CHAPTER – VI
CONCLUSION

The quest that Joshi projects in his novels borders on the highly existentialist-oriented philosophy. This attaches so much value to the right way to live. In all his four novels The Foreigner, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, The Apprentice and The Last Labyrinth, this philosophy has taken different dimensions to lead a meaningful life useful to others.

On account of his education from the western Universities, Som Baskar in The Last Labyrinth imbibed scientific temper, materialistic outlook, and intellectual appetite of reason. His grandfather was a carefree man whereas his father was a scientist bent on knowing the mysteries of the universe. His mother had stubborn faith in religion that too in Lord Krishna and she believed it to be the only panacea for her cancer.

Thus, the personality of Som Bhaskar is a combination of moon and sun as found reflected in his name that pulls between adverse emotions, love for womanising, drinking and sensuality which he inherited from his grandfather. At the same time, he has an impulse to trust and to surrender before Almighty, which he inherited from his mother. In between these two sets of emotions he himself becomes a labyrinth. “If only one knew – what one wanted? Or, may be, to know was what I wanted. To know just that. No more. No less. This, then, was a labyrinth too, this going forward and backward and sideways of the mind” (TLL 40).

As his name Soma bearing the influence of the lunar moon, he becomes the incarnation for the quest of hunger for the joy of life. The other name Bhaskar bearing its influence on sun, the planet of authority, power and male domination compels him to go in search of expansion in business world. In this search of material
expansion he comes across experience of sex with many. Though a married man, he feels a sense of emptiness within and void without. His wish, his desire for want, is itself ambiguous because he knows material expansion is not his wish fulfillment and at the same time the pleasures he got out of sex do not bring him any gratification for his thirst to realize the meaning of life. He feels money and women do not bring in him any meaningful grip in life out of sublimating his desire from the animalistic to the spiritual. His rational approach to life is not sufficient for his wish fulfillment of self-realization. Science and reason are not the tools to resolve the labyrinth of life. It is through intuition and faith alone that one can move through the labyrinth of life and attain the state of wish fulfillment.

The self-realization of Som for his meaningful existence gets twisted on account of his instinctive taste for Kama; that is why his sex association with women like Leela Sabnis to a certain extent with Anuradha and his wife Geeta, all became abortive. At the same time his Hindu mind taking into account of implicit cultural and religious faith reasoned out that such sex excursions of him were the resultant products of the world of Maya, the void. Thereby without finding the right direction he stood mystified in the midst of the void and what he wanted was an “identification with the Godhead as most Hindus want, sooner or later” (TLL 131). The female characters Gargi, Anuradha and Geeta know that what he needs is not kama but moksha. Anuradha obliquely says to him:

It is not me you want. She goes on: I know. You want something.

You badly want something. I could see that the first time we met. But it is not me. That, too, I can see. I told you so in the dargah. (TLL 58)
Everybody wants to waken his soul from darkness to light. Here lies the novel’s root in dharma that advocates that true faith can take over the difficulties of the mundane affairs and temporal values of life.

The Quest for Dharma got lopsided in the case of Som Bhaskar on account of his chosen path of Artha (Sanskrit word), the buying and selling of shares, meetings at inter-continental hotel, spending time on dancing, drinking and surrounded by hedonistic ideas. It is in the city of Benares, a place where once Karmas have to be burned for the spiritual liberation to Moksha, he and his friend Aftab plunge deep into the world of Kama, Som is searching for a labyrinth within labyrinth.

On account of his lack of Bhakthi in God or Krishna, he was made to travel on the path of tension, unhappiness, hysteria, neurosis and some strange dreams and insomnia. All others in the world around him including his mother are happy even in suffering and in the face of death due to their Bhakti in God or Lord Krishna. It is Anuradha who initiated in him the essence of realizing His existence not to be argued with logic and analysis but to be meditated upon. To disdain logic and science Anuradha says; “may be Krishna begins where Darwin left off” (TLL 132). And to get moksha one must make a complete surrender or submission to the will of God. To question His existence is completely ruled out in theology. The one who worships Him can get Him. As Meitei refers in Indian writings in English, Lord Krishna says: “The ones who worship the gods go to the gods/But my dear devotees come to me” (Bhatnagar K. Manmohan 99).

Som realized that Bhakti shown to God alone is insufficient. The same Bhakti as a kind of involvement is to be practiced at all levels and at all layers of relationships. Such Bhakti is to be got out of reason. Reasonable involvement is a relief for all maladies. Such involvement gets a person a meaning for existence.
Som’s personal experiences taught him this value. Though in the process of realizing this faith, Som’s Sakthi Anuradha leaves him permanently, out of her sacrifice of worldly pleasures which she would have got either from him or from Aftab.

Anuradha’s sacrifice creates in Som ripples of question why Anuradha a total stranger in his life out of her choice for such a sacrifice without any reward gets him the answer for his urge ‘I want, I want’. Anuradha’s sacrifice puts in him the reason that happiness got out of inner peace is not in amassing wealth but sacrificing one’s comforts and luxuries for others. Sacrifice of Anuradha is an answer for his urge ‘I want… I want’ that is, one is to aspire for wants and wants border on sacrificing such wants for the welfare of others.

The quest of material wish fulfillment through the labyrinthine parts of reason and instinct are transcended into the boundary of total meditation of complete sacrificing his wants for others welfare.

