Chapter – IV

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas

Hari Mohan Prasad in his book Arun Joshi remarks –

“Crisis of self and a quest for fulfillment, the fin mot of The Foreigner, continues to be the central experience of Arun Joshi next novel The Strange Case of Billy Biswas. The deeper significance of the work can properly be discerned if it is explicated both as an indictment of the phony, hot – shot, sordid modern culture and as an embodiment of Purush – Prakriti unification, particularly in the context of Sankhya philosophy. The novel articulates, almost with the intensity of Lawrence and Conrad human craving for the primordial, the ellan vital of our anthropological heritage. In the retreat of Mr. Billy Biswas from the modern waste land of Delhi to the ancient Garden of Eden in Maikala Jungle, from the smothering, clutch of Meena to the primeval possessiveness of Bilasia, Purush meets Prakriti serving the two ends of evolution, outlined by Sankhya, enjoyment (bhogo) and liberation or Sansara as well as Kaivalvya.”

“Arun Joshi’s second novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is often described as existentialist in certain aspects. It is concerned with the crisis of self, the problem of identity and the quest for fulfillment. In one of his interviews, Joshi himself admitted that he was led to writing to explore, that mysterious underworld, which is the human soul. He writes for expressing his own understanding of the world and his own true self as he replies to M.R. Dua in an interview: “My novels are essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and of myself.” In another interview with Purabi Banerji he admits that he has been influenced by the existentialists like Albert Camus, Jean – Paul Sartre and Soren Kierkegaard. Like the existentialist writers, Joshi is mainly concerned with man’s feeling of anxiety and alienation at great length. *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* develops the theme of anxiety and alienation more effectively than the treatment meted out in his first novel, *The Foreigner*. It is meet to quote K.R.S. Iyengar’s apt remarks here: “In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), Arun Joshi has carried, his exploration of the consciousness
of hapless rootless people a stage further, and has revealed to our
gaze new gas – chambers of self – forged misery.”

In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, Arun Joshi explores the
contemporary man’s inner crisis of being isolated from the whole
apparatus of convention and ritual of society upholding our glorious
cultural ethos. With an admirable dexterity of material and a controlling
of the weight of the details in the first person narrative, Arun Joshi
manages to explore the protagonist’s psychic and psychological instincts.
If in *The Foreigner*, Joshi’s first novel, the crisis of identity &
uncommon psyche and different mental frame arises out of conflict
between three different cultures, in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* it
is a conflict between more basic and greater forces, namely civilization
and primitive life or between nature and art. In the case of Billy, his
experiences are mainly intellectual and psychic and he is a lonely quester,
where as Sindi in *The Foreigner* is a person who is assisted by other in
his search. It is a movement from the almost contemplative world of
Sindi Oberoi to the dynamic, vital and active world of Billy Biswas.
If *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is to be studied from the point of view of psychoanalysis, the character of Billy Biswas should be first taken into consideration. His character needs to be analyzed through a psychoanalytical approach because every incident and episode connected with his life reflects his primitivism, desire to live life as a tribal and to part with the urban way of life though he is educated abroad and happens to be a son of an ambassador. Every choice that Billy makes in the process of this novel, every stand that he takes at the time of critical situation in his life, needs to be analyzed from the psychological point of view. This is because it gives a chance to peep into his inner landscape and dig out the hidden Subconscious and Unconscious of Bimal Biswas.

Arun Joshi in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* turns to the hero’s inner self, to the inner man in him to expose what he is inside as he had done in the case of Sindi Oberoi in *The Foreigner*, where Sindi is a lonely individual wanting to love and be loved but afraid of committing himself. In the same way as Sindi is misjudged by the Khemkas, Billy is also misunderstood by his father who thinks that man is governed only by engineering and law and nothing else. Billy longs to burst the spirit’s sleep and comprehend the magnetic pull of the Chandtola cliff. Billy’s behaviour, that is his disappearance to the forest, poses a problem to his
father and all other who know him even as it poses a problem to the reader. His behaviour is shrouded in mystery and he becomes an enigmatic figure. But this enigma can be resolved if one tires to interpret his behaviour in terms of certain psychological and anthropological facts at work. In fact, it can be explained in term of Jung’s theory of the Collective Unconscious. In addition to the immediate consciousness which is thoroughly personal in nature and which we believe to be only an empirical psyche, there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature, which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre–existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give a definite form to certain psychic contents. However, if we consider the tremendous power that lie hidden in the mythological and religious spheres in man the etiological significance of the archetype appears less fantastic. He only expresses something, which millions of people before him have believed.

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is a strident criticism testifying to a loss of confidence in the Anglicized Indian tradition of high culture, a tradition more flowed than its western parent. Arun Joshi needed Billy’s urkraft – a primitive force to see and show the sterility of this tradition,
which we ourselves do not see, and show. Arun Joshi through Billy project such a psychological frame that anyone could easily believe in counter – culture as opposed to the thinness of the social structures of the Anglicized ruling class of India. Though not identical to but in many ways reminiscent of the Satpura Hills is New York’s Harlem, a sequel to the western loss of innocence. Harlem is not simply the product of a generation gone awry. It came in to being as an enduring indictment of the larger society, the white dominated distortion which brought in to being the sore it grew into. It was also a witness to the psyche of the American south floundering on the rock of the ever – deepening bourgeois relations. In American Literature, the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s worked as an undercurrent giving the Blacks a distinct culture, and psyche, totally opposed to the technological industrial capitalism as to pre – capitalist, traditional southern agrarianism. The Great Migration of the American blacks from the South to the North was not merely a physical migration but, in essence, a process of urbanization seeking not only an ethic but also a class identity. It should be interesting to contrast the Harlem Renaissance with the New Criticism, which was the white man’s response to the black cultural resurgence. That totally projected the psychological frame of the white man. The formalist emphasis on the New Criticism was an up short of the proven debility of capitalism to confront its crises on its own, and of its helpless escape to pre – capitalist
modes such as Southern agrarianism so that the latter take care of the crippling social contradictions, which threatened to wreck the society. While the Harlem Renaissance tried to politicize art, the formalists not knowing how to confront the crisis between the decaying and the emerging attempted to turn life to aesthetics. It is given in the nature of man’s trials and tribulations that history occasions certain crucial points of conjunction. While the Black used this turning point to advance to the center of sharpening contradictions, the White ruling class recoiled from its responsibility and sought to snap the life – sustaining bonds between the people and its culture.

Harlem Renaissance proved to be a profound expression of the revival of the culture of black people and of the demand for positive images in art and literature. It was like the revival of the psyche of the black people. It sought to make literature an active agent, and not a life negating aesthetics, historically the breeding ground of fascism.

