Chapter Three

Agony and Anxiety

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

Wordsworth

Modern man is anxiety ridden because he often suffers from a deep sense of powerlessness, negative attitudes, abandonment and indifference. The theme of anxiety has appeared in almost all the existential writers of the West like Kierkegaard, Marcel, Jaspers, Buber, Tillich, Sartre and Camus. Like the existential writers, Arun Joshi is seriously concerned with man’s feeling of agony and the related anxiety arising from a sense of futility in life. The two novels The Apprentice and The Last Labyrinth present the inner life of Ratan and Som which is characterised by chaos, disorganization, absurdity, cruelty, brutality and insensitivity. Their misdeeds prick their conscience and so they find themselves in agonizing situations. Their guilty conscience due to wrong choices makes them
alienated and disoriented individuals who are too anxious to seek redemption by some means.

In the modern civilized world, people do not encounter genuine threats to their physical safety every day. Instead, modern man is faced with problems that complicate his life. These problems do pose a threat, but it is not a physical threat. People may be faced with the problem of losing a job or conflicting relationships or domestic disharmony. “Anxiety” means “concern about an imminent or future difficulty” (Oxford). “The suffering of intense physical or mental pain, a sudden or intense emotion, a violent, intense struggle in adverse circumstances is known as agony” (Mosby’s). The term “agony” is derived from the Greek word “agonia” which means struggle. “Agony causes severe physical or emotional anguish or distress as if one is in pain” (Encyclopaedia). Agony leaves a psychological rather than physical impact. This psychological impact triggers a mild version of the fight or flight response which is known as anxiety. “Anxiety alerts us to a problem and motivates us to try to resolve the problem, because we want anxiety to go away” (“Anxiety Disorder”). In Psychiatry, anxiety is a “state of apprehension, uncertainty or fear resulting from the anticipation of a realistic or fantasized threatening event or situation often impairing physical and psychological functioning” (“Anxiety”). Anxiety affects people of all ages and social background. When it occurs, it can disrupt everyday life. Tillich has treated the theme of anxiety in his book The
Courage to Be and pointed out that “Man is drawn into the world of objects and has lost its subjectivity in it. But he is still aware of what he has lost or is continuously losing. He is still man enough to experience his dehumanisation as despair” (142). The theme of anxiety arising out of the chaos prevalent in modern life which makes its first appearance in Arun Joshi’s The Foreigner is more effectively treated in his later novels.

The protagonists in Arun Joshi’s novels experience agony and anxiety in their childhood, adulthood and manhood which lead them to their psychological turmoil. The duo of protagonists Ratan Rathor in The Apprentice and Som Bhaskar in The Last Labyrinth are too anxious to resolve their traumatic situations which are consequent of their excessive greed for material and sensual pleasures.

A notable feature in the protagonists of Arun Joshi’s two novels The Apprentice and The Last Labyrinth is that they are highly placed both by training and by profession in the society. But they are driven by forces unknown and irrational and all their actions are not intelligible to the rational mind. Ratan Rathor in The Apprentice and Som Bhaskar in The Last Labyrinth are disturbed characters and they have confined themselves in their private worlds. Both of them are sinner heroes; Ratan is guilty of supplying defective war materials and his soul is in agony because of the death of numerous men which is the consequence of his avarice and greed. The reasons for Som’s agony are his material greed, physical hunger and
emotional vacuity. He is anxious to obtain peace in life. Though he is strangled in the labyrinth of life, he is spiritually enlightened to realize the merits and values of life.

Arun Joshi delves deep into the psyche of Ratan Rathor, the protagonist in the novel *The Apprentice*. His agony is caused by the sudden death of his father due to the atrocity of the British, his mother's ailment, his inability to find a suitable job and to crown it all, his mean act of corruption which leads to the death of numerous people. He flouts the old ideals of his father for material benefits and experiences the pangs of lying, hypocrisy, bribery, graft, drunkenness, womanizing and worse. The anxiety of losing his job or promotion agonises his spirit depriving of his personality and identity. He becomes a “thick skin” and “a washout” and his inside gets “hollow and moth-eaten” (*Apprentice* 41). Ratan too like Sindi and Billy is fissured in his psyche because of his double inheritance, the patriotic and courageous world of his father and the mean and materialistic world of his mother. From his childhood he has been brought up between these two contrary pulls, the patriotism of his Gandhian father and the materialism of his mother. Though he has endearing parents, he is dangling between the idealistic views of his father and materialistic concepts of his mother. His sense of guilt in his pursuit of accumulating wealth causes conflicts in his psyche and he tries hard to suppress the
murmur of his soul caused by his corrupt activities. In this context H. Prasad opines:

The portrayal of Ratan Rathor, the protagonist of Arun Joshi’s *The Apprentice* is an artistic transcript of the self-made man’s steep fall in morals in proportion to his meteoric rise in material status. He is simultaneously a product and a victim of the decadent social values that gave a fillip to his ambition and rendered him deaf to the voice of his own conscience. Saddled by the dichotomy in his ‘double inheritance’, and regretful of having misguidedly pursued the false philosophy of becoming one with the society around on his own terms, he becomes a near nervous wreck under the strain of salvaging a modicum of self-respect on which he is to rebuild the edifice of the remaining years of his life. (7)

Ratan belongs to the lower rung of society. When he started his life he had no norms, no direction or even no purpose. But he has acquired his father’s idealism, dedication for a cause and a dauntless will. But his mother has imbibed her love for materialism in him. He is frequently reminded of his mother’s words:

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. If I underrated the power of money she said I would be sorry some day. (19)

In the beginning of his life, Ratan found it very difficult to live smoothly in this civilized world. However, the idealistic view to be honest encourages him towards success and also a sincere patriotic feeling dominates his mind. His student days reflect his merits and talents and he weaves an idealistic dream around him. He is very regular as a student and fares better than his classmates. His mother, a short, dark, weak lady as a contrast to his father who is more than six feet tall, “strange to look” has been suffering from tuberculosis and cannot be treated properly for want of money. His father, a leading successful lawyer has “abandoned his practice, given away most of his wealth, under the Gandhian influence that in short, had no means of living” (Apprentice 18). He can never forget that unfortunate day on which his father was the leader of a political procession. He describes:

The crowds were the same as you find them now: multitudes, yellow with dust; ragged, poor people come from distant villages, a human tide threatening the confines of the street. They marched with determination, unsmiling and non-descript. It was only their roar that transformed them, into something grand, something more than what the wretched of the earth are normally allowed to become. (10)
Ratan recalls the scene when his father was leading the procession. The crowd being clubbed by the advancing sergeants on horse back tried to stop the movement. Many fell down. Though Ratan’s father was wounded, he kept on moving forward, despite the sergeant’s order to stay back. His next step ahead made the sergeant “to shoot him in the chest and again, as he spun around in the back” (*Apprentice* 12). Though his father died, Ratan identifies himself with people who are patriotic by nature. He considers it a great honour to be the son of a freedom fighter. On the other hand, his mother encourages him to earn as much money as he can. After the death of his father, the family responsibility fell on Ratan who was already shocked and confused. Chance paves way for him to join the army of Subash Chandra Bose, but he is disturbed by his mother who tells him not to commit the mistake done by his father by being a patriot and not earning money for the family. According to Nawale:

In a sense, Ratan’s life is a see-saw battle between the opposite values represented and propagated by his father and mother. His father abandoned his lawyer’s profession for the new ideal preached at that time by Mahatma Gandhi. This was a set of an ideal Ratan learned from his father. His mother has different set. She did not want her son to inherit her husband’s quixotic idealism. After the death of his father, his mother seemed to be nearer the truth to Ratan, for
he badly needed money, later he becomes disintegrated and
slave of money. ("Search for the purpose")

Ratan Rathor’s mother struggled a lot, when her husband joined the
National Front. Her husband had not gained anything for the family as she
had to starve and strive for her survival with her physical ailments too. As
she was in the lower rung of society, she was neglected by it. The trauma
in her was due to her husband quitting from his job as an advocate, just to
join the patriotic army which gained her nothing. Her husband had left
nothing in this world for his wife and child and was shot dead finally. This
incident had marked a crisis within Ratan’s mother. She did not want this
bankruptcy in the family to continue in the next generation. Hence she
requested her son to go into the materialistic world and earn money. She
asked her son not to be like his father without earnings because his ideals
were mere madness. She said that man without money was nothing and it
was money that brought respect and security. Friends flocked when purse
was full. Money could buy anything in this world.