The Hindu religious philosophy and the preaching’s of Hindu saints border on man’s physical, mental and spiritual powers as the highest form of all creations. For the attainment of the highest form, they prescribe the importance of Bhakti that is humility, kindness, truthfulness, contentment and peaceableness and knowledge of Reason and God without abandoning action. In The Dark Holds No Terror, the Bhakti cult, that is sacrificing all wants of one for the welfare of others, surfaces only after Saru got a chance to review her relationship with her husband, her dead mother, her dead brother, with her own children during her stay in her parental house, thereby throwing away all traditional Hindu woman’s values like remaining humble, kind, truthful, contented and peaceable. As far as her memories go, she experienced only gender discrimination shown by her mother in favour of her brother Dhurva. She developed jealousy on her brother who got all parental care and attention. Her
mother’s attitude that a girl is a liability and a boy is an asset created in her a sense of insecurity even as a child. Her father used to take his brother on the bar of the cycle thereby creating an impression that “daughters are their mothers business” (DHNT 105). Thus, she was always considered a burden to be eased or a problem to be solved or a responsibility to be dispensed with. The partisan attitude of her parents has a devastating effect on Saru. She becomes rebellious in nature. The rejection of her mother during Saru’s impressionable years made her hate her mother, harm her, hurt her, and wound her whenever there is an occasion warranting. As she gets advanced in age, she becomes crazy about Manohar. His love appears to her protective, condescending, all encompassing and satisfying. This marriage has caused a permanent break in the relationship with her mother. After becoming a doctor, her husband Manu begins to feel insecure and this cast a shadow in their married life. As a career woman, she has to stay longer away from home, Manu’s ego is hurt by her success. He feels inferior and becomes brutal during night in establishing his masculinity-ever superior through sex assaults. This has made Saru to loose faith in love and she believes that such a sex attitude is never to exist between man and woman.

Out of her experiences all her implicit qualities of goodness otherwise Bhakti that is sacrificing one’s wants for others cast her in the mould of integrating with her family members not out of confrontation or elements of disintegration but out of love and affection. A person’s refuge lies within and not in others without. Darkness makes one incapable of seeing things clearly and objectively. Darkness is also a source of constant fear when viewed from outside. It hampers the outlook of the inside, but it holds no terror in itself. The darkness of mind ceases to be terrible the moment one is prepared to face the situation. Saru has begun to understand things as
she finds that the dark is not terrible. As realization draws upon her, she becomes aware that neither secluded life nor the ‘wall of silence’ shall be of any help to her. She decides to speak of her being; the individual fragments will not be taken away by anyone, for now she hates to be touched. To Saru, therefore, there is realization that marriage is no guarantee for happiness. By gaining the identity as a woman, a new Saritha is identified to whom past was always receding and there was no future. Saru now learns to see reality clearly. “No, I’m a realist. We are realists. We deal with the ultimate reality….the human body. We come into this world alone and go out of it alone” (DHNT 208). Saru is in the process of gaining her identity as an individual. She is brave enough to realize that: Walking along a road, going on and on knowing with a sinking feeling that something, somebody awful and frightening, was waiting for her at the end of it. But it was important to go on just the same, not to stop, even though there was doom waiting for her.

Saru understands that it is she, who is self-assertive and that she has been cruel to her people like her own brother Dhruva, to her mother and her husband, Manu. She feels that till her last breath, she will not be able to get rid of the thought that she was cruel to them. “The deception had cracked so completely…. Shafts of truth pierced her, causing her unbearable pain” (DHNT 212). Her realization is swift and nearly perfect when she thinks “It’s not what he’s done to me, but what I’ve done to him” (DHNT 216). She realizes that her ego is responsible for all the problems that crept in her life. As A.K. Awasthi observes “No atonement can ever redeem her of the feeling of guilt” (109). She becomes humble and her father helps her to regain her will-power. From now on Saru feels that it is her life and there is no need to hide oneself from others and be a silent sufferer. This is what she has been desiring till then, and the absence of which has alienated herself from her home, her family and
surroundings. Finally, she realizes that if all is ‘alone’ what else is there to fear. By following her father’s advice, she has already broken away from her past. Thus, total surrender to a Godhead or total surrender to the family head will alone realize the inner labyrinthine path of Som Bhaskar and the inner mental recess of horrors in Saru for which Arun Joshi’s faith in Bhakti of sacrifice of one’s wants for others and Shashi Deshpande’s faith in Indian womanhood tendency of sacrifice everything for others are the necessary tools for self-realization of one’s meaningful existence.

The theme of quest in Arun Joshi’s *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* has taken the dimension of alienation flowered out of problems like maladjustment, crisis of consciousness, cultural and psychological deviancy and human predicament. The predicament of Billy is his split personality syndrome, between primitive and civilized as Tuula Lindgren ruminates that in him … “A great force, aircraft, a ….a primitive force…it is very strong in him …It can explode any time” (*SCBB* 19). Because of the struggle of his identity he is lost in the civilized world, though this conflict, a conflict between the primitive and the civilized as observed by Tuula for Joshi is a recurring factor of ‘an essentially Hindu mind’. At a later stage, Billy himself observes the powerless, normless and meaningless living in the western society.