The Harlem and the white ruling class polarity are not without some specific interest to the student of Indian Literature. One finds in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas a similar polarity albeit on a lower key
between the Satpura bhils and New Delhi’s Anglicized ruling class, the two making a taut nexus of conflicting forces. The two represents two different psyches. It was, therefore, not surprising that the novel opens in New York’s Harlem, the black ghetto of America. It was a conscious choice of novel’s protagonist Billy Biswas to live in Harlem, not at all a safe and dignified place by middle – class standards. It represents Billy’s psyche that he chooses to live in Harlem than to any other clean places though he came from a good family. Billy is not anchorless. He is born and brought up in a fairly comfortable background. He comes “from the upper – crust of Indian society.” His family has “all claims of aristocracy.” It had originally come from Bengal. His grandfather had been the Prime Minister of a famous Princely state in Orissa. His father after completing his law studies at the Inner temple had practiced law at Allahabad and Delhi. He had also been the Indian Ambassador to a European country. Though having such a polished background, the novelist mentions that during his study at abroad Billy chooses to have his rented flat in that locality, which can be considered the locality of not the white polished, and aristocrat Americans but black Negros who are more attached to a tribal way of life. He does not prefer Manhattan area, he prefers Harlem, thickly populated with the community of black.
Even Romi, Billy’s best friend notices his place to be strange. When Romi, the narrator of this novel met Billy for the very first time, he complains about his housing problem at that moment Billy offers Romi to live with him in his flat. When Romi reaches Billy’s place he at once notices certain strange urge in Billy. Romi says that he is one of those rare men who have poise without pose. It is at this juncture, where Romi says:

“His apartment was appalling. It was on the second floor of a tenement house that housed at least a dozen other families. It was situated in what must have been one of the worse slums of New York City…. The shutter hung loose; so did the mailboxes in the hall. Nearly all the glass in the front door had been knocked out…. The stairs were cluttered with empty beer cans, newsprint, children, and an occasional condom. At night you could hear the rats scampering among the garbage drums.”

This is the first instance in the novel, which demands psychoanalysis of Billy Biswas. Generally, an average Indian who migrates from India to abroad and particularly to a western country of either the U.S. or the U.K. prefers to be more attached to the community of white and tries to live like that community. Billy’s attitude parts with this normal tendency and
prefers the locality of the black, which can be considered an exceptional case in normal situation, but for him it is a way of life. The psychoanalysis on such a choice made by Billy indicates that he finds himself more at case and comfortable in the company of traditional and tribal people. In fact, for him meeting, mixing and living with the people of westernized culture would be something like a fish out of water. His choice of Harlem is the sign of his inner conditioning and comfort with the tribal lot. Of course, his friend like Romi may take it as something strange and uneven but the strange case of Billy Biswas is strange for others who are his friends related to him. It is not strange to him because for him that is how he would like to live his life.

The other dramatic situation, which demands psychoanalysis in the present novel, is how Billy selected anthropology as his subject. Billy is always plagued by some kind of inner crisis and duality in his character. He was sent to America by his father to study Engineering but the parents never knew that their Bimal had switched over to Anthropology in which he got a Ph.D. degree from an American University. In fact Billy went against the wish and will of his father who wanted his son Billy to be an I.A.S. or I.P.S. officer but the psychoanalysis of Billy indicates that some early seeds of love for tribal life were sown in him which in course of
time sprouted up in the form of his love for Anthropology. He prefers to be a student of Anthropology and tribal life because he found himself one with it. It made him live life at the command of his mind and not at the command of external elements like his parents or friends or even his wife Meena Chatterjee. As a student of Anthropology Billy was a thorough explorer. He makes it clear to his roommate Romi:

“All that I want to do in life is to visit the places they describe, meet the people who live there, find out about the aboriginals of the world.”

Billy’s case is very strange because at the time when he was in America, his father was a judge of India’s Supreme Court. In fact, Billy himself became a lecturer of the Delhi University, after having completed his Ph.D. in Anthropology. He has a very good friend like Romi who is so much affectionate to him. Yet Billy, it so appears, has little interest in the phoney, hotshot and sordid modern civilization. The external attraction of the so-called civilized set – up of society does not matter at all for him. He is much interested in the exploration of his inner being. In fact, we can say that he wanted to peep inside his deep layers of his mind and find out what exactly he wants. Romi rightly remarks:
“If life’s meaning lies not in the glossy surfaces of our pretensions but in those dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish forever, hidden from the dazzling light of the sun, then I do not know of any man who sought it more doggedly and, having received a signal, abandoned himself so recklessly to its cell. In brief, I know of no other man who so desperately pursued the tenuous thread of existence to its bitter end, no matter what trails of glory or shattered hearts he left behind in his turbulent wake.”

Billy is a person who wants to follow his Id. His Id is so powerful that even the Ego is unable to make a balance between Id and Super ego. His go tries to make balance between the societal norms and the desires of his Id but it fails. Billy often does what he likes. He is not at good terms with his family members. Though he lives with them, is brought up by them then to he feels lonely. He is always disturbed by his different psyche. He feels like a stranger to this pompous civilized world though he is born and brought up in the civilized setup society. He writes to Tuula Lindgreen:

“It seems, my dear Tuula, that there are certain questions popping up from the deep layers of my mind. Who am I? Who are my parents? My wife? My child? At times, I look at them sitting at the dinner table, and for a passing moment. I cannot decide who they
are or what accident of creation has brought us together.”

(underlined mine)

Billy is aware that he is a confused being and the deeper layers of his personality make him a psychologically torn human being. His is the predicament of an alienated personality who never feels at home in the modern bourgeois society. He is an attempt to find viable alternatives for, “the most futile cry of man… in…smart society.” Romi, the omnipresent narrator and Billy’s best friend conveys the same at the very beginning of the novel:

“As I grow old, I realize that the most futile cry of man is his impossible wish to be understood. The attempt to understand is probably even more futile. If in spite of this I propose to relate Billy’s story, it is not so much because I claim to have understood him as it is on account of a deep and unrelieved sense of wonder that in the middle of the twentieth century, in the heart of Delhi’s smart society, there should have lived a man of such extraordinary obsessions.”
Romi rightly describes Billy as, “a man of extra ordinary obsessions” and “that extra ordinary sensitivity to the world that used to be the essence of Billy.” He is an unusual person of brilliant intellect, profound sensibility and extraordinary obsessions. In all respects, he is ‘rare’, ‘extra ordinary’ and ‘distinguished’. One is bound to notice “the strong, rather British accent of his speech”, “that soft cultivated voice,” and “the words (having) a cadence, a compulsive quality that engaged you in spite of yourself.” Romi has much affection for Billy, and discovers: “Billy had almost inhumanly sharp eyes.” He is almost “distracted” by “the look on his face. His expression was a mixture of nearly all those emotions that one tends to associate with a great predicament.” Billy always carries a “singular air” and has a “peculiar intensity of concentration.” Later Romi observes that he had neither the imagination nor the obsessive predilection of Billy Biswas.