With a staunch idea of joining the army, Ratan cycles to the
recruitment centre. He thinks of his glorious future if he joins the army.
But he faces only disappointment as he is rejected on account of his lack of
perfect health. Moreover, he is constantly advised by his mother of the
importance of money and the dire need of possessing it in his life. He feels
that he has no other way except keeping pace with appearance and
following the way of the world of ordinary decencies. Ratan tells his young listener, “it was the future that had loomed before me, like a mountain range, a series of question-marks . . . waiting to be crossed. If he had money, he would have become a doctor” (Apprentice 17). When he tells his ardent desire of taking part in the national freedom movement, his mother is deadly against him. She advises Ratan to lead a life following the trend of the material world, “Don’t fool yourself son, she said. Man without money was a man without worth. Many things were great in life, but the greatest of them all was money” (Apprentice 19).

Ratan has to struggle hard to get a suitable job though he has passed his examinations creditably. His father’s sacrifice for the cause of national freedom has left behind only sufferings for his survivors. According to Reddy:

Ratan however discovers soon that the honour of being the son of a freedom fighter is of no practical value whatsoever in the world. His father dying a martyr to the cause of the country’s freedom, left behind an ailing, starving and cynical wife and a patriotic and penniless son. The people for whom his father has squandered a life time, forget him within a year. ("The Apprentice" 15)

The job hunting process is tiring and testing the nerves of Ratan. A tough time is waiting ahead after the death of his father. He, his mother
and the disease, only three are left in their little house to face the forthcoming adverse circumstances. Within the period of one year, his father has been forgotten by those for whom he had sacrificed his life without thinking about his wife and son. Once he comes across a lawyer, his father’s friend and he gives him a recommendation letter to a high government official who plays hide and seek with Ratan and finally pretends not to know the lawyer patron. Ratan loses hope and says “there is nothing in the world as sad as the end of hope, not even death. If you die, the matter is ended” (*Apprentice* 25). He realizes that the son of a freedom fighter is not even acknowledged because the Gandhian values he had fought for have been replaced by “opportunism, treachery, cowardice, hypocrisy and wit” (*Victor* 311-12). The humiliating experiences of Ratan, while hunting for a job leaves him frustrated and disillusioned.

Ratan remains always apprehensive of his failure. Having only a little money at his disposal, Ratan stays in a room with five other workers. He summarises his position thus:

> The occupants of my room were working men . . . . what got me down, wiped the laughter off my face, so to speak, was that they worked, earned, spent, and I had no job. I, who was the most educated of them all, would soon be on the streets, a failure, an incompetent, penniless fool. (25)
With the passage of time, Ratan becomes a pastmaster in keeping up appearances.

The burden of joblessness bangs on Ratan when he thinks of his friends and flatmates who are employed. One of his roommates is a turner and two brothers from Mirzapur are working in a cloth printing shop. There is a goldsmith’s assistant and a stenographer from Saharampur. They work, earn and spend. Ratan is the most educated of them all but he is unemployed. Despite his appreciable eligibility and qualification, he is unable to obtain a job in Delhi. It is shameful for him to say that he is jobless to his employed friends. In order to avoid the interrogating looks and pitying words, he lies to them that he is employed. But he feels the prick in his heart for being a liar. He narrates:

I had been insecure before and full of strange fears. But I had never undertaken such sustained, if harmless, deception, for once I had lied about having a job I had to lie about numerous other things, like food, clothing, why I did not want to go to the cinema and so on. From morning till night I told more lies than truths. I had become a master faker. (27)

Ratan tries several possible means to get a job. Ceaselessly he reads newspapers in order to apply for jobs that are advertised. Endlessly he waits for a reply in vain. So he personally carries his application for a job only to be humiliated at the gate by the peons and clerks. In many of the
places the candidates are preselected and the interview itself is a fake. Very often Ratan is “examined interviewed, interrogated and rejected” *(Apprentice 29)*. To Ratan, the rejection is an unbearable torment. He describes:

The blood would rise to my cheeks and to my ears and I would not be able to lift my eyes from the ground until well away from the office. It would seem to me that the whole world knew of my shame. Even now, when I recall some of the incidents, I can feel the humiliation all over again although, as far as possible, I keep such thoughts away from my mind. (29)

Returning home jobless is unbearable for Ratan. To fail to get a job in Delhi would have been the sign of the greatest incompetence. In another humiliating experience, Ratan was scolded and chased off. This affected him psychologically and he fell ill. He had a bad heat stroke. For a fortnight he had been in bed with ice packs on his forehead and looked after by strangers and the Mirzapur brothers. Finally everyone came to know that Ratan had neither job nor money.

When Ratan recovers, a chance introduction by the stenographer secures him a job of a temporary clerk in the department of war purchases and that small footholds is cleverly used by Ratan to reach the high point of his career till he has all the paraphernalia of material success. He achieves
this prosperity through “perfidy, chicanery, cowardice and corruption” (Abraham, “Vision” 212) is quite in turn with the decadent society around him “a society without norms, without direction, without even, perhaps, a purpose” (Apprentice 74). As a clerk, Ratan works “harder than almost any body in the department except the Superintendent himself” (Apprentice 37). Ratan’s carefully cultivated ingratiating manner and perfect yes-manship soon make him a valued employee and the upward rise in his career is accepted by him as recognition of his own merit. “I was a different cut, educated, intelligent, cultured, and as it was my right that I should rise in life, to levels higher than the others aspired for” (Apprentice 32). Very soon Ratan is promoted as an assistant in the office dealing with the purchase of war materials. It is at this place that Ratan departs from the ideals of his father. His thoughts are centralized on his career. The early faithfulness has given place to practicability and slowly and gradually Ratan becomes part of the “bourgeois” filth which his father used to denigrate (Apprentice 39). Ratan wins the confidence of his Superintendent with his docility and obedience. He blots out from his mind his poverty stricken past and feels no compunction in shedding the friends and associates of that time, including those who saved his life. As time goes on, he is confirmed in his job but his soul gets corrupted. At times he contemplates:
I embarked upon the solemn and relentless pursuit of a career. Bourgeois filth. Careers and bourgeois filth. It is not only now that I have remembered the words. There have been moments in my life when I saw nothing but filth around me. At such times my head would explode with violent, rebellious thoughts. But then I would always calm down and ask myself: What can be done? Here I am. And here is this filth. (39)

Ratan’s psyche is at war within, when a prosperous contractor meets him and tries to entice Ratan by bribing him with ten thousand rupees to change his adverse remarks and reports on the contract taken by the contractor. Though Ratan declines the offer, he remains restless. He is anxious to accumulate wealth and be affluent. The next temptation comes from the Superintendent. He suggests if Ratan marries his niece, he may become an officer.

The marriage deal marks a turning point in Ratan’s life. His mother also tries her best to lure her son with material things. She sends word to her son through family friends in Delhi. In the meantime, Ratan has to accept his marriage with a very rich girl or the daughter of Ratan’s boss. To satisfy his mother, he marries the girl, owns a car, buys a flat, gets a refrigerator, gets a good sum and a good bank balance. The mother’s boasting takes him to the level of forgetting completely his father’s
philosophy. “Ratan becomes obsessed with wealth and sacrifices the principles that have guided him during adolescence – a complete diversion from the ideals and morals dear to his mind and heart in youth” (V. Dwivedi 86). He is offered the post of Assistant Superintendent. He has obtained what he has expected not by fair means of merit but by a marriage deal which he considers dishonest. Ratan says:

Deals, deals, deals . . . that is what the world runs on . . . . If men forgot how to make deals the world would come to a stop. It would lose its propelling power. Men would not know what to do with themselves. . . . It is not the atom or the sun or God or sex that lies at the heart of the universe: it is DEALS. DEALS. It is a bit like my mother’s prophesy, about money. It is not whether you like making deals or you like money. They are simply there, like air. (48)

Ratan contemplates on the deal of life and realizes that in order to climb up he has to accept the marriage deal. He philosophises on life:

Life reminds me of those complex sums in algebra that we do in high school, sums involving twenty equations, all directed at discovering the missing x with which they are in some way related. But they are also related among themselves, acting upon themselves, holding each other up, at times destroying each other and in the process, the mysterious x is never
found, or they are short by one or two and there can be no questions of finding \( x \), try as you might. That is how the world seems to be set up, my friend. And success, that elusive \( x \) demands that you set up the equations first, one after the other, one on top of the other. It is not an easy task. Nor a quick one. It can take a lifetime. (49)

His colleagues lampoon him severely and call him a “whore” (Apprentice 47). He is not lacerated because he has become a hardened man. He says:

I am a thick skin now, a thick-skin and a washout but, believe me, my friend I too have had thoughts such as these. But what was to be done? One had to live. And, to live, one had to make a living. And, how was a living to be made except through careers. Thus the turbulence always died until it ceased to erupt altogether. I never found an answer. Nor have I found one now. (39)

When Ratan is cogitating on himself profoundly, he reveals the obvious fact that money is essential in life. He, being an Assistant Superintendent, has a comfortable life with all sorts of facilities like “a car, a flat, concrete roof, running water, telephone, insurance and future pension” (Apprentice 58). All his needs are met with the affluence he has. He says contentedly, “I did not need money. If I had ever needed money, it
was when I had been offered it the first time – by the contractor – and I had refused” (*Apprentice* 59).