The problem of Billy is his self-realization at his fourteenth year. Eternal questions like ‘Who am I?’ ‘Where have I come from?’ disturbed him at this age. While trying to find his identity in individuals like Linda and Meena in societies like the American and Indian and in civilizations- the western and the eastern- he did not get an answer for his identity. He was on the brink of breaking himself from his civilized society and decided to join the world of primitivism, - a farewell to all disillusionment of individuals society and modern civilization. In the company of tribals, he feels quite at peace. In this primitive world, the absence of ambition, the
root causes of anxiety and rivalry responsible for forgetting their values and becoming beings of alienation are not found expressed. It is in this friendly, simple, pure and detached atmosphere, in the sense of the Bhagavadgita, the new vistas of knowledge of life are opened for Billy. He is not only recognized as the king of that part of Chhattisgarh but is also treated as endowed with many divine gifts such as chandtola glowing because of his presence; he reviving a dead man; tigers running at his sight and so on. All these ‘news-items’ remain only sensational ideas for Romesh as he never gets a proof for substantiating the veracity of these incidents. But he realizes Billy’s power of profound faith and unfathomed knowledge when the latter could do almost the impossible (i) by predicting rains when there was no sign of relief from the scorching sun; and (ii) curing Situ’s migraine which had escaped cure in spite of the treatment given by the doctors of the ‘civilized’ world for almost ten years. These are only stray examples of the knowledge possessed by Billy, which is just like the tip of an iceberg of the knowledge acquired in perfect harmony by belonging to microcosm and macrocosm; living and non-living; nature and human beings. Although Billy laughs away the idea of his practicing magic and he being considered the king, there is nothing but truth in it. Tribals, hearing the news of Billy’s death, turn out in a huge crowd and the officers dare not carry away even the dead Billy from the spot.

The philosophy of Renunciation has got an element of irony because of turning oneself to be a primitive. When asked about his desire to become a primitive, Billy answered:

I don’t want to sound too pompous, old chap. Becoming a primitive was only a first step, a means to an end. Of course, I realized it only after I ran away. I realized then that I was seeking something else. I am still seeking something else”. What was he seeking? Was it God?
No, that sounded too pompous. Could it be something like that? Yes, something like that, he agreed, though reluctantly. (SCBB 189)

In order to find a meaning for his existence which he never realizes in his family and cultural ties, but he realized this in the primitive background. The same factor is found expressed in Deshpande’s Roots and Shadows in the exploration of the inner struggles of Indu dealing with the critical problems like love, sex, marriage, settlement and individuality. Biswas emerged as a demi-God for his tribe of Maikala Hills and Indu emerged as a female Saviour for her family members.

It is in the hands of Indu that the future of her family members lies, after the demise of Akka, the old rich family tyrant. As a modern woman, she is free, independent and determined. She feels puzzled whether it is possible, through her action, to break the traditional family ties on the pretext of love for her husband. It is because she has chosen Jayant as her husband not for love but to show the family that she was too a success though born in a weak, marginalized and traditional bound gender-woman. Her going back to her parents’ home in order to renew her past family ties, she met the varied personalities in her family. From them her concept about her own life, her career, her love, the traditional idea of marriage and her own marriage based on love brought her home the fact that in a well-knit family there were lot of prejudices among themselves unable to settle amicable.

In the family there were two sets of women like Akka, Narmada, Sumitra Kaki, Kamala Kaki and Atya and Indu. The former ones belong to traditional roots of the family. The latter ones though with their roots in traditions are anchors saving the family ship from being drifted away on the emerging trends of modernity. To the old generation, a woman’s life is nothing “but to get married, to bear children, to have sons and then grandchildren” (RAS 128). And the ideal woman is the one who does
not have her own independent identity: “A woman who sheds her ‘I’ loses her identity in her husband’s” (RAS 54). The new generation (here represented by Indu) reviews everything with reason. Indu analyzes the ideals of detachment and freedom and tries to achieve these. She tries to listen to the voice of her conscience and revolts. But, unfortunately, in all her efforts, she fails miserably either due to the impact of the culture and tradition, or fear of stigma, or timidity or all these combined together.

The paradox of Indu that after getting married to Jayant she does not feel happy and at the same time she does not want to live without him. After her physical union with Naren, she tries to reason out each and every action. She felt sexual instinct like material instinct is not a matter of sin and both should not make one get trapped on traditional values. Both are matters of thirst that is to be quenched whenever there is a feeling of impulse. Similarly the concept of love is false for Indu, so when Naren asks her what the truth is. Her answer is:

The sexual instinct…. That is true. The material instinct….that is true too. Self interest, self love…. they are the basic truths, you remember Devdas? I saw it with some friends. They sobbed when he died for love, but I could have buked. A grown man moaning and crying for love. God! A grown man moaning and crying for love. God! how disgusting. (RAS 173)

It is in Indu that Deshpande aptly pinpointed the inner struggle and sufferings of the new class of Indian women. Rooted and shaped out of Indian customs and at the same time influenced by the scientific knowledge of the west, modern women like Indu, once hailed as Pativrata, a sati protected by men now emerged as a changed person fully aware of the stirrings of her conscience, her quest, her identity, her
individuality, her place and role in the family and society. Becoming a part of primitive society, Biswas found a meaning for his existence and by getting polarised with the diverse factors of tradition and modernity Indu struggles and sustains the situation to find a final solution for a peaceful existence. To find a meaning for existence, Billy Biswas runs away from modernity and selects to live among primitive race with its characteristic element of detached involvement. Indu’s quest also gets her out of the polarizing factor of tradition and modernity based on reason that is her readiness to serve her family with smile but without guile.

