what does it mean to live with the reluctant promise of tradition compared with the incompatible modern colonial legacy which drove many existential thinkers of India into contemplation. In the novel, *The Foreigner* (1968), Joshi outlines the story of a young man, Surinder Oberoi, who is detached, almost alienated expressing the feelings of a diasporic individual. A man who sees himself as a stranger wherever he lives or goes, in Kenya, in England, USA and in India where he finally settles. His detachment transcends barriers of geography, nationality and culture. In his novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) he combines the normal and the abnormal, the ordinary and the extraordinary, illusion and reality,
resignation and desire which rub shoulders with one another. The incomparable legacy of modernity figures again and again and the postcolonial predicament is highlighted in political fables like *The City and the River* and *The Last Labyrinth* (1980).

It is Joshi’s polyphonic, heterodiegetic narrative style, which sets his work apart from his predecessors (R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, M.R. Anand) and his forbears in the Indian English canon (Salmon Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth). Admittedly Joshi’s predecessors were chiefly concerned with the representation of the Indian mind, revival of native roots, the cultural fabric of the marginalised voices in India (Dalits, Muslims and Women), set off in a heteronomical quest to the legacy of colonialism. Unlike the social realism of R.K. Narayan or Khuswant Singh, both Joshi’s narrative technique and literary quest can be seen as non-linear and polyvocal and above else, experimental.

In a latent shift from the public (socio-cultural) to the private (post-colonial self-subjectivities) sphere of representation, it can even be argued that Joshi is the first avant-garde figure in Indian English Literature before the arrival of magic realism, hybrid language and other post-colonial, post-modern tropes in the 1980s (Canlon, H - Asia Review n.pag).

Billy, the central character in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* symbolises the ideal, the restless human spirit which strives to realise the unknown mystery of life. The biggest irony lies in the title which marks out Billy Biswas as “strange case”

*The lines from the text hereafter shall be mentioned only with page numbers.
because of his quest for the truth. *The Apprentice* (1993) deals with the protagonist Ratan Rathor who represents the quintessence Everyman. His other novel, *The City and the River* (1990), a political fable uses a mixture of fantasy, prophecy, and a startlingly realistic picture of everyday politics. In short, every novel brings forth socio-cultural indigenous subjectivities of a broader range into personal stories of quest through revival of native roots and establishment of affinity with nature. Joshi’s predicament and bent can be expressed rightly by the following lines in the famous quartrain of Jalal-ud-Din Rumi’, a Sufi poet (1207-1273):

> For years, copying other people, I tried to know myself,
> From within, I couldn’t decide what to do,
> Unable to see, I heard my name being called.
> Then I walked outside (1-4).

These lines provide the essential knowledge of the correlation of both Man and Nature as homogenous entities – always co-existent. A look at the Indian scriptures show how long the advocation of the conservation of Nature for the well being and even the very existence of mankind depends on this concept. In a word, it can be said that the essence of Indian wisdom works out to protect, to preserve and to conserve, the geostrophe components which lead us to maintaining the environmental balance and developing the relational bonds between man and Nature.

As Donald Edward Davis argues, “human history is natural history” and the natural environment functions as an active force in cultural development (Donald Davis, 201). Arun Joshi’s novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* emphasises on close knowledge of natural history and its interconnection with the local culture and this occupies the main theme of the text.
British rule in India, first of all, resulted in breaking the barrier of closed society with its self-created customs and ancient value systems. English language provided the natives with a way to the western literature and to the western culture. India got Independence through bloodshed and rapid migration with division of borders. The multi-faceted character of Indian writing in English has embraced at sometime or the other -- conflict of identity, conflict of cultural crisis and mostly the nostalgia of Indian belongingness and this has become the dominant theme of many writers and this is the case with Arun Joshi too. The questions voiced in the novel are fundamentally important to modern man living as in a wasteland:

The strange case of Billy Biswas records an existentialist protest against superficial, materialistic and irritative western culture. It is a study of spiritual decay, lack of good relation with nature in general and our fellowmen in particular (Nayak R. 3-4).

Joshi’s novel also has similar connotations like Patrick White’s *Voss*. The inner journey and quest for spiritual awakening is similar in both novels. Commenting on the theme of the usage of nature and landscape Abraham, a critic says that the motif of journey exclusively helps to find out the meaning of the self in this world. According to him:

The two novels, though written in different backgrounds and environments, in fact deny all the boundaries and coastline. The landscape across which the journey takes place is, in fact, the interior landscape, which transcends all local, regional, nationalistic or cultural concerns. That is why the two novels involve a journey, which is also extended into a metaphor of the mind. It is also an exploration of the
past in order that the present should be potential enough to have a future (51).

Person versus society and person versus nature hold a deep foothold in the novels of Arun Joshi. Social and psychological problems hold importance in his works which are consistently reflected through nature. Billy, the central character in the novel The Strange Case of Billy Biswas taken up for study, tries to achieve a fluid identity in collaboration with nature.

Arun Joshi’s fictional forte is an effective portrayal of the crisis of self and a quest for meaning of life. In The Strange Case of Billy Biswas the search for identity takes spiritual dimensions against the backdrop of the clash between the superficiality of highly materialistic Indian upper class and the earthy values of the tribals who live in close association with nature (Supriya 1).

Arun Joshi is an Indian English novelist; an eco-critic, evolutionist, environmentalist, philosopher, naturist and eco-based aesthetic struggled to present the predicament of modern man and hence uses nature to dwell upon the mind of the characters in search of distinct identity. Man has become highly tensed and searches for futile values when life is much simpler to go on.

In a socio-cultural scenario that is losing its unity under the impact of new pressures of science, technology and affluence, it is natural that the novel should seek new techniques to transmute authentically the emerging outer and inner compulsions. This analysis and eco-critical reading of the novel concentrates on the delineation of the psychic and existential aspect through ecology and culture:

Though Arun Joshi has divided the novel into two parts: Part-I upto 98 pages and Part-II from pages No.99 to 244, it could have been better as
Harish Raizada suggests, if it could have been divided into three parts designated respectively as “the Civilized World,” “the Primitive World” and “the Impingement of the Civilized on the Primitive World”. In the fantastic structure of the novel, Billy’s disappearance into the world of tribals sounds ‘a bit like Scheherazade’ or ‘like Scheherazade alright’. It is in this respect Arun Joshi might be looked upon as a fantasist (Kumar, S. 96)

Diasporic individuals become a universal community of creative human beings who create infinity of the present moment and remain connected to realities and possibilities. In certain areas of human activity, a return to nature is desirable. One of the significant strands of ecoliterature is the evolution of an ecocritical method called Oikopoetics, which is the partial evocation of location of the indigenous tradition of ecology in the westernised world. As study of the oikos i.e., nature, ecology will not merely address a quantifiable and empirically verifiable relation between organisms and the non-organismic world but acknowledges that the inner life spirit is also a member of the oikos and the relationship among these three members cannot be measured through any quantifiable means. Oikocriticism, one of the dimensions of Indian ecocriticism, which is indigenous in dimension, analyses the unity of the human, nature and the spirit.