One more incident that demands psychoanalysis is Billy’s experience of Bhuvneshwar and his visit to Konark temple. In fact, Billy once reminisces in one of his memory – monologue to Romi about his first emotional and psychological setback that he has received when he was passing through the stage of adolescent. When Billy was a boy of 14, he had gone to the place of his maternal uncle in the company of his mother.
Billy was totally free from the burden of Dehradun School and so he read some magazines of his uncle. One day when he was in the garden of his uncle’s bungalow, he saw one servant going out. When asked that servant replied that he was going to see a dance in the neighboring village. Billy expressed his desire to see the dance and so he set on the carrier of that servant’s bicycle. The villagers welcomed them warmly. It was a kind of fun fair. Billy saw different stalls, games and dances. There were different wheels – rides for entertainment. Billy felt extremely happy in the company of those tribal. He saw one young girl and boy arm in arm moving near the stall. Billy saw them several times and it appealed to the primitives self of Billy. An unconscious desire took birth in him that he must have the same type of tribal life and tribal mate. The landscape, Hamlet of Oriya aboriginals, their uninhibited life had left its deep obsessive impression upon his mind Billy himself says:

“IT was as though a slumbering part of me had suddenly come awake you know, this happens with almost everybody at the time of adolescence. Strange passions are roused. Some get fascinated by music, others by painting or literature or the sciences your life starts to take the final mould, so to speak.”
The fun, the entertainment the inner peace and the unconscious desire that filled his heart were totally destroyed the next day as his uncle came to know about his visit to the tribals. The servant was fired and Billy was called by his mother and was severely rebuked. It was a shock for her that her son in spite of all his civilization went to see a tribal dance. His mother did not stop with but she asked one more question, which was her biggest mistake. She asked Billy whether he did anything with a woman. Billy could have given a simple reply that he did not do anything with any woman but a sense of rebel and an urge to live primitive life inspired him to ask a counter, “what if I did?” This counter question of Billy makes her angry and she orders Billy to leave the house if he is not ready to live the life according to the rules of the civilized society. This statement of mother causes emotional and psychological injury to her son and he immediately leaves the house. He just runs away without thinking where to go and what to do. But this time he was stopped by a servant who brings him back home. From Bhuvneshwar they went to Konark to see the Sun Temple. The erotic images on the walls of the temple reminded Billy of that tribal girl whom he had seen in the company of a tribal boy. Billy also reminisces his impressions of the sculptures of the Konark’s Sun Temple. He tells Romi about his experiences of Konark:
“But I know it was not the exoticness of the sculptures that appealed to me: as a matter of fact, even though I had not any training in the matter, except for a few piecets found most of the sculpture rather unaesthetic. No, what appealed to me were the shades of the same spirit that I spoke of although I knew them, as I know now, that the spirit was a much, much older force, older than the time when man first learned to build temples. If anyone had a clue to it, it was only the adivasis who carried about their knowledge in silence, locked behind their dark inscrutable faces.”

Billy finds that it is the tribal, which know the spirit behind the erotic sculptures of Konark. Billy passed his two weeks in Bhuvneshwar and came back to Dehradun School but he couldn’t forget that tribal dance, the tribal girl and the erotic images of the Sun temple. These experiences have made a permanent footprint in to Billy’s psyche. This trip to Bhuvneshwar brought a turning point in the life of Billy. He became aware of tribal life at an early stage and it created an inspiration in him to live life like a tribal. This is how the primitive self of Billy’s personality had come to surface, when he was a boy of 14. The desires of Id have tasted the blood and would demand more. His desires have had their first experience. Billy’s trip to Bhuvneshwar also reveals the personality and
psyche of Billy’s mother. Motherly affection is understandable but in case of Billy’s mother she is over protective of her son. She should have not asked that question. In fact, it is the question of Billy’s mother that made him conscious of sex instinct. It is the question that makes him aware about the man – woman relationship. Her question in fact proves to be a push for Billy to remember that tribal girl again and again. Of course, Billy never considered his mother responsible for whatever happened with his life.

One more incident that demands psychoanalysis of Billy is his discussion of the play *Avocambo* with Romi and the Bongo session in George’s apartment. Romi describes that Billy was sitting silently at the party. Billy was not moving, he wasn’t drinking but suddenly something happened to Billy and he started beating the bongo drums. Romi also felt a “mesmeric pull that held (the audience) by its sheer vitality.” Billy’s playing on the drum awakened dormant primitive impulse in the audience. A little Negro girl was drawn towards him: “Soon after Billy had finished, the little Negro girl moved over next him. She sat very close to him so that their knees nearly touched. They stayed like that for rest of the night. I think she had been greatly moved – sexually I mean – by the drumming.” It seems that Billy at moments gets transported to a different
world and when he comes back to normalcy, he seems to have returned from a long and difficult journey. Romi and Tuula didn’t find any explanation for Billy’s this strange behaviour. Romi goes to the extent of asking Billy himself for an answer. Billy’s reply is quite evasive because he says, “I must have been disgustingly drunk… what else? But Romi’s description of Billy’s “(eating)little and (talking) even less” drinking almost nothing, sitting silently in a corner even though there was plenty of eating, drinking and merry – making at the party, proves that Billy feels secluded there. He does not drink much to have forgotten himself but makes a contrived effort to attract the attention of the persons at the party. Billy gets success in his attempt and sees that everybody’s eyes are riveted on him. Billy often transforms himself into a primitive being. This shows that under the deep layers of his mind there is some disturbance. Billy has a strong dislike for an organized life. Though born and brought up in an aristocratic family, he is filled with virulent hatred for the systematized civilized life which aggravates his problem and then he undergoes hallucination and starts behaving as a totally different being who has come for a different planet.