In *The Foreigner* Sindi, a child born to a mixed parentage was forced to lead a rootless life. He lived in London, Boston and New Delhi. While his stay at London where he received his formal education, thanks to the help of his uncle at Kenya, his affairs with Anna and Kathy became abortive that drove him to develop a detached attitude of life and lead a drop of water on the petals of lotus like life. After having had his love crosses with Anna and Kathy, Sindi knew well that in woman, sex alone does not play a dominant role. What matters in such love affair is a total understanding with each other. For this factor socio-cultural upbringing of both the male and the female responsible for love plays a keyrole. In the case of Anna, a junior artist in London separated from her husband wanted to make use of the youth in him as a gratification for her flesh demands. Sindi quickly understood her intention of utilizing him as a bed partner touched him to quick and his true desire to find a moral partner as a relief for his inner pain of rootlessness did not materialize in this affair. Sindi’s inbred Indian culture and Anna’s social upbringing in the free sex western climate are at daggers with each other. This resulted in his snapping her relation. Similarly, his affair with Kathy too blossomed on the petals of extra marital sex affair. Anna separated from her husband and Kathy led a domestic life with her husband, both
desired for a bed partner for their gratification for their thirst for sex. Both of them dangerously departed from the social norms and against the tenets of Moses ‘Thou shalln’t commit adultery’. For Anna’s sex desire is due to her husband’s separation. For Kathy’s sex desire, she needs it more from the normal to abnormal passion. For Sindi both appeared to the passionate women using men as bed partners alone and not women offering or extending their true love as a relief for his inner pain of rootlessness.

As a result of his bitter experience from these two women Sindi almost lost his faith on women as a fountain-head of domestic reliever of men’s pain’s and agonies. He grew detached in his relationship with women. With the detached temperament he landed in America. Here he had met June, a beautiful, sensual, affectionate, feminine American at a foreign student’s party. Their relationship grows gradually; they start living intimately. He loves her intensely and has sex with her but avoids getting married to her. The talk of detachment alienates June from him. She turns to Babu when Sindi does not respond to her insistent pleas to marry her. It is only when June leaves him for Babu that Sindi becomes aware of his strong love for June. He busies himself with his work at college but June remains in his thoughts. He visits the various places where he had been with June earlier.

He also notices the hypocrisy and artificiality of the modern society in America. Participants at the ball arranged by the International Students Association pretend to be courteous. Even the strangers at the time of parting promise to meet again, knowing full well that it would not be possible. That, comments Sindi, “was the American way” (TF 25). Similar is his experience at the social parties at Mr Khemka’s house. He finds these parties to be a bit of a hoax with people drinking, eating and talking of money- doing nothing worth-while. Sindi finds that Mr Khemka
is obsessed with the unscrupulous accumulation of wealth. He had sent Babu to America for higher education in the hope that Babu, on his return, will be an asset to the family’s social status. Babu, however, is unable to cope with the American system of education. But the American system of education is very strict. Thereby he is thrown out of college when he fails all his courses the second time.

Babu belongs to an orthodox Hindu family and his fastidious, strict and domineering father has a damaging influence on his character. His moral inhibitions and orthodox background restrain him from marrying June. Added to this is his father’s threat to disown him if he married June. The father-fear and intellectual weakness of Babu drive June to despair. The Babu-June marriage does not come off when Babu realizes that June has been sleeping with Sindi and uses this as an excuse for driving himself to death. After his friend Babu’s death he came to New Delhi where he saw the material luxuries of Babu’s father Mr.Khemka and miserable life of Muthu, a low-paid employee in Khemka’s office.

His life so far drifting, now found a sudden but strong grip of doing something useful for the poverty-ridden, deprivation swollen and helpless workers who were swindled so far by rich businessmen like Khemka and led a miserable life of pushing carts in street and dying at the age of twenty five.

His non-involvement and his weapon of detachment were dropped after his realization that they were tools to be “used for right action and should not escape from it” (TF 193). Even in America he revealed this spirit of humaneness when Babu wanted to marry June. But poor Babu did not realize the cultural American background of June where in the name of liberty women used to cross the boundaries of modesty and share sex with all, unmindful of their marital status. Sindi tried his best to put this idea in Babu but Babu’s headlong love for June and his oriental mind
that women after marriage would remain faithful to their husbands did not hold good, and for the Indian mind, June’s sex departure was a great insult and assault of his ego that ultimately earned him fall into the jaws of death.

For Sindi having no roots in any soil, thereby evincing no faith in God or in morality, he developed an attachment in rehabilitating the workers of Khemka factory and finding solution in others’ suffering out of which he seeks relief for his inner pain of his rootlessness.

The factor of rehabilitating the life of Sheila’s family as a surrogate substitute for Babu in getting himself involved in their family and lifting up the financial suffering of the workers as a matter of Karma performing out of meaningful detachment of Sindi are matters of involvement and meaningful detachment. This same factor is found expressed through social conformity of a women’s identity of moulding her tastes in order to suit to those of the rest have come to grips with the portrayal of Jaya in Deshpande’s That Long Silence.