Nirmal Selvamony, an Indian critic has finely expounded the concept ‘tinai’ -- a very old concept in Indian literature prevalent since ages, which draws very close to indigenous ecocriticism. ‘Tinai’ as a social order is written about extensively in English and in Tamil. A paradigm for holistic land-human relationship can be found in ‘tinai’, an early ecocritical theory from the culture of the Tamils of South India.
Tinai has a source in the ancient Indian Tamil text- tolkappiyam. It is an example of an ‘integrative oikos’ of the West, in which the sacred, the human, natural and cultural phenomena stand in an integrated relationship. . . . Being the habitat of the people concerned, oikos (tinai) forms the matrix of all social institutions, economy, polity, family and communication (Selvamony, 314).

The earliest of this type of ecocritical theory in India along with the theory of indigenous ecocriticism the West is explored in this chapter with Joshi’s novel as the basis to bring about the importance of nature. Though early Greek life was based on the oikos, no known theory of the oikos had emerged in Greece, whereas the early Tamils had formulated a theory of tinai, which may be the earliest known “ecocritical theory.” This theory is a part of Indian ecocriticism and both the concepts of the West and the East have been the subject of intensive study, in this research and through exposition of Arun Joshi’s The Strange Case of Billy Biswas. The exploration of these concepts of ecocriticism is done highlighting indigenous ecocriticism with Indian and other tribal culture worldover. Indigeneity and Oikocriticism are related dimensions of ecocriticism that analyse the unity of the human, nature and the spirit.

Essentiality of Correlation between Man and Nature

Arun Joshi’s novel is a powerful record of the sophisticated, complex modern culture which is highly stressful and provides an affirmation of return to nature as the best option available for human beings, if real peace and affinity is to be established. Fritjof Capra explains the concept of interdependence in the context of ecosystem:

All members of an ecological community are interconnected in a vast and intricate network of relationships, the web of life. They derive their essential properties and in fact, their very existence from their
relationships to other things. Interdependence -- the mutual
dependence of all life processes on one another, is the nature of
all ecological relationships . . . The success of the whole community
depends on the success of individual members, while the success
of each member depends on the success of the community as a
whole (290).

The two sections, which the novel occupies, show two different worlds in two
different geographical locations. The novel reveals the falsity of the refined Indian
upper class society.

_The Strange Case of Billy Biswas_ perhaps Arun Joshi’s most well-
known novel, reveals a seemingly schizophrenic protagonist within
whom reside relatively compatibly a modern intellectual as well as a
primitive – an incarnation of the Jungian unconscious . . . and despite
his sincere efforts to keep sailing in the two streams, flowing in reverse
directions, his very existence is smothered by the intervention of
extraneous forces (Bhatnagar, 4).

Billy Biswas longs intensively to identify his real identity in the most innocent
primitive environment. Billy is a man of nature and his incompatibility with the
modern society affects his life much and he fails to accept the modern paradigm of
life.

The denouement, then, becomes but a foregone conclusion wherein the
jungle would ultimately claim him and all efforts to thwart that would
succeed only in complicating the picture. It is this rootedness to the
soil, which nurtures and nourishes the soul. Technology, by its very
abstraction and voracious instinct to master and tame Nature, Pitts man
not merely against his immediate environment but also against his inner self (Bhatnagar, 3-4).

This novel is a radical cultural critique of the existing system and enforces the need for rational transformation in the Kantian sense of changing the system and its cultural, social, gender and ethnic formations with age-old ideals. Ecology movements are related to political movements too. Nature is conserved for preserving the options for survival. Ecological restructuring is required at the level of worldview. The survival of humanity is threatened and justice is violated in the name of modernity and urbanisation.

The central figure, Billy Biswas, while enjoying his leading position, is defined in opposition to various other selves, exemplified mainly by the characters of Romesh Sahai, his long time friend, Meena, his wife, Tuula, his very perceptive girl friend and Rima who loves him with a naive infatuation.

Romi, the narrator and his Swedish girlfriend, Tuula Lindgren, know the profound intellectuality and obsession of Billy. Biswas is against false Western values. Billy Bimal Biswas is the only son of a Supreme Court judge. He is sent to America by his father to study engineering but he favours the study of Anthropology. He lives in Harlem which was famous for slums and he likes living with the people there. He meets Romi, the narrator of the novel when he is engaged in doctoral work. He finishes Ph.D. and returns to India. He gets selected as lecturer in the University of Delhi. Despite such an affluent background, he felt himself to be a misfit in the so-called civilised society.

He married Meena, a pretty aristocratic, convent-educated girl. She is only responsible for his lack of understanding and the cause for his despair and agony. His passions lead him in wrong directions. It results in the seduction of Rima Kaul. The
terrible shock he receives at his degradation instigates him to move away from the
civilised world. “Man is drawn into the world of objects and has lost or is
continuously losing” and Billy too enters this state (Tillich Paul, 142).

His conscience keeps him in a perpetual state of irritation against the social
setup. It made Billy suffer inwardly from the pangs of conscience. He admires the
Swedish girl Tuula who leads her life with certain principles treats money as a whole
lot of paper. Billy is surprised as she remains detached from others and friendly to
him.

He frankly admits quite early in the novel, “All I want to do in the life is to
visit the places they describe, meet the people who live there, find out about the
aboriginals of the world” (12). A glance at his library reflects that it was not only
filled with the books of knowledge but also of his passionate engagement with his
subject.

A look inward into his character gives the impression that he is fond of the
primitive world since his early childhood. He visited Bhubaneswar and Konark at the
age of fourteen. His inner urge to live like a primitive man in a primitive world is
made evident at fourteen years, when he talks about getting intimations of his
primitive self from the moment he emerged from the railway station: “It was as
though a slumbering part of me had suddenly come awake” (89). He admits that at
that time he could not analyse his feelings properly: “I could not figure out what
excited or troubled me unless it was a sudden interest in my own identity. Who was
I? Where had I come from? Where was I going?” (89). It had seemed to him that the
sculptures at Konark can give him a solution to his problems of identity. But finding
most of the sculptures aesthetically unsatisfying he concluded that only Adivasis or
tribals could provide him the necessary knowledge as they had stored secret wisdom for centuries with them.

The organic worldview of the tribal (and tinai) societies derives from the maximally integrated interrelation among the members of the oikos. This integration is in fact, a continuity of being, an ontic continuity, which results in identification. The being of a member of the oikos is seen to be flowing into the being of the other resulting in an organismic being in which human being, nature and the spirit are members (Selvamony et al., xx).