Billy is a victim of split – personality which is popularly known as Dissociative Identity Disorder. His case becomes a strange case as he
turns of out to be a split personality – spilt between “primitive” and “civilized.” Often he is psychologically torn between his upbringing in a civilized society and his desire to live like a primitive being. His strange case becomes a universal myth of the primitive in the heart of man even alienating him from the superficial and polished banalities of modern civilization. Billy finds modern civilization fast degenerating, as well as norm less and meaningless. He finds modern civilization decaying. He himself describes:

“What got me was the superficiality, the sense of values. I don’t think all city societies are as shallow as ours. I am, of course, talking mainly of the so – called upper classes. I didn’t really get to know the others. I don’t think I have ever met a more pompous, a more mixed – up lot of people. Artistically, they were dry as dust. Intellectually, they could no better than mechanically mouth ideas that the West abandoned a generation ago. Their idea of romance was to go and see an American movie or go to one of those wretched restaurants and dance with their wives to a thirty – year – old tune. Nobody remembered the old songs or the meaning of the festivals. All the sensuality was gone. So was the poetry. All that was left was loud – mouthed women and men in three – piece suits dreaming their little adulteries.”
Billy’s feelings totally convey the idea that he is a misfit in this world. His deep love for primitivism is an in born propensity. That is why Billy choose, Harlem instead of Manhattan. Though he was living admits the raucous noise of the Harlem, his eyes which comprise The ‘dominating features of his face’ remain serious even when he laughs or banters: “Most people who meet him considered him a light – hearted good sport without quite noticing the incongruity of his eyes or suspecting what went on in their dark depths.” Among a few friends who understand Billy are Romi and Tuula Lindgren, Billy’s Swedish girlfriend. These two are the only persons, “who had any clue to what went on in the dark, inscrutable, unsmiling eyes of Bimal Biswas.” Mainly it is Tuula Lindgren, the Swedish lady with extraordinary intuition who understands the dilemma of Billy’s life. She was able to know what went inside the Conscious, Subconscious and Unconscious mind of Bimal Biswas. Tuula was never interested in money and this attracted Billy towards her.

Mukteshwar Pandey in his book, **Arun Joshi: The Existentialist Element in His Novels** writes –

“Tuula, being far away from the commercial civilization, stands as a primitive force. She has mastered hypnotism, intuition and auto – suggestion. She has an insight to see in to the life of things. Billy
feels at home in her company and is fond of her. She is getting advanced training in psychiatric social work at Columbia in the United States. She is “strongly interested in India, especially in the tribal people, a subject about which Billy knew enough to keep her engaged not one but a hundred nights.” She tells him about the theories of Freud, Carl Jung, Adler and Karl Menninger.”

Tuula has been able to fathom the inscrutable character of Billy Biswas. As for herself she is strongly interested in Indian especially in the tribal people. She is in search of finding a psychiatric explanation of the concepts of the ritual and the taboo as she talks in one breath of religion and yoga and Gandhi and she is also in search of finding Freudian explanation of Gandhi’s non – violence: “It was with Tuula Lindgreen that Billy had spent all those summer evenings.” It is with Tuula that Billy comes to have his first glimpse of “the other side” that summer. He explains to Tuula:

“The other side, you know what I mean, don’t you? Most of us are aware only of the side on which we are born, but there is always the other side, the valley beyond the hills; the hills beyond the valley.”
We can say that it is towards this “other side” or “other thing” for which Billy continues his quest for the whole of his life: “That other thing was, and is; after all, what my life is all about.” Tuula tells Romi that Billy is an exceptional person born on this earth. She informs Romi of a great dormant force lying suppressed in the personality of Billy Biswas who has within him:

“A great force, urkraft…a…a Primitive force. He is afraid of it and tries to suppress it … But it is very strong in him, much stronger than in you or me. It can explode any moment.”

Shankar Kumar in his article, “The Primitive World versus the Civilized World in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas” rightly observes and remarks:

“Tuula’s assessment of Billy’s character is very correct and it is what she terms in German urkraft, which explodes in Billy’s life and he escapes in to the tribal world deserting the world of civilization and the members of his family including wife and son. In this respect, Billy’s case is not on all fours with the Buddha who has left his wife and son but he did not live in any tribal world engrossed in the tribal totems. Yet the Buddha is a kind of an
archetypal figure upon which Billy has been moulded in some respect in the context of the urban society versus the tribal world.”

Romi also during a long walk with Billy finds Billy’s talks “revealing not only that the mind of the speaker but also those dark unknowable layers of the mysterious world that surrounded us.” Romi after some time comes to know from Billy how he often had hallucinations, “the same odd feeling of being in a place very, very old, at times a wilderness, at other times full of strange primitive people” and that “It would be like a great blinding flash during which I would be totally unaware of anything else. And invariably it left me with the old depressing feeling that something had gone wrong with my life. I wasn’t where I belonged.” It was only Romi and Tuula before who Billy could open the feelings of his heart. Billy used to frequently discuss with Tuula about his hallucinations. Tuula used console him by telling Billy that such hallucinations occurred in a very mild form in every one. She used to say that in fact all art in a way flowed out of these hallucinations. But Tuula strongly advised Billy that he should not encourage these hallucinations too much.
Billy’s return from the U.S. to India after the completion of his study is one more element appropriate for psychoanalysis. Generally, people who go to the U.S. as students relish a dream of setting there by getting their Visa transformed from the student to immigrant but nowhere such an ingredient of thought is to be found in Billy’s psyche. The West fails to tempt him because his psyche is pre-conditioned to tribal and traditional Indian way of life, which drags him, back from the U.S. to India to be a teacher of Anthropology in the college of Delhi. His coming back was not a compulsion, it was a voluntary decision of Billy endorsing the fact that he was in love with a tribal way of life.

If we examine Billy’s relationship with wife Meena and affair her sister Rima from the psychological angle both have a lot to say. Billy’s parents and relatives had also tough time in persuading Billy to accept the traditional Hindu way of life. He was persuaded to marry on the logic of:

“…the usual amalgam of the Western pragmatism (a wife is so necessary, socially, sexually for a fuller life) and Hindu dharma (man’s duty to marry and reproduce: there is time for everything) that is the conventional wisdom of the Indian middle class.”
In fact, Meena is well brought up urbanized fashionable woman living in Delhi and Billy hates urban values of living life. When Romi was in Shimla for his I.A.S. training Billy meets him and discusses with him about Meena. Billy was confused and so he asks Romi that whether he should marry Meena or not. This question surprises Romi but to reply his question Romi utilizes his knowledge of Western philosophy and Indian philosophy. First Romi refers to the Western philosophy of life and says that in Western philosophy a man decides to marry simply for his social recognition and sexual urge. But Indian philosophy has to convey a deeper reason for marriage. Indian philosophy believes in *karma* and marriage is after all *karma*. Indian philosophy says that a man is incomplete in the absence of a woman and a woman is incomplete without a man. It is this holy duty to marry, to have a child and to continue the human race. With the help of this philosophy, Romesh tries to explain Billy that there is nothing wrong if Billy has decided to marry. Billy asks one more question whether Romesh believes in whatever he says. Romesh replies in to positive. This explanation by Romesh solves the dilemma prevailing in the mind of Billy about marrying Meena. But for our protagonist Billy the path of marrying Meena was still full of obstacles and this is revealed in his two telegrams to Romi. In his first telegram to Romi he mentions that his engagement to Meena is broken off. This telegram inspires Romi to guess what could be the reason
behind the breaking off Billy’s engagement to Meena. Many thoughts crowd Romesh’s brain. He guesses that it may be because of Billy’s different psyche and his strange personality. But then on the next day Romesh receives another telegram which suggests that Billy’s marriage to Meena is on and the engagement is not broken off. These two telegrams make it clear that Billy doesn’t have a stable mind. There is some oscillation in his psyche. Romesh gets confused and decides to meet Billy in person in his wedding and find out the reason for these two opposite telegrams. When Romi meets Billy at his wedding he says that those two telegrams puzzled him like anything. Billy replies that those two telegrams puzzled him also. Then he narrates the story behind those two telegrams. The story that he says make it clear that Billy is psychologically divided being. He tells that Meena’s friends had arranged a picnic to the hills of Tughlakabad. Meena had invited Billy to join that picnic Billy accepted that invitation of Meena but the previous night Billy kept awake till late night and read books on Anthropology. In the very early morning, naturally Billy felt sleepy. In his sleep, Billy saw a dream, which was the root cause of his sending those two telegrams. In his dream, Billy saw a big auditorium and he himself a spectator. The neighboring seat was occupied by his fast Negro friend George. In his dream, Billy saw some dancers coming on the stage dancing and singing. When one particular person came on the stage George told Billy that he
happens to be the lover of Tuula. Billy is not ready to believe in it and he decides to confirm it by asking Tuula herself. After a while, Tuula comes on stage and when her dance is over both Billy and George met Tuula. Billy asks Tuula whether she is in love with that man who danced on the stage before sometime. Tuula replies in to positive. Billy is not ready to believe in it and so he once again asks her the same question and requests her to reply it with her honesty. The word ‘honesty’ makes Tuula laugh. She passes a sarcastic remark to Billy by talking to George. In her sarcastic remark, she says that Billy has no right even to speak the word ‘honesty’. The dream there ends but it leaves Billy in a disturbed state of mind. Billy’s dream bears a great significance. One needs to analyses the dream psychologically to understand what exactly is going on in the deep layers of Billy’s mind. It reveals Billy’s guilty conscience and the desire of his Id. Within the heart of his heart, Billy feels that he has done something wrong by getting himself engaged to Meena because the first girl that came in his life was not Meena but Tuula. He thinks that he is a social criminal and it is this feeling of crime, which is reflected in his dream. This shows that in his deep psyche there is love towards Tuula, which he never expressed. His likeness for Tuula is because she is the only lady in his life who understands him and with whom he is at ease, comfortable and who understands his psyche very well.
Next morning Billy got up in a disturbed state of mind. But he should fulfill the promise of visiting the picnic spot which he has given to Meena. So they all went to the hills of Tughlakabad. The experience of picnic also reveals one more facet of Billy’s strange psyche. He feels quite uncomfortable at the picnic. At the place of Meena in the morning, he had to listen to American pop music and the same pop music was played even at the picnic spot. It constantly reminded Billy of Tuula and his days in America. Throughout the day, Billy remained in depression because he hates this so called rusty urban manners and American pop music. Whatever zeal and good sense that was left in the cannon of Billy was also killed because of one event which took place during their return journey. When they were coming back from the hills of Tughlakabad, they came across a group of Banzaras. It inspired a boy of their group to pass an obscene remark on those Banzaras. He said that all Banzara males are thieves and all Banzara women are prostitutes. This was something that Billy could not tolerate. After all he was a student of Anthropology and he had better knowledge of Banzaras than that boy. The comment irritated him so much that he jumped upon that boy and started quarreling. Had Meena not interfered in between the quarrel would have resulted in to a big fight. Meena pacifies them but when she reaches home, she shows her dissatisfaction with Billy’s conduct. They both argue and Billy thinks it better if the engagement is broken off. Billy
comes back and informs about it to his parents and sends the first telegram to Romesh. Next day he feels that he has taken his decision in haste. He thinks that it is because of hallucination that he behaved in such a manner and probably he might have been reminded of Tuula’s comment that he should not allow these hallucinations to pop up, so he makes a telephone call to Meena and realizes that Meena is in tears. Billy begs pardon for his rude behavior and decides to continue that engagement this was the reason why he dispatched the next telegram to Romesh.

Susheel Kumar Sharma in his article “The Strange Case of Billy Biswas: A psychograph of an Alienated Hero” remarks –

“The products of the “bloody old phony” and “materialistic” civilization disappoint him… His frequent change of “beloveds” is really a search for a true life – partner. His marriage with Meena Chatterjee, a pretty young daughter of a retired civil servant, is an impulsive action, no doubt, but this is prompted by Billy’s search for a viable alternatives. In that condition of mind, he finds no better girl than Meena. Perhaps Billy thinks Meena’s bond will be strong enough to chain up his split personality. It is just like Shudhodan’s getting his son married with Yashodhara to chain up Siddhartha. The result is drastic as Billy does not find in her a good
partner for she is too much down – to – earth for Billy. Meena is worldly wise and is a product money – machine culture.”

Often Billy had hallucinations and out of these hallucinations he comes out “very depressed and shaken up.” Truly speaking, he is much upset by these hallucinations: “I had grown terribly afraid of myself, some part of me. I thought terrible things might happen unless I did something drastic. What with being an Indian and having been brought up in a close – knit family, the only thing I could think of was to get married. It was like taking out an insurance on my normalcy.” He wishes to behave like a normal man. He wants to develop a sense of harmony with the surrounding, a sense of belonging. But this he does not get even after his marriage with Meena Chatterjee. Meena fails to engage his soul to satisfy his inner urge. Perhaps Billy thought that his marriage with Meena would put a check on the hallucination and Meena like Tuula would help him. But Billy is wrong as Meena could never establish a rapport with Billy. This marriage being a case of “uneven minds” results in utter failure. Although she is “quite unusually pretty in a westernized sort of way”, “never short of words” and talks “almost entirely in English in that unique, rather flat, accent that is to be found among young ladies taught in convents.” She is not able at all to give peace and satisfaction that Billy
badly needs. On the other hand, what he comes to receive from Meena and her kith and kin is disillusionment and depression. Meena’s nature of drawing a line is realized by Situ in her very first meeting. Situ sketches her character beautifully when she says:

“Did you see how she looked me up and down? ... As if she herself was no less than Miss India or something. Did you notice her hair?”