Often Ratan is swept away by the materialism of the world and his mind is centralised on money. He has a lot of money and credits. With money comes its drawbacks. Women, wine and wantoness titillate him. “The more money I accumulated, the more I was dissatisfied and the more I was determined to “enjoy” life” (*Apprentice* 85). He ogles at the women around. He admits, “I felt bored, unfettered. I stared at them, the women. Openly. Wilfully?” (*Apprentice* 74). He has a feeling that he has every right to stare at them. He visits prostitutes. “With the accumulation of riches, Ratan also gets engulfed in the vice associated with wealth such as taste for wine and woman” (S. Kumar 120). In short Ratan is “at the peak of the dung heap” that he had been climbing all his life (*Apprentice* 82).

Ratan’s contact with the fraudulent arms dealer Himmat Singh is the last stage of his materialistic and deceptive way of life. Himmat Singh, popularly known as the Sheikh is an underground don, who has a big pile of military materials in Mumbai. He has a stock of defective war materials. The Sheikh offers Ratan a huge bribe and tempts him into a big bargain for the supply of defective war materials to the Army. The Sheikh has planned everything tactfully. The materials would reach the army stores but all the documents and tracks of men connected with the transaction would be destroyed. Ratan dares to consign the defective materials for graft which
during that time, has permeated all over the country. Thus corruption starts seeping into Ratan’s soul as well. Reddy comments, “He had to abdicate his true self to fit in the corrupt society and eke out a living” ("Apprentice" 14). Betraying his conscience, Ratan receives the bribe and his “soul turns to ashes” proving his moral degradation (Apprentice 79). Ratan is in agony. First of all he has everything, all comforts in life. His larder is full. He need not accept the bribe. He needs it neither for his survival nor for his happiness. He says:

My wife is not swimming in saris but she does not use what she has. My daughter has all the money she needs; for college, clothes and the cinema. We eat as much as a human being can possibly eat. Our health is looked after by the Government. . . . I have insurance. I have twenty thousand in the bank . . . . I would have a pension when I retire . . . . (59)

Ratan tries to suppress the murmur of his soul caused by his corruptive activities. Moreover his friend the Brigadier returns from the fighting fronts of Indo-China war. The war is lost and the Brigadier upon his return home from the battlefront has a severe nervous breakdown. He is shocked, emaciated and out of his wits. The Brigadier during the war has deserted his post and this desertion was due to the fact that he had been supplied with defective war materials which had been approved by none other than Ratan. He is rushed to the hospital and he is in a critical
condition. During their childhood, Brigadier himself a teenager had saved Ratan’s life when he was attacked by a group of hooligans. The Brigadier yelling and swearing, had leapt across the fallen bicycles to “fight for me, me who no one had ever fought for” (*Apprentice* 16). It is irony of fate that Ratan becomes responsible for the Brigadier’s retreat from the warfront and the consequent nervous breakdown. Ratan is horrified at the condition of his friend and his death. Das remarks, “the act of treachery inflicts an irreparable injury upon the moral nature of man and that a guilty Ratan lives inescapably in the presence of his conscience” (13).

When the Superintendent of Police calls Ratan for interrogation, he proves too smooth a customer to be unnerved by the questions. In a dingy hall, smelling of bats, strewn with tables Ratan sat amongst pimps, prostitutes, burglars, pick-pockets and murderers. Suddenly in the station there was a humdrum because a young murderer of about twenty with chains around his ankles was brought in. The jangle of his chain filled the hall and every one stopped their work abruptly to watch. He had murdered his old landlady who had done him numerous untold favours. He was interrogated, suspected and slapped. Ratan stared into his black eyes and identified himself with the murderer because he too has murdered not one, but thousands of men by supplying defective war materials. He deceives him by saying that he has no knowledge about the clearance of the defective war materials which caused the loss of several hundred lives.
Ratan is under police custody. While sitting on a stool in the small room at the police station, there is conflict in Ratan’s mind whether he should confess or deny the allegations. He thinks of Honour and Dharma, and their values in life but he makes up his mind not to confess because the authorities have no proof of his misdeed. Justifying his action, Ratan gives a cross-section of Indian society:

If I had taken a bribe I belonged rather to the rule than the exception. Peons were frequently taking bribes. So were government officials and traffic policemen and railway conductors. A bribe could get you a bed in a hospital, a place to burn your dead. Doctors had a fee to give false certificates, magistrates for false judgements. For a sum of money, politicians changed sides. For a larger sum they declared wars. Bribery was accepted by factory inspectors, bank agents and college professors, by nurses, priests and chartered accountants; by all those who acted in the public interest. Men took the bribes to facilitate the seduction of their wives; women for seduction of other women. All this I knew and had known for twenty years. (108-09)

Pricked by his conscience, Ratan realizes the severity of his misdeed. He is directly responsible for the Brigadier’s death. Venugopal and Hegde comment, “... Ratan realizes the enormity of the crime he had committed
while accepting the bribe and clearing war materials . . . . Brigadier’s shooting himself brings home to Ratan in no uncertain terms his own part in it” (166). But when he is interrogated, his reaction is full of surprise and of great indignation. He answers like a confirmed hypocrite and shows great self-righteousness and shock that at the hour of national peril someone should do this. He himself is surprised at his audacity. He questions himself, “Was I not Ratan Rathor, . . . some one born of criminal parents? . . . What was I? Was I a thief? A scoundrel? Was I the murderer? . . . (Apprentice 106).

Seeking peace and penitence, Ratan visits a nearby temple. He is in the hard grip of deception, selfishness and immorality prevailing in the modern society. From the temple he goes to his office, from where he writes a letter of confession and decides to meet the S.P. In the meantime, the Brigadier commits suicide by shooting himself on the head and this incident shakes Ratan to his roots. He regrets for unnecessarily contributing to human suffering. He holds Himmat Singh responsible for the death of his friend and benefactor and seducing him to the evil of corruption. Ratan experiences a sense of loneliness and he is tongue-tied. “No occurrence, no conversation, no visit of either friend or foe, no sleep, in spite of the sleeping pills that our good doctor gave me, no relief, no respite from the hands that pulled me steadily down towards those caverns where I felt certain, the Brigadier has gone” (Apprentice 88).
Shocked and shaken by the tragic death of his friend the Brigadier, Ratan resolves to take revenge upon the Sheikh. He takes his gun to shoot him. To his dismay, he learns from him that he alone is not responsible for the deal of selling defective war materials but the Secretary and the Minister have also been a party to it. Ratan has been made a scapegoat because he is a “Spineless Flunkey” (Apprentice 131). He is merely a tool in the hands of the so-called dignitaries and high-ups. The Sheikh makes a shocking and candid observation of Ratan’s character:

You are bogus, Ratan Rathor, he drawled in a voice that had begun to go out again. Bogus. From top to bottom. Your work, your religion, your friendships, your honour, nothing but a pile of dung. Nothing, he said, but poses a bundle of shams. (131)

Knowing that the whole society is corrupt, from top to bottom, the Sheikh suggests that Ratan could start taking revenge from the Secretary rather than shooting him. “He just did not want me to come around playing the hero, flaunting a silly gun” (Apprentice 132). In his rage, Ratan wants to kill him and “shut that cavernous mouth” of the Sheikh (Apprentice 132). Ratan remembers that it was Himmat Singh who with his influence had got him out of the lock-up. He had no courage to shoot him. In the meantime the Sheikh had an attack and he was reeling on the
floor. He looked very ill and Ratan helped him with some pills and he started sleeping.