Modern individuals have no fixed or permanent identities. Billy immersed himself in a different world when he witnessed a tribal dance in Odisha. This strange sensation made him restless. “There is a sensitive portrayal of the dilemma of a double exile, Billy Biswas, a highly educated anthropologist with an aristocratic background who feels a strong mysterious pull towards the primitive force” (Supriya 1).

Billy follows the concept of himself as a part of belonging to earth and nature as K.D. Moore says: “Take away the sun, and I die. Take away the plants and animals and I die. So why should I think my body is more a part of me than the sun and the earth?” (Buell 58-59). The environmentally constructed body of nature is primal and crucial to health or disease, life or death. “The politics of life centred on the feminine principle challenges fundamental assumptions not just in political economy, but also in the science of life-threatening processes” (Shiva Vandana, 14).

Stories have power to move millions of people. Everyone must reckon with the past because within it lay seeds of the present and future. The body becomes an apparatus of the state through which various discourses of species survival occur: “wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are
waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilised for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity” (Tran, Jonathan 32).

The dualisms expressed in this novel, culture or nature, self-propelled or technology, past or present, movement or stasis, illustrate how the disabled - body or individual, embodies the opposite of wilderness. Movement is vital, and it is as temporal as it is geographical and diasporic too, hence the nostalgia is represented in Billy Biswas. Braun calls ‘wilderness’ a “purification machine” to expose its artificiality (Jacquette Ray, Sarah, 68).

Billy is not new to the tribals but he is very alienated to the civilised world. It estranged him and he wonders at their degradation:

I sometimes wonder whether civilisation is anything more than the making and spending 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 (69).

The statement, “I came a thousand miles to see your face, O Mountain. A thousand miles did I come to see your face” (7), declare a strong note in the very opening of the novel. It signifies nature in a state not polluted by civilisation. Nature in its purity is what Billy was searching for:

He leaves the smart society because he finds his affirmation of the essence of human existence in the primitive life and makes a concerted effort to join an other world away from this civilisation (Dwivedi, Vachaspati, 57).
Personification of Nature Crucial for Human Existence

Mother Nature is a common personification of nature that focuses on life giving, nurturing and protective aspects of a mother. Nature always was and is a source of energy and life spirit and has supported the existence of human race.

The path which leads him to the self imposed exile is fraught with doubts, apprehensions, uncertainty and the experience of rejection, bringing him very close to Camus’ hero Meursault. . . . A retreat from such an environment into the wilderness in response to the call of the primitive force is effected only with great effort, it implies the breaking away from natural kinships, societal affiliations and obligations (Supriya 2).

Ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies. This is true of criticism and approaches based on the Gaia theory or Carolyn Merchant’s concept of ‘Mother Earth” or ecocriticism privileging indigenous traditions. The systematic application of holistic ecological concepts to cultural and social texts would provide scope for a better critical reading. Billy tells Romi that “Most of us are aware only of the side on which we are born, but there is always the other side, the valley beyond the hills, the hills beyond the valley” (15). It is obvious that this other side illumines his vision, which concerns the primitive life untouched by the sophistication.

This is in complete agreement with the Desai’s opinion in her novel Fire on the Mountain as she through her central character, Nanda potrays the love of Carignano located on the hill. Even Raka who loves the other side than the valley which is highly populated and symbolic of the communal life, the busy modernity and the sophisticated lifestyle which are marks of colonial impact left on India.
Modernity emerged through the colonial factor and it formed a dialectical relation with non-European entity. “There cannot be modernity without Coloniality” (132) as said by Mignolo. Tradition is a means of handling time and space, which inserts any particular activity or experience within the continuity of past, present and future, while Modernity is the experience of living in which “social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character” (Giddens, 38-39).

Human progress and development are based and are delineated as evaluative binary structures, such as primitive or civilised, beliefs or science and traditional or modern. Through this comparison the West has represented its other counterparts as existing in the same trajectory of history but very far to achieve. Joshi proclaims about a Utopian society of eco-centric basis not on Eurocentric basis, through the character Tuula. There is no boundary to Billy in exploring the lives of the tribals. For this purpose, he never confined himself to the books written on them. His occasional expeditions leave a deep imprint on his mind and thinking. Kala Pahar, the key locale in the novel is located in the Maikal Ranges in Chattisgarh, which is the home of the great saints of Indian tradition like Kabir, Kapila Muni etc. It is the place of spiritual and nature’s enchanting beauty and it is this location which forms the base for providing Arun Joshi with an avenue for eco-cultural exploration. Kala Pahar, Kanha National Park’s highest hill, is home for wide ranges of wild creatures and fleshy white flowers.

Billy forgets himself when he looks at the wilderness of the Maikala hills. This location inspires him to think to be there for the rest of his life. He wanted to see his intimate friend Dhunia, the headman of the village. He offered high antibiotic medicine to his niece who is respected as untamed beauty of the village. He was
invited by his friend to watch their tribal dance. While looking at the dance he felt that the whole hilly area invites him to its timeless culture. Billy is attracted into the grip of primitivity “the essence of the primitive force” (103), with a high degree of potential to move away from collective codes of the so-called organised modern society. He gets energised with the capacity to accept a changed system and its inherent challenges.

The sense of belonging he feels in the wilderness is reinforced by its sharp contrast with a world, which passes for civilised society leaving a sense of repulsion. Lynn White Jr., in “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” points out that during ancient times people worshipped “every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill” (10). Alice Walker, the famous American novelist very beautifully expresses this sentiment in her work *The Colour Purple*: “My first step away from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it came to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all” (167). These statements point towards the asymmetrical nature of cultural encounters, in which one part is superior by possessing knowledge that the other lacks. This knowledge concerns the subject’s own knowledge and the real knowledge of the other in a cultural contend when observed through a linear view of history.

The dark jungle holds forth for Billy the promise of a primordial force that can nourish him when he is fully uncertain and confused. “Tolerance for such ambiguity and uncertainty is a prerequisite for taking action in this promising and perilous era” (Zimmermann, 17). The ancient voice of the Kala Pahar calls him incessantly. This inner urge is so compulsive, for “there is nothing you can do but go” (115).
The union of Billy and Bilasia opened new doors of knowledge. The flame of Chandtola (a peak) shined on full moon nights when King and Queen were alive long back. Everybody believed that Billy is the incarnation of the old king as the flame started glowing again. Now he is identified as their old king with some magical powers when he brought Dhunia’s grandson back to life. All his natural instincts were corrupted by different women i.e., Meena deadens his senses and Rima pollutes him.

On one end is Billy, who is non-consumerist and anti-materialistic while at the other end is Meena completely enamoured and dependent on money. Meena’s world is a world of social positions and respectability. Billy’s marriage to Meena is a failure as his freedom was curtailed after the marriage. His wife doesn’t want anything except money and status and never provides him comfort in his search for inner meaning.