In the Indian context, the social conformity surfaces out of a girl getting married to a man; whether it be a love marriage or an arranged one, the husband takes complete control over her. Wives in India are supposed to follow blindly the footsteps of their husbands whether the path is right or wrong. In the traditional values of wives to be taken as examples of Sita and Savitri, the wife is to follow the principle that “both are yoked together, so better to go to the same direction, as to go to different directions will be painful” (TLS 10).

Jaya is aware of such values impinging on male chauvinistic idea of a wife ever dependent on husbands and thereby to remain silent like a true partner. It is with the tool of silence, Deshpande projects an image that is not the personification of Indian women’s sense of duty to be emulated as the ideal of Hindu womanhood of
ages but in reality it is a tendency to cover the streaks of ugliness within her. It is her wrong understanding of true submissive nature Indian women like Jaya too expressed their submissiveness in their silent actions in order to maintain domestic equilibrium. For a balanced conjugal life this tool of silence is not to be used as force of submission prerogative to women alone. It is this harsh reality that Deshpande tries to project through the female protagonist who, at the end, chooses to break her long silence of the past.

Jaya won not only the silence that Deshpande is highlighting but also the silence of each and every character in the novel from different strata of society. This point is further supported by Sheshadri Veena:

The novel is not only about Jaya’s efforts to obliterate the silence that is suffocating her. It is also about the despair and resignation of women like Mohan’s mother, Jaya’s servant; Jaya’s mentally disturbed cousin Kusum. It also deals with Mohan’s silence which is the silence of a man who speaks but can find no one to listen to him. (94)

Thus, the idea of detachment as a traditional trait found embedded on Indian women’s psyche as silence is to be broken in order to face the challenges of objective world of obstacles emanating out of the opposition of Indian women’s surroundings and the contradictions got out of the demands of new social situations. Jaya is Deshpande’s woman who is not revolting openly but beginning to reconcile to the situation… but a kind of woman who wants to revolt against all existing systems but ultimately does not. Her inner turmoils are so bitter that she is unable to speak them out and remains silent in order not to be frustrated and disappointed after the disapproval of her actions by the society. She is unable to unfold the truth. Her
image becomes like that of a bird which has got wings and knows that it can fly, but, somehow, does not.

Sindi out of meaningful detachment in bringing happiness to all opens a new vista of life whereas Jaya out of following the traditional force of silence of submission brings harmony to her own inner self as well as the external members of her family. Thereby their quest for meaningful existence gets conformed on the converging point of meaningful detachment and significant submission.

The pivotal fictional theme of Joshi is the self as a labyrinth trying to assess its involvement in the alienation from the family and the society. In the novel, *The Last Labyrinth*, this aspect of realization finally touches the peak of Bhakti, total surrender of Godhead out of sacrificing all wants for others. Som Bhaskar’s travel into his inner Labyrinthine tunnels twisting and turning on the elements of instinct and reason, thereby causing him unbearable malady and at the moment of crisis Anuradha shows him the threshold of sacrifice that he comes to grips with the sublimation of all his desires of ‘want’ and then leading a therapeutic process of remedy out of his new dawned faith in family and his wife Geeta that in sacrificing all his wants for others alone is the purpose of life. In his next novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* this realization of assessing Biswas’s strength of involvement in the midst of alienation from his family, both western and eastern societies, the total unalloyed friendliness and love of primitivism offers him the realization of his meaningful existence. In *The Foreigner* the assessment is brought out by the realization of Sindi Oberi in performing meaningful deeds in a detached manner for the upliftment of the family of Khemka and betterment of the workers society.

In the novel *The Apprentice*, the same self of Rathan Rathoz while trying to assess his involvement is subjected to the problems of the corruption of the self in the
society. On account of the death of his father at his early age, he also did not imbibe the positive virtues of his father and his mother’s worldly wisdom groomed him to become a slave for money.

It was not patriotism but money…. that brought respect and bought security. Money made friends. Money succeeded where all else failed.

There were many laws…. but money was law unto itself. (TA 20)

Born in such a circumstance, his mother’s instilling in him the wrong choice of amassing wealth that alone is the be-all and end-all of a man’s life corrupted his soul in Delhi during the war between India and China. His arrival at Delhi at the later stage of the second world war in search of a job. He got a temporary job as a clerk in the Department of war purchases. Because of his docility and implicit obedience, his superintendent got him his post confirmed. Without caring for others’ opinion about him, he shamelessly pursued advancement in his career and also married the niece of the superintendent. After taking a bribe from Himmat Singh, a notorious person, he became responsible in sending useless war material to the Front. As a result, his friend Brigadier was unable to fight back the Chinese army effectively and efficiently. He absconded from the front and also died finally. The intelligence branch of the army suspected Ratan and authorized an official to interrogate him in a prison cell. Due to the influence of Himmat Singh, he got released from police custody. But ironically his friend Brigadier for deserting the army had to face a court-martial by the military authorities. The official told him that if he had confessed the guilt it might help the Brigadier escape from court-martial. When he was about to confess, the Brigadier committed suicide. When he approached Himmat Singh to wreak vengeance, he told him that the secretary had double-crossed him. Thereby his spirit of determination to wreak vengeance on his betrayers had lost its hold on him.
In such an atmosphere, the prevalent nature of corruption was such that not only persons like Himmat Singh, Rathor, the secretary and the minister but even the pojari in the temple which Ratan frequently visited were not free from it. The Pujari’s son is a contractor who builds three hundred quarters for slum-dwellers in a record time. The new engineer refuses to pass the bills because he notices too much sand in the mortar. Even though Rathor tells him that his department is different, the pujari persists in his request, and as Rathor puts it,

He said he would not mind if he spent some money to get all that done. Everyone had the right to a cut. He said he understood that. He could suitably meet the desires of all concerned, the clerks, the officers, of the engineer concerned, even, here he asked me to forgive his impudence, even mine. MINE. MINE. He said he was a poor man and could hardly afford bribes but he did not mind it in a case like that. After all, he said, we all had to live. And that boy was his only son. He said he would give me any reasonable cut that I demanded.