Ratan is used as a pawn in the corrupt game of clearing the war materials. The Sheikh had a foolproof plan and Ratan had to put signatures. “If something went wrong it was no doubt the paw that would be chopped” (Apprentice 130). When the Army Intelligence started to snoop around, the Secretary tipped off the police so that he was not under suspicion. In order to make his reputation, he denounced Ratan. But as the Sheikh made a good scheme, there was not a scrap of paper to prove that Ratan was guilty. As the police could not get a piece of evidence even from their enquiry with him, Ratan was released. Overcome with emotion, Ratan cries to God. He recollects:

Twenty years earlier I had come to the city . . . to learn, to work, and in this process to make my mark. I had come full of hope, ambitions, good will; and all that was left was a pile of dung . . . for two decades I had lived only in smog, confused, exploited, exploiting, deceiving, and now deceived, Deceived beyond my imagination. A pile of dung. Twenty years and nothing gained. An empty lifetime. What had I learned? Pushing files? Manoeuvering? At forty five all that I knew was to manoeuvre. A trickster, that was what I had left
life make of me. Did I know the meaning of honour, friendship? (133)

Ratan full with mixed feelings cried and beat his head against the sill. In a drunken state, he fell asleep. When he awoke, he saw the Sheikh grandly dressed with his diamond studs. He suggested instead of shooting him Ratan should start his revenge from the Secretary and he would take him there. On the way Ratan contemplates on his life:

The realisation that one’s life has been a total waste, a great mistake; without purpose, without results . . . but there is nothing in the three worlds to match the sorrow of a wasted life . . . . I did not yet know what had happened to me but one thing was clear: My life had been a great, great waste . . . .

One thing that they had all said of my father was that there was a good man. A very good man. And all my life I had waited for someone to say that to me. None had. (135)

With the determination to kill the Secretary, Ratan entered into the Secretary’s bungalow, while he was playing cards with his ten year old daughter. At that time Ratan thought of Mahatma and how he was killed. If his father would have been in Ratan’s position, “he would not have killed this man. He would not have killed him because it would have been too much of simplification, too primitive a solution. And primitive solutions, he would have known, never worked” (Apprentice 136). So
Ratan decided to redeem his honour in some other way rather than killing the Secretary.

Ratan has another agonizing experience in a hut where the Sheikh’s mother lived in poverty. Sheikh’s father was a revolutionary but “his mother a whore” (Apprentice 138). Night after night his mother had sold herself. One of his sisters ran away and the other died of pneumonia. A policeman caught him for stealing and broke his leg with an iron rod. He made his life as a shoeshine boy, a pimp, a petty thief, a waiter, and a valet for a British army officer. After the Englishman had gone to Singapore, Himmat Singh started introducing himself as a man from Singapore but he was on the streets again. He worked for a trade union and then got involved in a black market racket who had broken his leg and who had made a whore of his mother. Those men angered him. He felt he had a desert in his heart. It grew vast and vast. So he had taken to women, to drink and finally to drugs. When his mother raved at him for going astray, he scoffed at her. She would shout, “Himmat Singh, God’s darkness has come over you. God’s darkness. God’s darkness” (Apprentice 140). He wanted his mother to suggest a solution for the darkness. The Sheikh interrogates:

But if it was God’s darkness, he asked, what was the cure? What was the cure of a crooked world. None, perhaps. Revolution, perhaps or perhaps . . . perhaps . . . he seemed to
hesitate a long time . . . perhaps God Himself. God alone perhaps could remove His darkness. But where was God, he cried out again, suddenly excited, his voice ringing with despair. What was God? And where? Thus we went on during that strange night, neither visible to the other, the storm beating about our ears. At one point he said: My soul was killed, you put yours to pawn. But souls that were pawned could perhaps be retrieved. (140)

Ratan feels a strong pain in his inner heart. He recalls his past and assesses his achievements. He realizes his life is a great waste and he has even no intimacy with his wife. He learns that one cannot live for oneself because no human act is performed in isolation and therefore each act should be done with a sense of responsibility. He wants to start his life once again from the very menial job of wiping the shoes of the devotees outside the temple every morning on his way to his office. He says:

Each morning, before I go to work, I come here. I sit on the steps of the temple and while they prey, I wipe the shoes of the congregation. Then, when they are gone, I stand in the doorway . . . I stand at the doorstep and I fold my hands, my hands smelling of leather and I say things. (142)
Ratan Rathor concludes by saying that everything in life he has experienced is only as an apprentice. He tells the readers, “Consider me an apprentice and you will perhaps understand” (*Apprentice* 148).

Ratan strongly realizes that God alone can give him peace. In the beginning Ratan is taught by his mother to earn as much money as possible. At each stage of his life, he takes time to free himself from the shackles of the materialistic modern civilization. He feels that corruption has entered even into religion and into the meaningless God. His asks, “What was God? And Where?” (*Apprentice* 140). Ratan tries to erase the error in his life or to rectify his fault through some means. When Ratan realizes his mistakes, “His apprenticeship comes to an end” (Venugopal and Hegde 168).

Ratan’s psychic conflict ends when he makes a compromise for his mistakes. He believes that purification is to be obtained not by any ritual or dogma but by making amends. He starts a new life with a firm faith in life and in himself. His earlier craze for money is gone. Bhatnagar points out, “Ratan, a guilty conscious fellow realizes the futility of his past filthy life. Ratan Rathor’s penance is not physical but spiritual. He is willing to pay the price by suffering humiliation” (51).

Ratan has experienced a great change in his mind. He undergoes the consequences of all his deeds and realizes the truth. Therefore with a changed mind Ratan tells his friend:
Be good, I tell myself, 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 victims of my cleverness, those whom I could have helped and did not. (143)

Thus his genuine repentance does not only provide peace of mind that he has been seeking but also strikes a new note on a second chance in his life with the sincere conviction. “One must try and not lose heart, not yield, at any cost to despair” (Apprentice 143). He confesses his mistakes and prays to God for forgiveness. He is reminded of his father’s advice to him to be good always. He recollects his father saying, “Whatever you do touches someone somewhere” (Apprentice 143). He hopes that there are young men willing to learn from the follies of their elders. In order to seek peace and moral courage, Ratan visits the temple which is nearby his house. He reaches there at the time of Aarti and prays to God to give him strength to confess his crime as diverse thoughts have muddled his head.

He visits the temple to seek peace and solace but he meets a priest who is ready to grease his palm to save the skin of his son, a contractor who having used substandard material in the construction resulting in the collapse of many roofs was facing punishment. Ratan concludes that even religion is not free from corruption and no succour can be drawn from it.
The novelist presents an India filled with corruption. God can be propitiated by gifts in black money to his temples, where the priests themselves are as corrupt as the narrator.

Ratan realizes the futility and hollowness of his whole life. He is agonized in body and spirit. He has neglected India’s rich heritage and not created a new order he once envisaged. Penitent, especially after he learns that even the temple priests condones bribery, he takes to cleaning the shoes of the congregation. Each morning before going to work, he goes to the temple and wipes the shoes of the people and “it is to learn that I came here each morning. If you can learn to wipe shoes well, you can perhaps learn other things” (Apprentice 144). This symbolic act of penance, he thinks, will bring him humility.

In Apprentice, Joshi has suggested another remedy to life’s problems, which is within the easy reach of the common man. Ratan comes to realize that life may well be a zero, but “it need not be negative” (Apprentice 146). He learns ultimately, the lessons of humility and resignation to the Will of God, doing what he can “without vanity and without expectations and also without cleverness” (Apprentice 149). Ratan becomes conscious of the folly of his past life and undergoes the most difficult penance for his misdeeds. Ratan’s conversion may sound somewhat unnatural and rather an extreme act. But it is very much possible under the circumstances of his life, and has been found to take
place more than once in actual life. An absolute humility and genial acceptance of life as it is can undoubtedly create an inner centre of peace and serenity for the individual.

In *The Last Labyrinth* Arun Joshi articulates the conflict of modern man who is groping through the labyrinths of life and reality with the psychological pull between anxiety and futility. The novel is centralized on the eternal longing for the material and sensual pleasures of the narrator-hero Som Bhaskar. It probes into the turbulent inner world of the narrator who is relentlessly driven by undefined hungers, “hungers of the body” and “hungers of the spirit” (*Labyrinth* 11). Life as an intricate labyrinth leaves the protagonist puzzled. On the surface, Som’s life is ideal. It is a happy life by all means. Som Bhaskar is young, has a beautiful, understanding and sophisticated wife, two children and a vast business empire. He is “thirty-five” and a “millionaire” (*Labyrinth* 11).