Billy is convinced that the constructions of society cannot sustain his search for the meaning of existence. Joshi points to the modern man the materialistic urge to gain wealth, which had lead man to forget his own heritage. The primitive people living in the hills and forests sustain their life without spoiling the flora and fauna in the ecosystem. Arun Joshi is aware of the power of nature, which can cause support and also great disaster to humankind. That is why he created such strange natured Billy to reveal the power of nature. Tribals have no problem with the concept of living a simple life while the urbanised have a “social order difficult to redesign” (Sharma, 3).

Bilasia is the proper medium which provides an answer to his problem of self. She is the primitive force which leads Billy to experience soul. Bilasia works as a catalyst for him who frees him from the strange hold of money-minded civilisation. Tribals naturally experience happiness in mingling with Nature. They learn to remain
happy in primeval passions and realisation of the spirituality of souls. Modernisation introduces new forms of oppression. The tribals in all their simplicity are not affected by modernisation.

In the name of development there is maldevelopment which has in fact violated the integrity of organic, interconnected and interdependent systems. Societal codes and ethics produce a process of exploitation, violence, injustice and inequality meted out to the weak in society. Recognition and realisation of nature’s harmony maintains the justice and equality which Mahatma Gandhi talks about the fact that there is enough in the world for everyone’s need but not for some people’s greed.

Billy expects Gandhiji’s mode of thinking and tells Romi that the tribals enjoy living at the sustenance level. He admits:

What kept us happy, I suppose were the same thing that have kept all primitives happy through the ages: the earth, the forest, the rainbows, the liquor from the Mahua, and occasional feast, a lot of dancing and love making, and more than anything else, no ambition none at all (107).

They never fear death and moreover they overcome their desires quite easily. So even when there is a draught, inspite of pain and grief, they do not forget to sing, dance and dance. They are not nourished by food and water but by enlivening their inner being by song, dance and love-making. Billy readily responds to this call and finally undergoes a new transformation whereby, he is received into the solidarity of the tribals. It is imperative in the modern context to recover Prakriti. This feminine principle or ‘Prakriti’ serves to conserve and is ecological. Prakriti represented by Bilasia, the tribal wife of Billy, represents life and is the source of the powers of political and economic transformation.
Joshi like Alice Walker re-writes and re-interprets a cosmogonic ritual to transform the forbidden and unknown territory of joy into an imago mundi to which the characters and the readers can eventually return, once they have embarked upon the journey. Its strange to find in Joshi’s fiction as a male writer to look into the deepholds of nature and woman as important to sustain life and his fiction builds an altar to celebrate Mother Earth, debunking the patriarchal system, and presents a mystical universe of which woman is the centre. “Ecospirituality based upon some mystical naturalism (the Grandmother Earth of Now Is the Time To Open Your Heart (2004), or the metempsychosis of Lissie in The Temple of My Familiar (1989)) leads to the articulation of healing: some ancient snake uncoils in the utopian space of “Walkerian” fiction as is the case with Joshi’s novel The Strange Case of Billy Biswas” (Castro-Borrego 30).

**Intrinsic Value of Nature**

In Indian cosmology, the world is renewed by the dialectical play of creation and destruction. Ecological devastation diminishes human spirit. Human fulfillment requires aligning oneself with cosmic laws transcending human control. Is Billy’s expression, the expression of an alienated, masculinist soul “yearning to merge with Mother Nature” or is it “the expression of an ancient human experience of wider identification with the cosmos”, as Zimmerman raises these questions in his book Contesting Earth’s Future: Radical Ecology and Post Modernity (305). Joshi’s work although written a little long ago reflects the contemporary Australian nature writers. William J. Lines and Eric Rolls who do not merely portray a history of Australian flora and fauna in A Long Walk in the Australian Bush (1998) and From Forest to Sea (1993) but interweave the protagonists’ epic journeys into Australian’s once “pristine forests” in order to challenge Western environmental exploitation. Joshi too
in a similar way argues that people in today’s society need a “fundamental shift in consciousness” towards appreciating the natural world. The act of writing and the position of the artist grant special power, that of creating, through the reclaiming of the symbolic order.

The interaction of opposite sets motions the dynamic and active energy otherwise known as “Shakti”. The entire creation arises from this primitive energy which is the essence of everything existing in the universe. The external representation is called nature or “Prakriti”. “Prakriti” is the energy which is both animate and inanimate. It always exists in conjunction with the masculine principle called the “Purusha”. Nature is active and productive force the essence which renews and sustains all life of earth. “Prakriti” or the female form likes Bilasia representing Nature is given due to respect likewise in Gita Mehta’s *The River Sutra*. The Narmada River, itself, is steeped in mythology. Mehta contemplates the river thus:

> It is said that Shiva, Creator and Destroyer of worlds, was in an ascetic trance so strenuous that rivulets of perspiration began flowing from his body down the hills. The stream took on the form of a woman . . . Her inventive variations so amused Shiva that he named her Narmada, the Delightful one, blessing her with words: ‘You shall, be forever holy, forever inexhaustible’ (8-9).

Nature is intrinsically valuable that is valuable apart from the evaluative activity of a conscious being. Prakriti gives rise to the multiplicity of life forms and inanimate forms like the mountains, streams, rivers, trees, animals’ etc., are all expressions of the diversity that it represents. Nature is full of energy, active and all encompassing. Nature symbols emerge in every form of nature as a stone, a tree, an animal etc.
According to *Kalika Purana* which seems to continue the spiritual touch with Joshi accorded to the Kala Pahar and supports it:

Rivers and mountains have a dual nature . . . Mountains appear a motionless mass, yet their true form is not such. We cannot know, when looking at a lifeless shell, that it contains a living being. Similarly, within the apparently inanimate rivers and mountains there dwells a hidden consciousness (4).

Bilasia is compared to “Prakriti” (nature) while Billy is “Purush” (male) and their union represents the cosmic power. Bilasia symbolises the life spirit in woman, representing the feminine principle of the Sankhya system. Nature is not recognised as the source of our survival and development is seen in terms of resource transfer and destruction of nature. Indian physicist and environmental activist Vandana Shiva asserts that “[w]hile gender subordination and patriarchy are the oldest of oppressions, they have taken on new and more violent forms through the project of development” (6). She argues for the recovery of the feminine principle—Prakriti—to counter the destructive effects of the Western model of development, which she calls maldevelopment. She defines “Prakriti” as “the feminine principle as the basis for development, which conserves and is ecological.