\((TA\ 124)\)

The pujari’s problem and the means he employs to solve it characterize a society in which all values are inseparably tied to the craft of making money. As it usually happens, the more the money, the greater the frustration that accompanies it. The narrator, in spite of his awareness, fails to get out of the corruption racket. He finds his daughter and his wife always showing some sort of discontent. Even though he does not need money, he takes a bribe.

In *The Apprentice* Rathazr’s crisis of character slowly but steadily got out of him by means of activating his self through his solemn mood of penitence and
expiation. This is why he wipes the shoes of the congregation, a method of retrieving his soul. He tells himself,

Be good, Be decent. Be of use. Then I beg forgiveness. Of a large host; my father, my mother, the Brigadier, the unknown dead of the war, of those whom I harmed, with deliberation and with cunning, of all those who have been the victim of my cleverness, those whom I could have helped and did not. (*TA 148*)

The tormented self of Rathor in order to find a meaningful involvement in the alienated society chooses the tool of offering service to humanity by polishing the shoes of the devotees of the temple- thereby getting solace of expiation for all the wrong deeds. This attitude of him has taken a different dimension in *A Matter Of Time* of Deshpande. Like Hermann Hesse’s Siddhartha, deserting his home and family to find a solution to the enigma of human loneliness and discontent, the protagonist, Gopal, renounced all of a sudden his family on account of his sudden sense of loneliness and desolation.

Emptiness, I realized then, is always waiting for us. The nightmare we most dread, of waking up among total strangers, is one we can never escape. And so it’s a lie, it means nothing. It’s just deceiving ourselves when we say we are not alone. It is the desperation of a drowning person that makes us cling to other humans. All human ties are only a masquerade. Someday, some time, the pretence fails us and we have to face the truth. (*AMT 52*)

His sudden feeling of emptiness is due to the following factors about which Deshpande does not give any detailed account in the novel. During his childhood days he witnessed his father marrying his brother’s wife. She had a daughter at that
time. This was a strange happening in the Hindu Brahmin family. This had considerably disturbed him that a father known for his values and virtues of Hindu Brahmin family had committed such an act of moral departure. There was none at home for Gopal to explain and skim the reason in this act. He grew as a matured person and realized that the act of his father was not for conjugal happiness but for protecting the young widow. Then in his in-laws family he met another tragedy that a boy born to his mother-in-law Kalyani lost in the platform by her on her return to Pune and its attendant treacherous reaction on the part of her husband Shripati who willingly isolated himself from the family and started leading a lonely life on the upstairs of the family house without showing no care nor love nor concern nor sympathy for the rest of the family. As a professor of history, he started ruminating the insecurities and complexes of life. He had a primordial fear that the accident had taken place in his personal life that his father married to his brother’s wife, and the loss of the male child of his mother-in-law and its aftermath repercussions of his father-in-law shripati’s alienated existence inside his own house made him feel that at any point of time such similar accident would surface and make the family sink in untold misery. Before happening of such an accident, Gopal wants to get away from the family and give them ample training to face the harsh realities of suffering and pain caused out of his lack of support and help from him.

The Metaphysical moorings underlining the inconsistency of life and the uselessness of living is philosophically brought out in the answer of Gopal to Premi’s probing questions on his desertion.

You remember the Yaksha’s question to Yudhishtira: What is the greatest wonder in the world? And what Yudhishtira’s answer was?

We see so many people die yet we go on living as if we are going to
live forever. Yes, it’s true, that is the greatest marvel the world holds, it’s the miracle. In fact, it’s the secret of life itself. We know it’s all there, the pain and suffering, old age, loneliness and death, but we think, somehow we believe that it’s not for us. The day we stop believing in this untruth, the day we face the truth that we are mortal, that this is our fate as well, it will become difficult, almost impossible to go on. And if that happens to all of us, the human race will become extinct. (AMT 134)