The reason behind Som’s crisis is his excessive longing to possess anything that he desires. “I want, I want” is the hue and cry of Som. Apart from the hoard of wealth and material benefits, he wants to possess the business shares of Aftab Rai, his friend. In spite of marrying a woman of his choice and having many concubines such as *ayahs*, librarians, nurses, aunts, friends’ wives and women of ill-repute at his disposal, he wants to possess Anuradha, the ex-film star and the mistress of Aftab. His hunger remains insatiable as ever. This flaw in him has resulted from his
ancestors, his grandfather and father. His grandfather was a womanizer and boozer. His father was a scientist, alert and speculative. The paradoxical pull, the father representing reason and intellect and grandfather representing senses and instinct afflict Som. This inheritance makes Som impulsive and immoral. As he is not satisfied with anything in life, he is anxious to seek peace and tranquility with the help of a godly woman who tries her best to resolve his psychological problems.

Arun Joshi in the novel *The Last Labyrinth* explores the crannies of the protagonist Som Bhaskar’s mind. His mind is a labyrinth and so are life, reality and existence. According to Patil:

Som Bhaskar is a young and educated business tycoon. In fact, the novel is autobiographical. It depicts Som Bhaskar’s quest for both physical and mental fulfilment in life. However his desire for materialistic comforts as well as mental harmony takes him nowhere. The novel explores the crannies of Som, his Jungian and Sartrean struggle for an authentic mode of life. (145)

Consequently, in order to experience an anchorage and security, he rushes to the arms of innumerable women but everytime he experiences just void. Relationship after relationship makes Som feel more discontented. His life is a puzzle. The novel reveals man’s restlessness in modern life and his futile attempt to escape it. Iyengar remarks thus, “It is a paradigm of the
contemporary diseased world where discontents grow their own pestilential vapours and self-doomed humanity lacking faith, lacking Grace – is tragically resigned to being suffocated by them” (116). The protagonist Som Bhaskar is an obsessive and highly sensitive individual who has his grappling with the feeling of emptiness and void at the core of his being. He searches for adventure and romance in life and finally he ends with his unconscious efforts to come to terms with himself and the world amidst discontent and disharmony. H. Prasad observes, “The Last Labyrinth assimilates the existential anxiety, the Karmik principles, the longings for the vitals of life in the mystical urge of Som Bhaskar” (85).

Som Bhaskar, the narrator-hero is an ambitious son of a prosperous industrialist. He has good Western education which makes him a supporter of the rational, industrial and technological world. He returns from Harvard to inherit an empire of plastics factory. His father has spent an immense fortune on his education by sending him to the world’s most reputed universities. No wonder, he has learnt the way of life. He is a name to reckon within the industrial world of Bombay and his primary aspiration is to grab failing industries to add to his dominion. His traditional Indian root gives him a sense of isolation, when he is required to follow Western culture in the materialistic world of Mumbai. The city has taught him to apply scientific principles to the problems faced by the society but Som Bhaskar is unable to accept the idea. In his pursuit of
realizing his ambition, his efforts are futile. He becomes mentally shattered and physically exhausted with dreams and insomnia. Even tranquillizers and sleeping drugs could not afford to appease or soothe him. As a result of his anxiety to acquire more and more, he maneuvers a sort of alienation and restlessness and he becomes self-centered and even loses faith in God, in friendship, in marriage and even in fatherhood.

Som Bhaskar is troubled psychologically. He is completely immersed in the labyrinth of life which leads him through innumerable sufferings. As a young millionaire, Som Bhaskar gets good foreign education, but does not get peace in life. The reason for his conflict is that he is relentlessly chased by an undefined desire to possess everything. He is always haunted by a mysterious voice, which is audible only to his ears. He narrates:

Beyond them all, audible only to my ear, a grey cry threshed the night air. Through my days and the blackness of my nights and the disquiet of those sleepless hours beside my wife, within reach of the tranquillisers, I had the same strident song: I want. I want. I want. I want. (11)

He tries to quench his ravaging desires by possession of an object or person. But he is always chased by unquenching desires to possess more and more. He remembers:
for many years now, I have had this awful feeling that I wanted something. But the sad thing was it did not make the slightest difference when I managed to get what I wanted. My hunger was just as bad as ever. A year ago, I couldn’t imagine, a wish, which if fulfilled, would have made the least difference to my life. (189)

He is never at peace with himself and his warring psyche troubles him. Som flirts from one pleasure to another. He becomes the incarnation of the quest for the joy of life. He therefore goes in search of new experiences concerning business or fornication. But ironically, far from attaining a sense of fulfilment, he has a terrible sense of emptiness. He feels a void, idleness and loneliness within himself and is lost in the labyrinth of thoughts. He has been haunted by voids both internal and external. He utters, “It is the voids of the world, more than its objects that bothers me. The voids and the empty space, within and without” (Labyrinth 47).

Som experiences these voids almost continually. He is perpetually haunted by “a great roaring hollowness” (Labyrinth 25) and “the boredom and the fed-up-ness” (Labyrinth 21). The first time Som had this feeling of void was when he visited the caves of Ajanta when he was eighteen. He experienced it when his mother died or every time an affair ended and even when his daughter was born. Moreover on the Manikarnika Ghat at Banares, the sight of funeral pyres, the smell of burning flesh and the
sound of bursting bones gave him the same sense of void. Som says, “you have to have a little incident or get a telephone at midnight about so and so popping off or catch your wife with another man or be told you have cancer to see the voids within” (*Labyrinth* 48). The feeling of emptiness does not leave him at peace with himself even for a minute. He goes to bed every night feeling empty and wakes up feeling empty the next morning. He is at a loss to know how to fill this emptiness. He feels that there is a psychic longing for something. His excessive desire to possess leaves him with a sense of vacuum. When he is asked to name what he wants, he bitterly cries being unable to identify it. He says bitterly, “If I stayed up all night chaffing tranquilizers, not knowing why I was awake, and come close to tears because I did not know, it came pretty close to sorrow” (*Labyrinth* 103). Consequently, he experiences agony that does not let him breathe. He finds within himself, “nothing but an empty roaring, like the roar of the sea in a conch” (*Labyrinth* 115). This void leaves him with insomnia and he can do nothing about it at the conscious level.

Som has made several unsuccessful attempts to find out the reason for the void in his psyche or what is the reason for his conflicts. Money and riches give him enjoyment. He is born into a phenomenally rich family and has all access to every imaginable luxury that money can buy. With the spirit of a business tycoon and guided by the dictum “survival of the fittest” he has tried to acquire wealth and the name and fame that go
with it. The world around him seems to value many things other than money. Money has added his misery. Som has tried to drown himself in drink and soothe his nerves with tranquilizers but as soon as their effect wears off, the voids would return with a relentless ferocity.

Born and brought up in India, Som is also interested in religious faith like his mother. It is from his father that he has gained melancholia. Moreover, his grandfather is a womanizer who drinks and runs after several women. It is this hereditary lack of stability that has created a sense of agony in the psyche of Som Bhaskar. He is also constantly aware of his father’s death due to melancholia upon failing to find a scientific explanation for the mysteries of the world. Som’s father, a scientist happened to start wondering if there is a “First Cause that would explain everything, whose nature might lie behind the natures of all the rest” (Labyrinth 27). He often slipped into melancholia. Coming back from Elephanta walking on the beach his father brooded. He had long silences interrupted by momentary elation. He had belief in science but “Science cannot solve the problem of the causes” (Labyrinth 26). He used to give his explanation thus:

There are processes in our plant that use certain methods for providing heat. But the same could be provided by totally different means. Theoretically, you could concentrate the light of the sun . . . and actuate some of our processes or . . .
the scientist who developed the process is the cause or the workers . . . or my mother who bore me or her father. You see how complicated it gets . . . There are causes behind causes . . . like the geological periods . . . (26)

Thus he has been brooding for a long time over the First Cause. Another important concern of his was the fundamental unity in the construction of the universe. “Everything happens in cycles. Birth, Growth, Decline and Death” (Labyrinth 26). He says:

Couldn’t there be a First Cause that would explain everything, whose nature might be behind the natures of all the rest? I spoke of heat. All light could have a first cause too. So could all sound. So could all love. Hate. Anger. They too are energies. Som realizes that the scientific enquiry leads him nowhere. (27)

But his father’s sudden death leaves a void in the mind of Som. Seeing his father’s empty room with his bag ready for his flight to Brussels, his wedding photograph, his spectacles all leave him with drooping spirits. But his father as a scientist, brilliant and diligent, alert and speculative had left a great influence on Som as a boy.