She talks of “ecology as the revival of Prakriti—the source of all life” (6). If the forests and the hills had earlier beckoned him from a distance, Bilasia was now leading him by the hand. Evolution and natural progress takes place only when Purush and Prakriti come into contact. Bilasia is the untapped source of psychic energy. It is quite worthy to mention Gita Mehta’s view as Bilasia suits and remains the ununderstandable element of Nature which is expressed by Joshi too:
The goddess is just the principle of life. She is every illusion that is inspiring love. That is why she is greater than all the gods combined. Call her what you will, but she is what a mother is feeling for a child. A man for a woman . . . For thousands of years over tribals has worshipped it as the goddess (142-143).

Sandilands describes spiritual ecofeminism as:

. . . the resacralisation of Nature, of the divine feminine inherent in all living beings. It is seen as part of a process of reconnection, a reestablishment of ways of knowing and being in the world that have been lost in the history of patriarchal domination. The Goddess, in myriad forms, represents an ultimate vision of connectedness . . . The idea that women are, because of their womanhood, spiritually close to nature is central to ecofeminist thought, and is manifested in many forms of (nature) religion—both in the west and the east—often in the form of worshipping the inner goddess that resides in women (Tollefsen, Inga 91).

Women’s connection to nature allows for transformation and celebration. Bilasia acquires a pivotal significance almost that of a primitive goddess, like the forest goddess in Efuru. Western models of development have been violent and destructive but for women and local environments such violence is said to accomplish patriarchal modes of domination which underlies all models of thought and development strategies.

Nature, landscapes, power and discourse are supported by spaces that are socially constructed in ecocriticism to give a new meaning. The new meaning determines the power of the discourse. Prakriti can transform maldevelopment. Billy
realises that he had been running after shadowy and illusory appearances. The novelist with deep mystic overtones before he took his momentous decision to escape presents the 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? . . . You thought New York was real. You thought New Delhi was your destination. How mistaken you have been! Mistaken and misled. Come now, come. Take us. Take us until you have had your fill. It is we who are the inheritors of the cosmic night (88).

Romi is the narrator of the novel. He is a close friend to Billy. He tried to protect the prospects of Billy. In fact their visit to the remote temple of Fate in the Maikala Hills lets Romi recognise in Billy a rare quest for spiritual awakening. His way of pursuing things is different from that of Billy. So, he could conclude that he did not know so many things. Billy chooses not to be doing things others-oriented but oriented inwardly towards the individual. Biswas and his friend Collector Romesh Sahai talk of the economy of Saal forest into which Billy Biswas migrated and how it would soon go to pieces with all the wanton destruction of the forests by the so called civilised people.

Life for Billy is authentic in the jungle, which is a free life without decorum. The forest remains the opposite of civilised order having a purpose of its own. His wait for Bilasia and their union provide intellectual evaluation of the civilised society and the tribal society. When Billy meets Bilasia his inner change becomes complete. A critic, Venkataramana comments on the tribal literature that deals with symbiosis of all the living and non-living beings in their environment. The oikos of the tribal
people not only integrates them with their immediate environment but also with their
distant environment. According to Selvamony, this phenomenon is termed
“integrative oikos which integrates the sacred, nature, and the humans in a complex
kinship even as a family of kith and kin” (314). This phenomenon integrates the
sacred nature, culture and the humans in a complex kinship.

After a gap of ten years Billy meets Romi in the jungle. Romi had become the
District Collector and tours the Maikala Range. He is startled at Billy’s figure when
he meets him. Billy justifies his mysterious disappearance to the irresistible urge to
become a part of the primitive people. After this Billy keeps on visiting Romi again
and again and in the meantime cures Romi’s wife Situ’s migraine with some herb.
Romi senses the mystery of the hills and admits, “Beyond the strip of land lay the
jungle a dark mysterious shadow whose mystery very few Collectors had unraveled
since the race of Collectors began” (77).

The very title suggests a hidden meaning of the strangeness. Billy’s case is
described as a strange note which is a comment on the so-called civilised modern
world. Billy tries to search out the real meaning of life in the lap of nature. However,
his search for the meaning of life is conducted in a very hostile modern atmosphere,
and he has to pay a heavy price for it. He thinks that his life can be meaningful
beneath nature. He urges his friend to let him lead a tribal life where he can live
unknown and secluded. The binary of Nature and Nurture is thus the basic category
at the bottom of his conflict. It is not through man’s interference with nature but in a
spirit of total submission to its greater being that he felt he could attain happiness and
realisation of God.

Native science and medicine consist of healing herbs, nature cure and spiritual
healing, which the modern world appreciated quite recently. When Dhunia, the tribal
headman says very reverently that, when Biswas came: “Chandtola came to life . . . as it used to thousands of years ago when we were kings here” (112). Many years ago, the forest and the hills were under adivasis’ rule when the place was filled with spirituality. Romi has a glimpse of the all-pervasive spiritual force in a dilapidated temple into which Biswas ushered him in. There Romi has a baffling experience of ‘another presence’ attending them while discussing about fate; a presence, the contours of which Romi is not able to convey, but which meant to signify a message:

Then something distracted me . . . All of a sudden, I had the feeling that we were not alone that there was another presence besides us . . . It seemed neither good nor evil but terribly old. Beware, it seemed to say. There are things that the like of you may never know. There are circles within circles and worlds within worlds. Beware where you enter (137).

The geometry of the circle has been a key trope involved in the underlying assumptions of ecology and environmental discourses both as figure to provide a holistic perspective and for decentring the human view of its place and importance in the world. Carl Sandburg too expressed similar views in his work when he describes a circle and its symbolic representation very satirically: “The white man drew a small circle in the sand and told the red man”, “This is what the Indian knows”, and drawing a big circle around the small one. “This is what the white man knows,” and then the Indian shows another wonder when he took the stick and swept an immense ring around both circles: “This is where the white man and the red man know nothing” (476). This novel suggests somewhat a similar meaning.

Anthony Weston has observed that in environmental philosophy which concentrates on indigenous traditions and ecological balance, which is more often or
not concerned with ethical issues are all framed geometrically. “We are invited to ask how big the circle of moral consideration can or should get and where to draw the line between what counts and what doesn’t” (89). It is generally assumed that in order to be more ecological the circle of concern need to be expanded to include the more than human world. The circle is used symbolically throughout human history to circumscribe and identify an area or region or a group or represent a whole. All these usages hold Aristotle’s view, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts – which has been emphasised in *Holism and Evolution* written by Jan Smuts. This view is defined by Smuts as “the tendency in nature to form wholes that are greater than the sum of the parts through creative constant evolution” (342).

The eco-worshipping Adivasis and nomads co-existed with the animals in the forest. Such existence is enforced when Billy sends away a tiger into the jungle as Dhunia describes it: “We came to know of his powers only when he sent the tiger away. A tiger had been roaming the jungle for a week killing our cattle. Biswas Bhai went into the jungle and spoke to the tiger, and the tiger went away” (114).