According to the concept of the Hindu tradition of renunciation, Gopal crossed the first stage of Bramhacharya with the sickening memory of his father’s marriage to brother’s widow. Then he crossed Grihastha stage with his marriage to Sumi. Her brother’s sudden disappearance and its agonizing impact on his in-laws-family drove him to the third stage of Vanaprastha that is relinquishing the duties of a householder. He is only one step away from total renunciation-Sanyasa. In the portrayal of Gopal, Deshpande did not idolize him and at the same time, he was not reproached for shirking his responsibilities as a husband and father. If Gopal finds an involvement of his self by means of leaving his duties of a householder, the discontent frustration, humiliation and disgrace of being a deserted wife Sumi copes well with the wretched situation. She does not rave and rant but walks alone with a deathlike silence. Her very silence, however, conveys her pain more effectively than words can. Sumi reveals an independent nature. She refuses to accept financial help from her well-placed parents, her doctor sister (Premi) or Gopal’s ever-helpful doctor nephew, Ramesh. She insists on taking up a temporary teaching post at once and is actively on the lookout for a permanent job. With great determination, she learns to ride a two wheeler, at her age, much to the amusement of her children and the anxiety of her
mother. She frantically searches for a house to move into, unwilling to stay on in her parents’ house, but gives up only when she is convinced of the impracticality of moving out of the ‘big-house’ which has ample space for her family into an expensive and congested apartment. She gently spurns the efforts offered by her friend and cousin, Devaki. She also makes it a point to inform Gopal that she has in no way encouraged their daughter, Aru, who is obsessed with the idea of suing her father for maintenance. Her pride refuses to allow her to show her grief to Gopal or request him to return home.

Being born as a woman that too in Indian society which gives importance to renunciation and detachment, the privilege and prerogative of man Gopal’s walking out of the family is easily accepted by the society while Sumi, being a mother and a woman is left to console and organize the family. Journey is one of the motives skillfully woven into the narrative. In addition to the external travel and movement taken by characters on train, bus, car, moped, or scooter, Sumi and Gopal go time and again on inward journeys, searching their souls to find a rationale for their sufferings. Each character has a philosophy of their own: Kalyani’s motto is ‘fate’; Gopal thinks that “Destiny is ‘just us’ and therefore inescapable, because we can never escape ourselves. Certain actions are inevitable because we are what we are. In a sense, we walk on a chalked line drawn by our own selves” (AMT 26).

In a Matter of Time as the title indicates, Shashi Deshpande aims to weave a whole lot of philosophy around the concept of Time. The narrative begins and proceeds in linear time with the statement of the dramatic decision of Gopal to desert his family. The gradual and painful disintegration of the marriage of Sumi and Gopal is detailed through a sequence of events. Sumi and her daughters journey from their rented house to the ancestral Big House. Her house hunt with the property agent in
the streets of Bangalore and her newly learned art of driving the scooter take her in and out of the Big House. Her search for her own identity and independence bear fruit when she succeeds in finding a job for herself in a school. Kalyani’s and Premi’s futile attempts to convince Gopal that he should revoke his decision, Aru’s desperate pursuit of Lawyer Surekha to help her to bring her erring father to book for the wrong he has done to her mother, and the ultimate end of Sumitra and her father in a fatal accident—all these incidents span a little less than one year. The double death in the family of Sumi and Sripathi coincides with the death of the national leader Rajiv Gandhi. As the country is rocked by the national disaster, the members of Sumi’s family, who are distraught by their own personal tragedy, sit around the Television set in stony silence. The reference to this historical, tragic event roughly encompasses the linear movement of the dramatic events of the story in a contemporary time frame:

Life has come to a standstill, people driven into their homes by the terrible shock of another assassination. Gopal finds them huddled together in front of the TV. Shocked and grieved as they are, there is for the time being some respite from their own personal sorrow; they can lose themselves for a while in a larger calamity. (AMT 241)

Thus, the individual loss and grief, the unfair ways and means of Destiny and violence are seen in a larger context and from a different and broader perspective. Within this chronological sequence of events, blocks of narrative sections are arranged in which the major and minor characters of the novel, through voluntary and involuntary memory, move freely in and out of time, from past to present and present to past. Opening up multiple, interweaving pathways into the past, memory recovers, revives and reconstructs lost time and refreshingly frees the narrative from its bondage to the ticktack of clock or calendar time. Memory, which becomes a major
structuring device in the novel, thus leads to the creation of a psychological time or time in the mind. He, then has the frightening revelation of an existence beyond time where time past, present and future exist simultaneously within him. During these brief and most elusive moments of intimations of immortality where the temporal intersects with the timeless with eternity- Gopal experiences Cosmic Time or a religious sense of Time. It is only a matter of time, within which the main characters- Gopal, Sumi, Aru and Kalyani manage to make some kind of sense of the jigsaw puzzle of life. Death may signal the curtain call for many like Sumi and Sripathi, her father. But there is Kalyani, a miracle herself, not yet destroyed by time; she has survived the onslaughts of destiny and is still there as a source of strength and support to Sumi’s orphaned daughters. Moving effortlessly and unobtrusively from linear to psychological time, to ‘the time in the mind’ and by collating and juxtaposing Historical and Mythical Time with Cosmic Time, Shashi Deshpande manages to explore successfully the range and dimensions of time. Thus, by working out a comprehensive and complex philosophy around the concept of time, she has given to *A Matter of Time* intellectual and spiritual substance and amplitude.

The Holistic understanding of human relationships and the metaphysical realization of our relationship with cosmos is found expressed in Joshi’s novel *The Apprentice* where Ratan shedding all his ego and performing the deed of cleaning the shoes at the entrance of the temple transcending historical, mythical time with cosmic time as an act of expiation. This element gets broadened and deepened in Deshpande’s *A Matter Of Time* that all adverse aspects in life like freedom and bondage, silence and speech, destiny and freewill, solitude and society, physical time and cosmic time, death and life, or mortality and immortality by means of rejecting the rigid concept of gender politics as found rooted itself in male-female conflict in
the world. Arun Joshi’s faith and expiation and Deshpande’s faith in a world without any Gender bias shall bring in the destiny of mankind a source of strength and support out of mankind’s leaving away from the linear time to psychological time – a time of the mind, collating and juxtaposing Historical and Mythical time with cosmic time.