On the other hand, Som’s Epicurean and hedonistic grandfather was “a man–about town, a gourmet, fond of women and drink. He had mistresses among the young starlets” (Labyrinth 156). He was a
womanizer and boozer. He was a man of impulse and the satisfaction of the senses was all that he desired. He was “reckless, happy, unburdened by philosophical speculation” (*Labyrinth* 156). Any reference to God embarrassed him. He used to disappear when there were *Kirtans* at the house. He was a loving friend but a ferocious enemy. The father representing reason and intellect and the grandfather representing senses and instinct, two opposite influences inflict Som. He is fully aware of it. “I had inherited the afflictions of both of them . . . bestowed upon me by my genes, I was in unbearable entanglements” (*Labyrinth* 156-57). Som develops into a womanizer, a boozer, and a high-strung impulsive man. At the same time he is also thirsty for knowledge.

As Som’s mother was a religious woman, science and religion create a conflict within Som. She had profound faith and endurance and had the will and courage to suffer for faith. Though she had developed cancer, she was never saddened by the thought of death; rather she enjoyed life thinking that she would be saved and cured by the wooden image of Krishna. She would not take medicine believing that God could cure her. But she died. Naturally the blood of his mother flowing in his veins cries for faith and the abiding love for God. Science and religion, two opposing poles cause a strain within Som.
Som then consults many psychiatrists who said a lot of things that either made “too obvious a sense or no sense at all” (*Labyrinth* 73). At last he gets the explanation to his malaise by an old psychiatrist:

> It is possible to conceive this world as being populated not with people . . . but with souls. . . . A soul might also imagine that his wants, desires are the best met through another soul, if the soul is the right one. Until he meets this right soul there is no peace. When you meet the right soul then things might be peaceful . . . (74)

This explanation comes closer to Jung’s theory of the union of “animus” and “anima” or “the Sankhya philosophy which deals with the union of ‘purush’ with ‘prakriti’. Until this encounter takes place, discontent corrodes away the “animus” (S. Sharma, “Arun Joshi” 84). Som as a rationalist demands proof of the existence of souls. He is full of contradictions. “Like Jungian or Pirandellian man, he is full of inner disharmony and is a loose cluster of masks or fragments of identity” (Pandey 116).

Som Bhaskar has developed an affair with Leela Sabnis, a young professor, who is widely read and highly intellectual. “She is a professor, descendant of a long line of professors, scholar, an M.A. and Ph.D from Michigan, something else from London” (*Labyrinth* 75). Som has done a paper on Pascal at Havard and has studied the sermons of Buddha at
Sarnath. He realizes that Leela Sabnis is the best choice for him as his companion. He loves her, but she is very much engrossed in her studies. “The flat of hers . . . [is] crammed with books. Books on the floor, books against the walls, on the toilet, inside he laundry bag, on the bed” (Labyrinth 77). She is a scholar in her own right way. Som has to remove a dozen books around her in order to make love to her. Som, as a lover is impatient to see her reading whenever he approaches her. Books above, books beneath, books on all her sides and Leela is found amidst heap of books. Even at the time of love making, she remembers Descartes. She is bold, courageous and rational. She is above passion and emotion. She has proudly accepted her divorce and says that her husband divorced her for reading too much. Leela is dispassionate and she can speak with conviction about anything under the sun. She is capable of diagnosing the psychological malaise of Som and fathoms his troubles. She says at his face, “You haven’t got the stamina, for that, I know. You haven’t got the faith. You have always been a skeptic. You always will be. You always will be” (Labyrinth 114). In Leela’s world, there should be no dilemma, no uncertainty and no doubt.

As Som Bhaskar feels that he is psychologically distanced from Leela, he abruptly ends his affair with her. In the beginning, his meeting with Leela Sabnis gives him a trust on the theories of various philosophers and she symbolizes western culture. V. Dwivedi says:
Som’s meeting with Dr. Leela Sabnis, a Michigan educated lady gives a thrust to the theories of various philosophers and thinkers like Freud, Descartes and Spinoza. For him, she symbolizes western culture. Though a scholar, she is proud of having been divorced by her husband for her love of books and also of leading a free life. (107)

Som calls her a mechanic of the spirit but she turns out to be totally incapable of giving him the answers he has been looking for. In spite of all her reading of Freud and American and European philosophers, she is unable to solve the problem of Som. She finds the cause of Som’s problems is “his separation of the world of matter from the world of spirit” (Labyrinth 81). Moreover Leela was crazy for music. Apart from books, she had a great collection of records – “Music always turned her on: Rock, and hard rock, and soul and, of course, the Beatles. The drums, the guitars, the voices set some bit or the other of me vibrating, just as the tantric rituals do” (Labyrinth 54). Som realizes that Leela is not the person that he wanted and his fission in his psyche makes him alienate Leela Sabnis.

Somehow Som Bhaskar’s taste and views do not go with that of Leela Sabnis. She represents the American standard of living. Though she is divorced very soon after her marriage, she does not care about it and she takes it lightly. Leela Sabnis feels that life is not a business, but a game that has a winner and a loser. All his life Som has been seeking for
someone who has the capacity to resolve the contradictions of his life. He does not find it in his wife, nor in Leela Sabnis, the clever professor who could quote from Freud or Descartes. Som says, “What I needed, perhaps, was something, somebody, somewhere in which the two worlds combined” (Labyrinth 82). She as an embodiment of reason, tries to explain Som’s sickness through analysis. She tells, “You are too much high strung. Without reason. You are a neurotic. A compulsive fornicator” (Labyrinth 80). While she offers Som the joy of physical love, she analyses his problems. She tries to help him by prescribing Descartes’s Cogito ergo sum without much success for the simple reason that he is one who keeps the two worlds – the world of matter and the world of spirit – separate. What she tells of Som Bhaskar can be applied to most of the men characters of Joshi.

Though a born millionaire and owner of a gigantic plastic industry, Som Bhaskar suffers from an unbearable hunger. He is married to an extraordinary woman named Geeta who is faithful, intelligent and educated and yet he suffers from the so called hunger, “Hunger of the body. Hunger of the spirit” (Labyrinth 11). This hunger in him is the consequence of his heredity and environment in which he lives.

Som Bhaskar’s moral lapses are tolerated and his psychological ailments are treated skillfully by Geeta, the wife of Som Bhaskar who appears as a much enlightened woman and could be called a champion of
women’s liberation. She is a real house wife, who tolerates her husband’s immoral acts too. She has no complaint, no reproach for Som’s adulteries, “Where she has every right to the adulteries of his body, she had only taken to the cleansing of the soul” (Labyrinth 62). Geeta is like Som’s mother, a child of another world traversing like a plane at a higher attitude, “a corridor separate from the dark vestibule” (Labyrinth 69). She is not possessive or suspicious and not a fool or indifferent woman. Though panic and despair overtake her at times, Geeta tries to put an end to them. The desires and passions of Som Bhaskar comes to an end with the tactism of Geeta. Though she too has trauma within her, she has the capacity to overcome it. Padma says, “It is Som’s wife Geeta who has been saving him from physical death” (36). She is the only woman who is matured enough to adapt to the circumstances and she patiently accepts the pain and agony that she undergoes. She is like a pillar who lifts up the falling moral values in Som Bhaskar and rescues him physically, after diagnosing his psychological ailments and treating them successfully. Geeta tries her best to resolve the problems of Som Bhaskar.

Som is a sinner because he wants to possess everything in life and he desires to attain his wants through some source. His interest is not on his wife but on Anuradha, the mistress of Aftab Rai. He gets mental peace on the sight of Anuradha. Som wishes Anuradha to be nobody’s wife. Raizada states “Som Bhaskar, a millionaire industrialist, is relentlessly
driven by undefined hungers of his turbulent inner world to possess a woman for whom he lustrs with fervish intensity” (73). The labyrinth in his life, his western education, money and Anuradha make him confused and create a feeling of dissatisfaction in everything that he sees. He suffers a massive heart attack but is miraculously cured. Filled with fear of death and doubt about life in this dark world of problems and pains, Som becomes disillusioned.