Tribals sense the presence of God everywhere from Kala Pahar to an old banyan tree. The temple in the novel attracts a special significance and a spiritual connotation to provide an understanding of man’s oneness with nature:

For ten years he chiselled at granite imported from all parts of the country. Leisurely at first; then, as the work on the temple gathered pace, the fever in his blood rose until dawn to late in the night, in the light of flares, the young king chiseled at the stone . . . He forgot to eat or bathe or rule his kingdom . . . Years went by. His hair grew long and white. Blood oozed from under his broken nails. Even the gold rings in his ears began to rust . . . The king went mad. But the
chiselling went on day and night. Then one night the chiselling ceased. In the morning, the townsmen came and found the young king with the white hair dead. . . The last piece, the one at whose feet he lay, was exquisite. No artist had ever infused such life in a stone figure or hewn such limbs out of common granite. But the figure had no face. That had always been the trouble. The king could never make the face of his god (122).

This story has a deep significance. The author tries to put a cosmic interpretation of how ill equipped people are in understanding and moulding nature. Dhunia’s description of the Black Rock their master, runs thus:

Beyond the forest are our hills. Beyond the hills is the plain. And still further beyond are the seven seas. . . Where the surf ends, the forest begins. There is both light and darkness in the forest. It is full of strange animals, some pleasant, some not pleasant, and some positively evil. The evil ones stray out only at night so that no one has seen anything of them except their eyes, burning like coals. In the middle of the forest, its head high above the clouds stands the Kala Pahar (115-116).

Herbert Read in his book Form in Modern Poetry similarly expresses the relationship of man and nature. “Man and nature, Mind and the external world, are geared together and in unison complete the motive principle of the universe. They act and react upon each other, ‘so as to produce as infinite complexity of pain and pleasure’” (126-127).

There are laws that govern the universe out of which man has a lot to learn. Dhunia states that there is no point in questioning, “why man dies or why at night the
stars come out” (117). So also unquestioningly natural environment with its entire constituents whether man or animal or vegetation or hills or streams and shrubs must be left at peace and not submerged under mega dams and mines.

Romi promises to keep Billy’s location a secret until Situ, Romi’s wife forces him to tell the secret. The human tragedy of being uprooted from peace and serenity in the civilised world is vividly described. The novel portrays for us convincingly a radiant picture of the original man and woman, a symbiosis of the forces of nature, upholding an ideology that challenges those who fall outside its precincts. Yet its potent message fails to reach out to the wider world. The richness and diversity of life forms allows one to realise values and values in themselves.

The flourishing of human life and cultures is possible when policies, which affect basic economic, technological and ideological states, are changed. Indigenous ecocriticism “notionally mirrors the combination of social, economic and environmental factors at play in standard definitions of sustainable development in general. Encompassing global concerns for poverty eradication and social justice as well as a locally situated acknowledgement of the deleterious effects of climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss” (Huggan & Tiffin 66). The death of Billy is highly symbolic too, suggesting the incapacity of the mundane world to move beyond peripheral concerns and the strength of the forces that negate human bondage with nature.

In A Bend in the River the terror and insecurity felt by Salim is the same as that of Billy; the narrator is similarly reflected in his meditations upon African landscape. This time divided in the ecosystems of the river and the floating water hyacinths, on the one side and the bush, on the other. While the bush stands for everything that is outside civilisation, the river allows human civilisation (the town
built at a bend in the great river) but is ambiguous towards it. The landscape thus oscillates between the extremes of the forest and the tribal culture in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, construed as antithetical and mysterious and the civilised world as equally dangerous in their damaging effects on human beings.

With ecological awareness, the modern day ecologists turn to the native beliefs and indigenous culture and people who are special sources of learning who live in harmony with nature. Regeneration, perpetuation of the generation and the transmission of vital elements through a continuous flow of life are defining aspects of life in the jungle. Images of domination function as cultural sanctions for the denudation of nature in urban life. The earth is no longer viewed as a cultural factor allowing socially and morally sanctioned human actions. Ecological and political struggles sanction or restrict oughts and ought-nots.

Billy’s tribal urge of his visit to the Odisi tribals and the Konark during his childhood and his preferences for the Negroes in Harlem to the American whites are all offshoots of his inner urge of being a tribal. Tagore brings out:

> When a man does not realise his kinship with the world, he lives in a prison-house whose walls are alien to him . . . When man’s consciousness is restricted only to the immediate vicinity of his human self, the deeper roots of his nature do not find their permanent soil, his spirit is ever on the brink of starvation, and in the place of healthful strength he substitutes rounds of stimulation (Tagore, 11).

Civilisation is rooted in nature which has shaped human culture and influenced all artistic and scientific achievements. The present day world is a world of advancements, hi-tech technology and unimaginable scientific growth and development. People live a fast life which has turned them blind toward Nature and
natural surroundings. This has evidently resulted in ecological crisis and the evident dangers which can prove fatal to life on the planet. As Freya Mathews indicates that through:

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\ldots \text{communicative encounters with a world that seems so readily to entwine its poetics with ours, apparently simply for the joy of wrapping us and itself in layer upon layer of narrative meaning, we might come to share those faraway \ looks, that dreamy-eyed love that binds Man’s thoughts project earth as belonging to man but in fact it is the other way round man belongs to the earth. All things are connected in the web of life”} \ (12).
\]

The point of view expressed in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* has a dramatic fictional technique of a different dimension:

The narrative point of view of the novel is that of “the witness-narrator’s” while in *The Foreigner* it is that of the protagonist narrator’s point of view in which the narrative follows both flash-ahead and flash-back technique. In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* it is Billy’s friend, Romesh Sahai, known as Romy to his friend who is the omniscient first person narrator (Kumar, S. 95).

Billy seems to explore the hidden treasure of life. He searches for his own bearings of life and death, sorrow and joy. After facing the materialist and anglicised world, he finds it meaningless to get involved in that and as a result alienated. They fail to relate themselves to the worldly system and relations and only by his relation to the forces of nature that he is able to establish an identity of his own although considered to be crazy by civilised people.
As E.M. Schumacher in his book Small is Beautiful analyzes man’s economic relation with nature says: “We still have to learn how to live peacefully, not only with our fellow men but also with nature and, above all, with those Higher Powers which have made nature and have made us; for, assuredly we have not come about by accident and certainly have not made ourselves” (17).

The external landscape privileges sight or vision in the primary epistemological sense; by framing an environment. Such landscape representations are by definition partial and exclusionary. Like the wilderness ideal, landscapes are usually cleansed of human presence, evidence of industrial processes, or urban blight. The role of ecocriticism in diasporic fiction attempts to unhide the hidden and expose these ideological assumptions of the concept of nature and its important role in human lives.