Such a snobbish and “self – possessed” character as Meena’s could never have helped Billy as a partner. Though Meena realizes that she is incapable of handling the situation with Billy, she complains of Billy’s totally different behavior which is reflected through his losing his temper on minor provocations, quarreling all the time, snapping at everybody, remaining in a dark mood, not touching his wife for six months, always making fun of Meena, not keeping his promises to his wife, and the sense of resignation in Billy, which was perhaps the result of losing the battle every time. But, Meena simply complains: “Things are falling apart” and “Billy is getting stranger and stranger with every passing day.” She does not make any effort to improve upon the situation. In fact, Meena fails to understand the psyche of Billy or she is unable to understand the psychological changes that are taking place in Billy. She confesses to
Romi: “You see, I just can’t handle the situation any more… It is all probably my fault. Perhaps I just don’t understand him as a wife should.”

On the other hand, instead of making compromise with the situation to save it from worsening, she spies on him:

“Tell me, Romi, do you think he is having a…an affair?”

She suggests three solutions to get rid of the rut:

i. “Go to your cannibals, if you find me so intolerable.”

ii. “I wish I were dead.” which she repeats twice in her eight sentences; and

iii. “I will go away if that is what you want.”

These three sentences of Meena estrange Billy even further as he under goes mental agony but his reply is that of a well – composed man: “That is not what I want, Meena. You know that.” And while saying this Billy is “more depressed than annoyed.” Thus, Billy’s attempt to marry Meena and finds refuse goes waste. A product of ‘phoney society’ as Meena is, fails to quench his thirst. She fails to satisfy his soul. The distances between the two grow more and more. There is a gap of communication between the two. He affirms: “Communication between us was soon
reduced to zero.” Billy is east, Meena is west, and both east and west cannot meet together. Billy’s psyche is very different from Meena’s psyche. It is not that any one of them is wrong. In fact, none of them is wrong. The only thing is that Billy does not fit in Meena’s mental frame and Meena is a misfit in Billy’s mental frame. Therefore, both of them become psychological tattered. Even they fail to communicate and respond to each other. This tells upon their lives and their vitality, that “self – possessed” Meena Biswas, “buffeted by some enormous sorrow” given to sobs Billy, in his turn loses his buoyancy every day. Meena fails to understand “why he is always annoyed with me”, “Why he is so unhappy.” She reflects thus: “God knows what the matter is. All I know is that Billy is getting stranger and stranger with every passing day.” She even complains that Billy has turned out a changed man. He is no more the man she had married. The failure to establish meaningful contact with his wife and with the society she represents only enhances Billy’s inner restlessness and it increases his psychological trauma. His outward appearance also undergoes a thorough change. His “inhuman sharp eyes” wear a tortured and haggard expression and betray “emotions that one tends to associate with a great predicament.” He turns introvert and lackadaisical. To Romi, who meets Billy after a year of his marriage the change seems astonishing. Romi is shocked by the change in Billy and
says: “I had never felt so strange with Billy Biswas” and that “He seemed duller than most dull men that I usually met.” Romi further remarks:

“It was as though some part of him had gone on strike. All my words simply sank upon his listless mind without so much as causing a ripple. Gone was the staggering intelligence, the spectroscopic interests, the sense of humour. He had either turned banal, something that I had seen happen often enough, or, unknown to us, he was turned upon some obscure segment of himself, ferreting out a bitter secret, setting an old score. Whatever it might have been, the Billy Biswas I had known was finished snuffed out like a candle left in the rain.”

His sensibility is almost blunted. Even Romi also feels that Billy is psychologically tormented and certain shift or change of psyche has taken place in Billy. Billy’s married life turns into a miserable failure. He tells Romi: “my own married life so quickly went to pot.” It is “ill – conceived”, “ill – fated like a ship that gets smashed up in a gale.” He confides to Romi that the marriage, “might have been saved if Meena had possessed rare degree of empathy or even a sufficient idea of human suffering. These, I am afraid, she did not have. Her upbringing, her ambitions, twenty years of contact with a phoney society – all had
ensured that she should not have it. So the more I tried to tell her what
was corroding me, bringing me to the edge of despair so to speak, the
more resentful she became.”

The insensitive and corrupt society with its artificiality and phoniness
seems to smother Billy’s sensibility and claw him apart.

Tapan Kumar Ghosh writes in his book, *Arun Joshi’s Fiction – The
Labyrinth of Life –*

“He feels himself ‘pinned down there, like a dead butterfly’ and his
sense of disgust at the civilized society finds expression not only in
such Hamlet like outburst. “Oh, how dreary, how dreary, how
dreary!” But also in occasional incidents of violence. He begins to
lose his grip on life and experiences a blurring of reality. Thus even
before his physical disappearance, Billy ceases to belong to the
civilized world.”

In fact, there is a change in Billy’s psyche. All these situations, traumas,
and tensions result in to Billy’s turning an introvert. He forsakes his
responsibilities towards his family, his wife and his son. He cares for his
responsibilities towards his soul: “I had greater responsibilities towards
my soul.” He is a pilgrim of the spiritual world. He is self-centered. His tortured soul terribly needs application of some balm by someone who can share his sufferings, as his married life has turned out to be a great failure. Billy doesn’t find himself so closely attached to Meena in spite of all her glamour and fashion. It reflects his psychological disinterestedness in urban fashionable glamorous world, with a view of getting the right kind of solace that his injured soul needs, he meets Rima Kaul, who has been loving him passionately since the day she meets him. His trips to Bombay bring him closer to her. Billy for a long time remains indecisive in his choice between Rima Kaul who understood him better and Meena whom his parents favoured, but then he becomes sure that Rima Kaul possesses much of that “rare degree of empathy” and “sufficient idea of human suffering” which is lacking in Meena. Thus though Billy is married to Meena and has a son, he has an adulterous affair with Rima Kaul. Billy himself remarks:

“I came to like it even more than I liked the sex part. I felt happy not when I took her but when she said, “oh, how misunderstood you are, my poor boy, I know how you feel. Those who harass you should be put to death straightway.” It was this that I was really looking for.”
Basically Billy goes wrong here. It is his passion towards tribal life that leads his romance with Rima Kaul into mere seduction. Billy’s episode with Rima Kaul presents before us nothing but his disturbed psyche. One afternoon he takes her to Juhu, hires a room in a third – rate hotel and “like any common rogue” and seduces her. Billy very soon realizes that his relationship with Rima is nothing but his degradation. He remarks: “After it (seduction) was over I looked into her clear trusting eyes, and I had a first glimpse of my degradation.” Billy’s psyche has been changed and now he turns a hypocrite, a thoroughly corrupt being. Unfortunately, he fails to find out a way out of it. He does not have “the guts to break away from this filth.”