Another reason for Som Bhaskar’s agony is his rootlessness as he is unable to come to terms with the world and with himself. His desire is to know if there is a mystery in life. He is vexed with the thought of death. If death is to wind up everything in life, he thinks there is no point in running madly with outstretched arms in the pursuit of “little pleasures” or “little vendettas” of life (Labyrinth 65). He also has an inborn fear of death when he sees gravestones. Fear of death is termed as “death anxiety” in psychology. Like any other anxiety, this is the “emotional state in question, directly connected to a specific stimulus” (“Fear”). Once at a dargah in Delhi, Som feels, “there was nothing I loathed more than I loathed the sight of death and here, amidst the cenotaphs and the gravestones, there was death with a vengeance. I felt tricked” (Labyrinth 15). Ever since his mother’s death, he has been in the grip of fear-psychosis. When he confides this fear of death to Dr. K, he tells him, “it is not death but life you are bothered about” (Labyrinth 203). Like Hamlet,
Som shrinks from death. He tries to comprehend the mystery of life and death through logistics and reasoning, but these mental exercises are rendered infructuous.

Bombay, the seat of fashion and luxury seems prosaic to Som to afford any romance and adventure. The people with whom he has associated like Leela Sabnis, Mr. Thapar and Dr. K. are forcing him to act against his will. He is tired of the pressures of city life. He meets Anuradha, the sprightly woman of the labyrinthine Lal Haveli located in the ancient city of Benares and he unconsciously identifies that it is she whom he has been longing for all his life. He met her for the first time when he was already thirty-five. He was irresistibly drawn towards her. He realizes that Anuradha is the centre of his attraction. Her antique appearance captivates Som. He describes:

I had come only to talk of business. I was in a hurry. I was always in a hurry then, like a hare chased by unseen hounds. I had noticed Anuradha like one notices a monument: tall, handsome, ruined . . . . She did not look clever. She wore costumes of twenty years ago – brocade sari, large gold borders, sleeves up to the elbow, antique jewellery. She was obsolete . . . . (12)

She is dark-eyed, sexy and brings before Som the images and memories of his childhood. Everything about her is extraordinary, exotic and elusive.
The quaint house in which she lives with a lover strikes as being grotesquely labyrinthine. Lal Haveli, where she lives with Aftab and Benares with its streets filled with danger and piety present a contrast to the matter-of-fact reality in Bombay. Som feels that Lal Haveli is a maze. “The house was built with either no plan or with a most meticulous plan . . . it was labyrinthine” (Labyrinth 35). Som finds that his spirit is revitalised in the spell of Lal Haveli and the charm of Anuradha. She casts a spell on Som. The architecture of Lal Haveli, Azizum’s enchanting dance and song recitals conjure up images of Som’s past life.

Som Bhaskar is invited by Aftab Rai to attend the reception conducted by the Plastic Manufacturers’ Association. It was at Delhi where they stayed in an Intercontinental Hotel, Som associated himself with Anuradha, the mistress of the company owner Aftab Rai. Though it was a business meeting regarding Aftab’s shares, he could not conduct the meeting successfully. Som Bhaskar one of the invitees, did not concentrate on the meeting but on Anuradha, who charmed him. “She was like a Moghul Monument” (Sinha 103). Som was captivated by the looks of Anuradha. He was impressed and attracted by her beauty. He describes:

I had noticed Anuradha . . . she had been transformed by the lighting. It had leveled to pits in her face, brought out the unquenched fires that constantly burnt in those haunted eyes. Even her antique costume had come alive. It lent her a
personality very different from any I had her known. She was attractive . . . (13)

Aftab Rai seems to be a peculiar person. His great grandfather was a zamindar, a courtier of Wajid Ali Shah. They fled to Benaras after the mutiny, though they lived there for more than hundred years. “Aftab is a secretive sort of a man” (Labyrinth 13). Though his ancestors had colourful and active life, they were pushed out of Lucknow by the British. Aftab is a man of suffering and has undergone torments of hellish life. He has realized that money, wealth and health have no real value. Som tries to tempt him with huge sum but he is not interested in big balance. He even does not mind if Som buys his shares. “He is a practitioner, a Sadhaka, who is practicing Sadhana quietly. He has known tantra. He has known Sufism” (Labyrinth 97). He explains the essence of a tantra Sadhana to Som. “You have to sacrifice before you are given. You can’t have your cake and eat it too” (Labyrinth 166). Aftab has experienced that there is peace and there is certitude in this realization. He has sacrificed everything, but he is not discontented. The loss does not make him bitter. Rather he informs Som with the assurance of a prophet that “God compensates you for whatever He takes away from you” (Labyrinth 132). He says he has no wants, and all he wants is to have peaceful death. Unlike Som, Aftab has no fear of death. He knows fully well about death. He knows that death is the last labyrinth. He is usually secretive but rarely
he opens up. He likes Som but he despairs of his obstinate questioning and once he reveals his world to Som, “you don’t understand us. You work by logic. By your brain. You are proud of your education . . . . There is an understanding that only suffering and humiliation bring. Anuradha has that. Even I have a bit of it. You are empty of that understanding.” (Labyrinth 207). Thus Joshi employs Aftab as a foil to Som in order to reveal Som’s agony.

Chance permits Som Bhaskar to be with Anuradha and that promotes an affair between them. Wherever Aftab goes for business venture, he takes Anuradha and Som with him. The frequent visits of Som with Aftab pave way for Som’s intimacy with Anuradha. Both of them are not able to concentrate on their business because their attention is always centered on Anuradha.

Som Bhaskar is often haunted by some strange thoughts which at times will shoot out in various angles in the form of melancholy and dilemma. His psychic imbalance leads him to end up his life. His major problem that hovers within his soul is his desire, the desire to attain his wants. He cannot understand himself first of all and does not know the reason for his agony. He requests Anuradha to listen to him. He says, “Anuradha, if there is a God and if you have met him and if he is willing to listen, then Anuradha my soul, tell him, tell this God to have mercy upon me” (Labyrinth 223). Anuradha “is gifted with a special vision and her
eyes are filled with understanding” (*Labyrinth* 100). Som Bhaskar feels that Anuradha could resolve all his contradictions and revitalize him. She is so familiar and comforting to him but still, she is elusive and distant.

In spite of having a faithful wife and two loving children, Som Bhaskar craves for Anuradha because she is the “right soul” for him and that she can drive him “towards a higher goal” (*Labyrinth* 74). Anuradha cannot be completely owned or possessed by Som because she lives with Aftab. She is a former film actress. Som uses both force and love to win her. Som starts buying the shares of Aftab’s company to make him financially ruined so that he can get involved passionately with Anuradha. He states, “each morning, far from cooling my passion, served to fuel them. I lived on the nourishment of the shades shown by her naked body under the chromatic shower” (*Labyrinth* 121-22). His love making with Anuradha is an ecstatic experience, very different from that of the one Som had with Leela or Geeta. Som expresses his feeling thus:

They coupled high above the earth, independent of time and space, like a pair of asteroids, locked in each other’s gravity. Silent, unable to communicate except what we communicated through the thrust and push and pull of our bodies, we circled high above the empty cities. (107)
Yet, there is distance between them. In order to diminish it, he takes her to a Himalayan resort and then to Bombay only to be completely merged in her.

Arun Joshi presents Anuradha as a lady with divine nature like Bilasia in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. According to Padma:

Som like all the other heroes of Arun Joshi, looks for a redemptive principle in woman’s love. His relationship with Anuradha appears to vindicate the psychiatrist’s prophecy that the minute his ideal-mate is discovered by Som, the little adulteries in his life will disappear of their own accord. (34)

Anyone who comes near her, experiences romantic feelings and her company gives comfort and contentment. She is an illegitimate child born of an insane mother in Bihar Sharif in a one-roomed house where her mother earned her livelihood by singing for strangers. She was taken away by one of her lovers who killed her with a broken whiskey bottle. Anuradha, whose name was Meera then was left motherless. Her background does not sound good and hence, she has to take life as it comes. In her early childhood Anuradha was taken care of by her aunt who had given her some education. The trauma in her increased when she was put up in a convent where she underwent humiliation. Anuradha was alone in the hostel as she had not made any friends there. The emptiness, the void in her, is due to the loss of maternal affection and her early hostel life.
Anuradha’s aunt used her for money. So she was devoid of warmth and affection and had no one to take care of her. “No other human being has suffered as much as Anuradha” (Labyrinth 189-90) said the doctor who saved her from committing suicide. She was molested as a child and underwent many sufferings. She had to witness “murders, suicides, every conceivable evil of the world” (Labyrinth 190). She became a film star and was seduced by many producers. She left the profession with the help of Aftab and she has been living with him without any formal marriage. She says, “You can’t marry everyone you love. So, why marry anyone at all?” (Labyrinth 43). She desires to be no one’s wife. When Som asks her if she would like to be married to some one, she says, “I can imagine I am married to Aftab. I can imagine I am married to you. My mother used to imagine she was married to Krishna” (Labyrinth 128).