The example of wilderness and the presence of the forest as a key player in Billy’s life draws attention to the geographical, social, historical processes involved in the discourse of life and the tragic as associated with it. When it “assumes certain social characteristics once it is administered by the state or redesigned for visitors and tourists” (17), as Thacker said and the novel’s end turns to be tragic. Krista Comer notes that one group of landscape representations might further represent heroic white history, whereas another group of representations might “question that dominant history, reveal its internal contradictions” and offer very different “conceptualisation[s] of ‘landscape’ and human relationships to one another and to nonhuman nature” (12-13).

Representations of landscape vie to normalise competing narratives of place, invoking varying conceptions of nature and nation in these contests. Even Billy hates all technology. In environmental thought and literature the metaphorical “mountain”
of societal prejudices is set against corporeal otherness. The mountain as metaphor looms large in the lives of simple tribal people, people whose bones get crushed in the grind of capitalism, modernity and globalisation. The mountain even represents the lost fights against assimilation as climbing it up is quite difficult and learning the secrets of the forest is unheard of by the urbanised colonised, modernised lot.

Modernity not only entails a ruthless break in old traditions but also characterises a never-ending process. Local ethnicities become as dangerous as national ones. “Joshi has used various myths, legends and archetypes to suggest the value of an authentic life, faith and right action – the best necessity of modern man” (Sharma, Anita, 29).

**Eco-psychological Perception**

A discovery of self constitutes the best moment and Billy Biswas achieves this. Modernity as a problem is unfolded in the novel. In that very struggle is a change of consciousness, a change of self-recognition, a new process of identification, the emergence into visibility of a new subject. A subject that was always there, but emerging, globalisation implies a movement away from the classical sociological idea of a society as a well-bounded system. The mountain is a fitting metaphor because of the symbolic values that capitalist and adventure culture attach to it -- upward mobility, escape, conquest, and vision, which getting to the top entails and Billy is the one who tries to reach it while Romi doesn’t understand it. The novel is also indicative of the pastoral tradition, which promotes the escape into nature as a retreat from social responsibility. Billy’s retreat is the only place where he can escape these externally imposed disabling social impositions. The feeling of alienation which Billy overcomes can be contrasted to Stanza LXXIII of Byron as the lines express the same feeling of rejoice when Billy associates himself with the tribals:
And thus I am absorbed, and this is life,
I look upon the peopled desert Past,
As on a place of agony and strife,
Where, for some sin, to Sorrow I was cast,
To act and suffer, but remount at last,
With a fresh pinion; which I felt to spring,
Though young, yet waxing vigorous as the blast
Which it would cope with, on delighted wing,
Spurning the clay-cold bonds which round our being clinging (LXXIII).

This form of self and environmental awareness provides a counter to both the risk and eco-psychological narratives that privilege certain kinds of experiences through revelations of bodies, and landscapes and getting back to nature as the best solution.

Although the woods provide escape from society’s disabling features, Billy’s environmental ethic is one of openness, commitment toward the shared structural societal and global mental oppression. His wilderness is a place from which he can craft constructive critique rather than uniformly reject society. Billy has come to an understanding of an ecological immortality. His approaching re-envelopment by nature makes him happy. His unification of the spirit expands to become the whole landscape, as if space itself were its dimensions filling the whole land from horizon to horizon. The paradox of human existence is best reconciled by distinguishing between the collective and the individual.

The face-to-face communities that are knowable, that are locatable, one can give them a place. One knows what the voices are. One knows what the faces are. The recreation, the reconstruction of imaginary, knowable places in the face of the global post-modern
which has, as it were, destroyed the identities of specific places, absorbed them into this post-modern flux of diversity. So one understands the moment when people reach for those groundings, as it were and the reach for those groundings is what I call ethnicity (Anthony King 35-36).

Further, by portraying the nature where he escapes social oppression as contested and embedded in human politics, he resists defining wilderness as a space devoid of people, politics, and history. In other words, he sees the space of the woods in terms of its power geometry. By doing so, Billy challenges the construction of wilderness and the ideals of individualism, corporeal fitness, and purification accompanying it.

Native communities do have a vested interest in addressing environmental issues, not because of an essential closeness to the land that mainstream environmentalism, but they are always subsisting along with it. Wilderness and nature are treated as a pristine landscape to retreat, to replace the stresses of modernity and industrialisation.

Priscilla Wald observes that they also “promote or mitigate the stigmatising of individuals, groups, populations, locales (regional and global), behaviours and lifestyles, and they change economies” (7). This eco-critical reading draws on and extends the field of ecocriticism by attending to the ways in which literary and cultural narratives produce meanings and affect policies, environments and lives. “It is an awareness that begins with the realisation that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western Man’s attitude toward women and tribal cultures . . .” (Birkeland, 18). In one sense, the case for green post-colonialism or post-colonial ecocriticism is painfully obvious.

As Pablo Mukherjee (2006) puts it:
Surely, any field purporting to theorise the global conditions of colonialism and imperialism cannot but consider the complex interplay of environmental categories such as water, land, energy, habitat, migration with political or cultural categories such as state, society, conflict, literature, theatre, visual arts. Equally, any field purporting to attach interpretative importance to environment must be able to trace the social, historical and material co-ordinates of categories such as forests, rivers, bio-regions and species. The very ideology of colonization is thus one where anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism are inseparable with the anthropocentrism underlying Eurocentrism being used to justify those forms of colonialism that see indigenous culture as primitive, and less rational closer to animals and nature (In Huggan and Tiffin, 2).

Indigenous ecocriticism is a link that serves as a basis for an alternative way of indigeneity stresses on the fact that man is one with the land and that land is not owned or is the sole possession. One while the Western imperialistic trend changed the entire meaning and opinions of the indigenous natives. Many tribes in India and elsewhere saw land as a living network, not as fragments but as a whole. All the members of the tribe used Land and its produce was the share of each individual member in the tribe. But Western impact brought nature as one to be ravaged, exploited and violated and monetarily transacted.

Post-colonial studies have come to understand environmental issues not only as central to the concepts of European domination and conquest but also as supporters of imperialism and racism throughout history to keep up its status. People were regarded as part of nature and then treated instrumentally as animals, but also they
were forced or opted over time into western views of the environment, thereby forcing them to undergo cultural and environmental changes. “For Young activism has as much to do with the need for epistemic decolonisation what Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong’o calls the ‘decolonisation of the mind’ relating it to physical forms of social struggle theorising, the ‘morally committed to transforming the conditions of exploitation and poverty in which large section of the world’s population live out their daily lives” (Huggan and Tiffin 6).

The sufferings of the Western impact can be minimised and removed with indigenous ecocritical concept which would prepare the soul for the higher incoming of values, ethos and culture. This suffering leads to self-awakening and not to disillusionment. The magnetic, mysterious power of the universe brought Billy to hills of Bilasia where he felt free to express his own individual self-unhampered by those ties, which were limiting him. While he was in the midst of the upper crust of society, he was frustrated a lot. It is primarily “a focus that will enable greatness, master signifiers and responsibility to save the planet and rescue worthy life. Not mere life, the new magia reaches every corner of the soul . . .” (Ilan, 21).