He comments:

“The worst of it was that in spite of this knowledge of my degradation, I continued to behave as before, I continued to whine and lie and sham. I found that I could not stop. I met her three or four times after that. Each time I would determine to be honest with her, with myself and each time I would start to play the part as soon as I got the chance. You have no idea how ridiculous and fraudulent it became. I offered to divorce Meena and marry her even though Rima herself never even hinted at such a thing. I
agreed to start living with her as soon as possible. And all the time I knew that I intended no such thing.”

Billy was not interested in almost anything. He probably has developed a negative attitude. He did project how he came by his own sense of values and her perceptions. Billy thought he would forever hold himself in contempt for what he did to Rima Kaul. He seduced her. He realized he started to behave in a manner that in other man it would have excited his greatest contempt. What made the situation much worse was that she remained as yet fond of him. It was his degeneration.

Thus, Billy reaches the climax of hypocrisy in his way of working. He delves deep into corruption and affirms: “It gradually dawned on me that a tremendous corrupting force was working on me. It was as though my soul were taking revenge on me for having denied for so long that Other Thing that it had been clamouring for.” Billy has probably understood the changes that have taken place in his psyche. He now clearly understands that no woman of this ‘phoney society’ can quench the thirst of his soul. In fact, Billy’s affair with Rima Kaul can be understood with a different dimension. His affair with Rima Kaul is not the result of any attempt on
his part to live life like a westernized young gentleman. He does it more because of his inner psychological drive to live life like a tribal, who have the freedom for polygamy. So that affair has in it as a root Billy’s love for the tribal way of life.

There are many incidents in the novel, which demands psychoanalytical approach because at the plain of simple logic one finds it difficult to understand those things. One such incident is Billy’s unexpected stand at the time of discussion on the Krishna Murder Case. In fact, it is an incident with some supernatural elements in it just like a goddess giving inspiration to a human being to sacrifice a child. No man with modern education and way of life would ever approve or believe in such a brutal act but the opinion given by Billy at the time of the discussion on Krishna Murder case is different. Once Romi was invited at Billy house for dinner. While taking dinner with the family they discuss one court case named “Krishna Murder Case.” In fact, all the people of Delhi have applied their own psychology to find out who is guilty. This is a case upon which Billy’s father is to pass his judgment the next day. The narrator of the story, Romi mostly remains quite at the time of discussion of Krishna Murder Case and it is Billy and his father, which mainly argue
upon the case. It is through their argument we come to know about the different in psyche father and son.

Krishna Murder Case is in fact, the case of human sacrifice. In the heart of the city of Delhi there lived a middle aged government clerk with his wife and a son. That clerk was accused of murdering a twelve year old servant of his house. His name was Krishna and he used to work for that clerk. The clerk was accused of killing that boy. Of course, that clerk tried to defend himself saying that the murder was committed by him in his attempt of self – defense. The clerk declared that, the servant entered his house with an intention of burglary. The clerk tried to defend himself and in his defense, by chance he killed that servant. The clerk’s argument was very weak keeping in view the age of the servant. How can a boy of twelve think of robbery in the house of a middle – aged man? The public prosecutor had also procured some evidence against the clerk, which made his defense weak. The most powerful evidence was that of the statement made by the priest of the temple. His statement made one thing clear that, that clerk had planned the murder in advance. It was a pre – meditated and pre – planned murder. The priest in his statement said that he was consulted by the clerk a week before the day of murder. The clerk had told the priest that for the last fort – night he had been frequently
seeing a dream in which he was asked by Goddess Kali to propitiate her to please her by the way offering a human sacrifice if he wanted his son to recover from Leukemia. The clerk had asked the priest to help him in this matter. He had also told the priest that he knew one boy who can serve the purpose of an object for sacrifice. The priest also said that while saying this, the clerk looked wild maniac and dangerous.

Some other evidence, which were procured by the police department, also made the clerk’s defense very weak. The police found out how the clerk has arranged for a butcher’s knife, sandalwood and how a Yagna was performed in the temple before the sacrifice. One more weakness in the defense of the clerk was that he talked about robbery but he had not filed any complaint in the police station. He filed that complaint one week later when the police from a nalla procured the cut – off body of Krishna. These evidences were against the clerk but the lawyer hired by the clerk tried to save the clerk by introducing the concept of “Temporary Insanity.” This point of temporary insanity aroused discussion among Billy and his parents. The lawyer of the clerk said that at the time of committing murder the clerk was not in this world but in the world of madness and how can we apply laws and rules of this world to a person who has committed a crime by remaining in the world of madness.
Billy’s father believes that the concept of temporary insanity is not a proper defense and in any book of law, there is no concept like temporary insanity. Whenever a person commits a crime in the state of insanity, his attack would be sudden and with a wild anger. In case of the clerk, we do not find such wild anger of sudden attack. He continues meditating and planning for the whole week. He prepares everything in advanced and how can we say that the murder was the result of temporary insanity? This argument of Billy’s father inspires Billy to make a counter argument. Billy tries to define the term “temporary insanity” in his own way. Billy believes that “temporary insanity” does not mean the insanity for a few seconds or a few minutes. It may continue for a day, for a week or even for a year. Billy opines that whatever that clerk did for the arrangement that was also in the state of his ‘temporary insanity’. Billy has his own ideas about temporary madness. He believes that there may not be a concept of temporary madness in law but in reality temporary madness does exist. Billy considers it possible that an ordinary man like that clerk can easily receive the message from Goddess and because of those messages he may enter in to another world for a month or a year. And after the function is over the person may come back to the original world or to the normal state of mind. Billy exposes his firm belief in the existence of the world of ‘temporary insanity’ but his father is not ready to believe in it. He believes that in reality there does not exist anything
like in insanity. His father is of the opinion that it was a well–planned, pre–meditated murder. Billy again says that pre–meditation is a worldly concept used by court and government offices while the clerk at the time of planning and committing of that murder was in a different world. Billy’s question is how can we apply the terms of this world to a person who commits a crime by living in some other world? Billy’s father now asks Billy what is the proof that the clerk was in some other world at the time of committing that crime. To this question, Billy gives a reply that his son did recover after that sacrifice which is a proof that clerk was in some other world. At this point Romesh jumps in to this conversation and asks Billy whether he really believes that that son recovered because of the human sacrifice. Probably Arun Joshi wanted to explore the psyche of Billy and so through his mouthpiece Romesh he asks this question to Billy. To this question of Romesh Billy does not give a direct reply. Billy says that he is a student of Anthropology and he knows the tribal people of Africa, Japan, Indonesia and even Sweden. If the court records are examined such cases will be noticed even from the tribal people of India. On the basis of this example Billy wants to prove that there definitely exists a world of ‘temporary insanity’, and a man can receive messages from supreme beings. Billy’s father still does not believe in it and Billy reacts that one starts believing in it only when he becomes a victim of it. Billy’s father wants to know how can a man enter in to that world of
‘temporary insanity’ and how can he communicate to Almighty? To this question of the father. Billy gives a flat reply that he himself doesn’t know how can one enter in to that world and how can one communicate to God? Billy simply says that something happens and that man is transported in to some other world. Billy ultimately requests his father that while doing justice to such a person the judge must possess the knowledge of that world. Billy asserts his father that, “there are worlds at the periphery of this one, above it and below it, and around it, of which we know nothing until we are in them.” This episode in facts gives us a chance to peep inside the mind of Billy. It tells us lot about the psyche of Billy. However, educated Billy believes in ‘temporary insanity’. Billy probably has a firsthand experience of it through his hallucinations. This episode tells us about Billy’s primitivism. Billy is a divided being. He in fact for people around him is different and is completely different from within. He has an irresistible desire for living a life like a primitive. His inner desire that is the desires of his Id pushes him to live a life of a primitive but his moral constraint that is his Super ego resists his desire. The result to such a tag – of – war is split personality of Billy. That is why discussion on Krishna Murder Case is very important episode in the novel as it makes clear the inner desire and psyche of Billy. Billy not only believes in it but also tries to justify that such a supernatural incident is possible. This justification is a key for the psychoanalysis of Billy. It
opens his inner landscape before the readers that he believes in it because he loves it and he would like to be a part of it. The Krishna Murder Case in the novel can solve the purpose of a final verdict on Billy’s mental traits. His obsession for the tribal way of life is revealed at its best through his participation in the Krishna Murder Case. He has a different way of thinking, living, which in no way has the tuning with the ultra modern urban way of life. In fact, the trial of his thinking moves backward which is a remarkable finding of the psychoanalysis of Billy. Whatever is advanced, modern, and westernized fails to attract him and against that, he falls in love with all that which the advance society recognizes as rustic, backward and tribal. This is how the trail of his thinking works in reverse.