Anuradha is a woman of obscure origin, she is a monument to Som. Though lowly born and scarcely educated, Anuradha has a wisdom higher than Som’s. In her own way she is fond of Som and yields to him on many occasions. Possessing Anuradha is a challenge to Som and this is definitely a part of the romantic quest of Som Bhaskar who is a rationalist and a believer in intelligence and expediency. There is always some conflict between Anuradha and Som Bhaskar, because the one is materialistic and the other is spiritual. She pretends to be crazy with Lord Krishna and involves herself in devoting her time to God. Anuradha is
gifted with a special vision, “a vantage point high above the earth from where she could see the melee below as ordinary men could not” (

Labyrinth 58). Her friendship with others is not serious but fun.

Anuradha is a riddle, a puzzle and a mystery to the people around her. No one is able to understand her character and behaviour. The confusion and chaos that she undergoes within her makes her not to take any decision on her own. She appears to be friendly with some one, but she is not able to fix herself deep in one’s heart. Her religious faith and her attachment with Aftab stop her from coming close to any one who is interested in her. One cannot see Anuradha being possessive with anyone. She tries to bring Som also into the spiritual line, but the ideological clash between them stops Som coming into her line. “And then, there is the clash of cultures. Som could never understand the superstitious faith of his mother in Krishna, nor of Anuradha in the astrology of Benarus Sadhus and the tantra-mantra goings-on in Aftab Rai’s Lal Haveli” (Guruprasad 104). Her miserable past has made her stay detached and composed whatever the circumstances may be.

Anuradha’s indifference agonizes Som. Her beauty is her strength. As a devotee of God, she must follow some moral code. But she makes every individual who is interested in her crazy for her. Aftab also runs crazy over her saying, “I can’t live without her . . . endlessly I walk the mazes . . . night turns into day . . . day into night . . . I knock my head
against the wall” (Labyrinth 222). Altogether, Anuradha uses the relationship of men as a temporary relation for her bereaved soul. It is a kind of escapism from the sordid torments of the world and circumstance that she lives.

Suddenly Som suffers from a second heart attack and Anuradha callously deserts him and goes to Gargi, the deaf, mute god-woman, to seek God’s help in saving Som’s life. Gargi is the daughter of a prince who later turned a Sufi, a Pir. He lived with Aftab’s father and gave sight to the partly blind Aftab when he was a child. It was a miracle. Anuradha makes Gargi to work a miracle to save Som’s life and promised to give him up for good at the behest of Gargi. Anuradha disappears from Som’s life. His Doctor Kashyap (Dr. K) firmly states that only a miracle has saved the life of Som and not medicine or his will power. Som’s lust for Anuradha exceeds all limits but he is thrown away by her. At the height of their love affair, the enigmatic Anuradha disappears. She embodies the concept of sacrifice. Explaining this, Joshi says, “Anuradha’s role in the novel is to lead Bhaskar through the subconscious. Then he loses her. I was hinting at the old classical dictum that you do not get anything without sacrificing something. So she is to be taken away from him” (“A Winner’s Secret”). Her rejection makes him fissured. He tours around the world with his wife to suppress his growing desire for Anuradha but he is more discontented with life than before. It is commented:
Her [Anuradha’s] conduct is beyond Som’s comprehension. She accepts, rejects or flees from him without warning . . . he is hell-bent upon finding Anuradha. His frantic pursuance to search her leads him through absurd situations. Som eventually learns that she had consecrated to sacrifice her love for him in order to save him from death . . . . In a desperate effort to flee from him she disappears in the last labyrinth. ("The Last Labyrinth")

Though Som enjoys physical pleasures with Anuradha and earlier with Leela Sabnis or Geeta, he is not happy because of his spiritual hollowness and greedy desires. Wanting to possess the desired objects by crook or by hook is a sin. He has not attempted to suppress his desires through spiritualism or faith in God. He is the representative of the Western Indian aristocracy which has lost its spiritual roots. The labyrinths of life can be resolved through intuition, salvation and faith rather than reason and intellect. Som has to completely surrender his intellectual rationalism and destroy his carnal desires in order to get peace and solace in his psyche.

Som meets Gargi in Benares to seek solace. Gargi is deaf and dumb because she listens only to the divine and communicates with souls. “She is the symbol of the Great Mother” (Bande 154). She is the only person who understands the “orchestra of discontent” of Som. Living in a sort of
labyrinth, she attracts the rational Som Bhaskar in spite of himself. “Once again, against my will, I was drawn helplessly into the labyrinth of their mysterious world” (Labyrinth 60). To reach her, Som crosses the river with Dr. K. and others. This too is like a ritual. The dark powerful mallah rows them through the dark river as if it “was not Ganga but some unknown stream, in some unknown segment of the universe, leading to reality that I had not yet known” (Labyrinth 49). This remark reveals “[Som’s] intuitive recognition of a primordial force which is both life-giving and life-sustaining. Gargi is not his biological mother, but she is the giver of life because she had saved him during his hopeless illness. She is the archetypal mother who understands everything” (Bande 154-55).

Som has faith on Gargi. She is wise, aged and inarticulate, a mysterious figure who compels reverence. She provides the missing link between his material hunger and spiritual craving. When she hands Som the shares of Rai, she takes away Anuradha like a strict disciplinarian mother, for the material and the spiritual cannot co-exist in man. Her presence is soothing and pacifying. She has transcended the limits of time and space. She saves the life of Som. Her touch works as a balm on ailing Aftab. Her words refresh Anuradha and her look tranquils Som. Gargi is a living proof of God’s presence. Som feels a mysterious urge in her presence to realize sensuality and sophistication, the world where mind grows and heart withers. The mystical urge to realize his identity
possesses him and the dirt and filth clouding his vision are being cleaned up by his suffering. He asks Gargi to help him. He asks her to confirm that God exists. Gargi tells him “We are all children trying to reach up to a crack in the door to peep into a room” (Labyrinth 214). His warring emotions get reconciled when he opens up and lays bare his agonies before Gargi, Anuradha and Aftab. When Som realizes the existence of God, he is at peace with himself. He feels that he is cleansed of his sin of immorality and excessive desire. Joshi believes that “it is very difficult to steer one’s way through life without God, or atleast concepts like right or wrong” (Bannerji 6). Som has moved on the road to realization. Som finally goes to the mountains to encounter God and to get peace within himself. His journey to the mountains makes him realize that his lust, revenge and bundle of shares actually hold nothing for him and he feels utterly defeated. He reflects on his entire failings and excessive desire and understands that no external system can cure man of the malaise because the malaise lay within him and the solution to it too should be from within.

Arun Joshi’s protagonists progress from alienation to existential affirmation. Joshi records the actual experiences of man in his novels. He experiments with the medium of literature for studying man’s predicament, particularly in the light of motives responsible for his action and the reaction of his action on his psyche.
The central message of the two novels *The Apprentice* and *The Last Labyrinth* is that understanding or enlightenment will be accorded only to those who have a whole psyche and that the most effective balm to heal the bruises on the psyche is the balm of love. Sheila offers this balm of love to Ratan and he in turn works for the betterment of the labourer community discarding his old self of cocooning with non-attachment. His agony due to his guilt decreases as he wipes the shoes of the devotees at the temple. It is Gargi who exercises tremendous influence on Som Bhaskar’s life and resolves his dilemma. The voids of Som’s loneliness are filled with a divine radiance when he is in the presence of Gargi. Both the protagonists Ratan Rathor and Som Bhaskar in their own way have taken perilous efforts to fill their emotional lacuna caused by the agony of guilt and sin. In their anxiety to end their trauma, they have crossed the dark mossy labyrinths of their soul.

Arun Joshi’s *forte* is his preoccupation with man and his situation. He explores the chaos and hollowness in the mind of the contemporary generation. In *The City and The River*, Joshi exhibits the power-psychosis of a ruler of a city whose diplomacy causes destruction of a whole generation of people as he is moving his coin to make his dream of becoming a king come true. Hence the next chapter deals with the **Dream and Despotism** of the Grand Master.