Spinoza viewed humanity in terms of its relation to the cosmos, instead of conceiving of the cosmos as an instrument for human ends. According to Sessions, Spinoza philosophises that breaking “free from the bonds of desire and ignorance which captivate and frustrate most men,” always stand in the way “to attain a higher self which is aligned with a correct understanding of God/Nature” (Zimmermann, 38).

Really the novel opens a case of fictional discourse which epitomises man’s longing for ‘Return to Nature’ against the technological verifiable constituents of present modern society.
The sense of awe and reverence reflected in this description suggest that man’s language is grossly inadequate to communicate the mystery of a different kind of knowledge from what is offered by the materialistic, rational world. The quick succession of short sentences suggests the nature of the overpowering effect of the Black Rock on Dhunia who verbally sways to its spell. His answer emphatically asserts the otherness of life lived with the elemental forces totally uncontaminated by civilisation (Supriya, 5).

Violence against nature occurs when nature is not considered and perceived as the object of knowledge. The domination of women by men, of nature by western culture and education can be identified as being rooted in the domination of westernised man who could subjugate or exclude the rest of humanity on grounds of human concern.

In all his four novels, he has tried to project through the experiences of his heroes the crisis of the urbanised and higher industrialised modern civilisation along with its dehumanising impact on the individual who is ever eager to find out and reaffirm the value of meaningful relatedness in life (Sanjay Kumar Singh, 109).

The novel combines the quest for the essence of human being with the Upanishadic truth of spirit as involved in nature. The cultural beliefs of Dhunia and the other tribals are inspired by nature who have faith in God’s justice. The novel provides a logical illustration and unfolds the artificiality, hollowness and deceitful sophisticated urban lot. As Renuka Nayak says:

The first part deals with Billy’s social, intellectual life and indicates strong primitive urge in him. It attempts to establish his spiritual decay, his rejection of social values. The second part is devoted to his
transformation through his contact with organic life, his meeting Romi once again after 10 years and his death (2).

Arun Joshi explores the contemporary man’s inner crisis. The title itself is indicative of the fact of the upper class. It also depicts the dream of America and its lifestyle as life denying and vitality choking structures simply mechanised -- a way of complex living to a life of human fullness and wholesomeness among the primitives untouched by the sophistication, inhibitions and restraints of the civilised world.

The novel is about ‘mystical urge’ of Billy Biswas, his metaphysical quest to find rest and peace in the civilised world. Talking about his characters, the centre is occupied by Bilasia -- the primitive force and energy which frees him from all frustrations:

It would be better to regard her as the matter (Prakriti) according to the Sankhya system of Indian philosophy is ‘one’ and eternal, not on illusionary appearance but something real. Billy might be taken to represent the soul (Purusha), which by its mere presence excites Matter and illumines the process of evolution of the universe (Sharma, Anita. 28).

Billy’s meeting with Dhunia and Bilasia works as the medium to search for his identity but her tone is smooth and simplistic quite natural and that is why she attracts Billy and sorts out his problem of search for identity. “. . . a mature person is attuned to and prepared to enter into relationships -- sometimes contradictory with many human and non human beings. Such a relational self benefits from a total view, which helps to guide action in the multifarious relationships constitute an ecological community” (Zimmermann, 38).
Due to the imitation of the western culture, makes man go far from the traditional values and hence resulted in the spiritual uprootedness of man. Later Billy, like a typical Indian character finds out relief in primitivism, which is very far away from the evils of materialism, confusion of values and spiritual decay. The result of progress and stillness of primitive life is compared in this novel.

Expressing his vision of life in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, Arun Joshi tries to establish that it is the primitive way of living which prevails in a conflict between the civilised and the primitive cultures. Joshi suggests that the real peace, pleasure and perfection can be felt in the lap of Nature and unintruded primitive atmosphere and not in the sophisticated urban setting (Kumar, Lokesh, 137).

The interaction of modern technology extracts all this joy and led the life towards the destruction. Man is going away from nature because man is puzzled with the real way of living and aims in life. Billy shuttles in the middle with the first way of modern, westernised and educated one with tensions, dissatisfaction and the second life with real love, an aim and oneness with nature and people and achievement of mental peace. Like Billy many have shifted aims with modern, western culture rather than with indigenous culture which imparts mental peace and real bondage with people. Establishing balance with Nature is a natural solution to live a healthy, stress free life.

“His constant want to identify himself with his environment is reflected in his aberrant behaviour, his way of living, eating and dressing and even thinking” (Dwivedi, V. 57).

Joshi’s idea was to locate an integral part of the ecological environment that he was seen as seeking to capture:
Joshi in his novels focused not only on socio-political issues but he carefully touched deep and very sensitive layers of human being. His novels reflect his strong faith on Indian mythology (Sharma, Anita 27).

The tribal system, which Joshi uses, cannot be dismissed as an outmoded one.

The despondency of its protagonist Billy Biswas is the result of his estrangement in modern society and civilisation that forces him to take refuge in the world of tribals . . . The motif of quest permeates the whole narrative (Dwivedi, V. 57).

Indigenous people like the tribals of Kala Pahar reflect on the inefficiency of new systems of domination. The tribals have practiced nature education since ancient times in India, but it has attained different forms due to various influences, but it still holds a precious treasure of medicinal herbs, roots and cure. The anthropogenic relationship with nature held places as sacred, the knowledge of nature and community practices as useful and valued for human welfare. These elements of ecological sensitivity have been used with a range of refreshing variety, ranging from physical cognizance to sensation and sensuousness to philosophical conceptualisations.

Joshi advocates simplicity, tranquility and spirituality of primitive life. Man’s thinking of himself as “[. . .] distinct from but superior to nature, and that sense of distinction and superiority rests precisely on the ability to transform -- to ‘socialize’ and ‘culturalize’ -- nature as Ortner has said and which Joshi seems to advocate” (Ortner 73). Human beings can never be separate from land. Joshi’s idea was to locate an integral part of the ecological environment that he has captured through Biswas.
Nature sustains us and maintains balance. Its only man who has built ups every artificiality into it and degenerated it. Man needs to rethink of what sort of development he needs, balance of nature provides sustenance and survival for mankind in the future. This eco-critical reading supports sustainable development which needs spirituality, which is a kind of attitude towards oneself, one’s neighbours, one’s surroundings and that which transcends all these. Proceeding from the concept of formation based on self-development and self-determination to an interaction with the world of nature, with other people and with one’s own self. Billy turns out to be reflective as Joshi created him with the intention of humanising the growing generation. Humans are not separate from the land and can’t destroy what is beyond our understanding abilities. The merging of human being and nature makes the transformation complete as man lives in nature and nature lives in man.