In the novels of Joshi and Despande, the survival factor of all protagonist rests on their affirmation of life stemming out of their element of sacrifice. It is the sacrifice of Anuradha in *The Last Labyrinth* that rehabilitates Som and gets him an answer for ‘I want… I want’. Material expansion alone does not provide happiness to one’s meaningful existence, which is possible only through sacrifice. This has dawned only in him out the sacrifice of Shakti Anuradha. Born as an Indian woman and steeped in traditional values, Saru could not bear the sex assault of her husband; she deserted him and her family for some time and took shelter in her father’s place. It was here she came to realize how her father bore all the insults of her mother patiently and did not show signs of leaving her for these insults. In the case of her father, there were verbal insults, in the case of her, they were sexual insults; but the common factor is ‘insult’. One is to bear to live with for which sacrifice is the only remedy. Her father sacrifices his precise honour as a husband for the welfare of the family. She too has to sacrifice her pride and honour as a doctor but everyday being tormented by sex assaults of her husband for the greater welfare of the family, out of the realization of affirmation of the element of sacrifice. She is ready to go and live with her husband, irrespective of facing the challenge of sex assault on her by her husband. The temperament of her by her father in bearing the verbal insult is due to the fact that such insults are leveled against him by his wife- a filial partner never to be dispensed with and not to be dispensed with, for an integral factor of family relation. Saru
realizes this factor and is ready to sacrifice her agony which is the cementing bond of human relationship.

Sacrificing the modern comforts for the welfare of the primitives has got Biswas his much expected realization of his essence of existence. Indu also got the same essence of existence out of sacrificing everything for the welfare of the family members.

As an orphan, Sindi finds life very miserable. But his meaningful detachment in all matters bordering on sacrifice gets him the element of affirmation in life. Men and matters he confronted with earned him only emptiness and voidness but he did not give room to the element of pessimism. He became an optimistic being by facing all odds in his life and became a selfless being of service – a thing of sacrifice. Jaya, as a true Indian woman, did not deviate from the path of devotion even at the crisis period when her husband Manu left her. She has faith in him and is ready to face life in his absence on account of her faith in sacrifice. Though she is critical of Indian womanly values, she never departs from such values, her choice of becoming a journalist to voice the liberation of women in order to make the society realize that in only matters of ‘give, control and sacrifice’ women alone are responsible as a staying power. In the absence of such power the society becomes shattered to pieces of lawlessness, rootlessness and anarchy.

Time is the greatest factor in making one identify with the element of sacrifice and realize the essence of life. The post-war Indian era has a linear time that operates on the individual Ratan, stirring his conscience. Searching for a meaning for existence, he luckily identifies in him the potentialities of sacrifice out of choosing the divine place where cosmic time plays its important role. His inner identification sacrifice out of the external cosmic element of the temple gets him a meaningful
existence- sacrifice- that is cleaning the dirt of devotees cheppals; the devotees become pure out of their worship of the divine and what is left as dirt on their cheppals, Ratan wants to clean, thereby making the devotees appear as embodiment of purity. Gopal in *A Matter of Time* knows all Vedantic concept, without realizing that the essence of sacrifice alone is responsible for redemption. Deserting the family and seeking redemption in the absence of sacrifice will get only sorrow for him and for others. Whatever explanations he has given for his desertion, only his wife Sumi endorses his points of view because she is a true Indian woman born to abide by the authority of men. Ironically, when she was ready to take up reigns of family, the responsibility that he has to discharge. The cosmic time does not approve of her benevolent nature but offers punishment to him for his callous attitude for his wrong negative choice of running away from responsibilities as a tool for redemption. But fate or cosmic time’s intervention puts him back on the path of shouldering responsibility of the family for which the value of sacrifice is more essential than seeking redemption out of leaving all family ties. The fate or cosmic time taught him a very costly lesson out of killing his wife, a tragedy essential for him to realize sacrifice and not to practice philosophical tenets as a source of redemption.

Arun Joshi and Shashi Deshpande are among the very few Indian novelists in English who have successfully revealed subtleties and complexities of contemporary Indian life. They have produced very compelling works of fiction. Sensitively alive to the predicament of modern man, they have ably delineated unfortunate consequences of the absence of values and faith in life. In fact, they have been rarely excelled in exemplifying the existential dilemma of the present-day world. They have also worked out various dimensions of pressures exerted by the complex character and demands of the society in which modern man is doomed to live. This awareness of
man’s rootlessness and the consequential anxiety is the keynote of Joshi’s unique vision of the plight of modern man. Their novels delineate human problems rather than issues arising out of ephemeral loyalties. They mark a definite departure from the general run of Indian novelists in English and their experimentations in themes and technique have added new dimensions to the art of the novel.

Thus, in the novels of Arun Joshi and Shashi Deshpande there is quest for identity, which is forced on the important characters. Though in the beginning they suffer due to alienation caused by various factors, the identity quest stays unabated in them from the beginning till the end. Finally, the identity quest comes to an end when the characters realize, after physical, mental and spiritual sufferings that the best things in life that give meaning to human existence are: sacrifice and service to others.