If we examine Billy’s role as a teacher in a college of Delhi, he does not remain satisfied with simply the theoretical parts of teaching. He tries to implement the idea of making his students aware of how tribal’s actually live their life by creating an opportunity for a face to face encounter between his students and the tribal. For the same purpose he selects the tribal’s living in the forest of Madhya Pradesh and takes his students every year to the same part as an educational tour. The psychological instinct behind him is simultaneously to satisfy his own psychic urge to
be with tribals. That urge is so powerful in him that he takes that tour at
his own cost and risk when his superiors deny it. The psychoanalysis here
portrays Billy as a young man colored completely with the tribal way of
life. In fact, that urge is so powerful in him that at the time of each
educational tour his students live in a tent while he prefers to be with
tribal people in their huts. His inner craving for the tribal way of life
makes him connive of his responsibility to his students. He is supposed to
be with them at night but he prefers to be with the tribal and takes wine in
their company. Had it been as a part of the western way of life in a club
or disco, he would have rejected it but here it happens as a tribal way of
life and so it becomes acceptable to Billy. Billy’s return to India has been
futile as he does not feel homely, well entrenched or the true son of the
soil, who is culturally well rooted and socially well – beleaguered. And
because of this he takes a job of lecturer and goes for practical expedition
rather than just knowing and teaching things in a class room. A sense of
nothingness pervades him. He suffers from a sense of a loss of socio –
cultural ethos, finding himself wrapped in a vacuum, which his entire
being is unable to comprehend. It dawns upon him when he listens to the
aarati. In this realization, the whole life becomes meaningless and futile
to Billy:
“Returning home one evening, finding myself in a state of considerable agitation, I stopped at a temple. It was the hour of the evening aarati. I stood before the idols my hands folded, my head bowed, incense of dhoop tickling my nostrils. I stood there while the pious voices of men, women, and children rose and left about me like little waves of a benevolent sea. What I had hoped to achieve by my visit I do not know… As I stood there, my eyeballs restive behind the quivering lids, that the gods who awaited me now was one to which no temples could be built. What awaited me now, I realized, was Fate.”

It is at such weak moment only that a man takes certain decision to fill up the void of his life. Billy’s visiting the temple proves that he is trying to adjust himself socially and culturally but once again he feels totally disenchanted by the utopia and this results in the realization of wasting his time by living in a civilization where people are simply busy making and spending money. Billy is a disturbed being and in order to satisfy his soul, he undertakes expedition to the tribal belts. But they give him momentary peace. He writes to Tuula:

“When I returned from expedition, it is days before I can shake off the sounds and smells of the forest. The curious feeling trails me
everywhere that I am a visitor from the wilderness to the marts of the big city and not the other way round.”

As a matter of fact, he is a stranger to the civilized world, and not the tribal. The civilized men are estranged to him. He has an intense hatred of them. He remarks:

“I see a roomful of finely dressed men and women seated on downy sofas and while I am looking at them under my very nose, they turn into a Kennel of dogs yawning (their large teeth showing) or struggling against each other or holding whiskey glasses in their furred paws.”

The imagery of dogs with large teeth and furred paws reveals the hatred of Billy and the character he thinks they bear. He has no love lost for the modern civilization. In fact, Billy feels that this civilization is a monster. It is not a civilization, but a degradation. He remarks:

“I sometimes wonder whether civilization is anything more than the making and spending of money. What else the civilized men do? And if there are those who are not busy earning and spending – the so called thinkers and philosophers and men like that – they are
merely hired to find solution, throw light, as they say, on complications caused by this making and spending of money.”

He hates the world because it hangs on the peg of money. His dislike of money is intense. He is drawn to Tuula because she has no hankering after money. Even Bilasia is not interested in money. It is because of these pulls and visions that even the marriage does not engage his soul. He finds that Meena fails to quench his real thirst. She does not stir the spirit of his flesh. He loses his buoyancy after marriage. These constant pricks of conscience make Billy look strange. Gone are the staggering intelligence, the spectroscopic interests and the sense of humour, which were part of his character and personality. His sensibilities get blunted, as if some part of his being has gone on strike. The Billy that Romi knows, is “finished, and snuffed out like a candle left in the rain.”

Another major incident in the novel that provides a platform for the psychoanalysis of this character is how he treats his friend – the district collector Romi when he remains successful in finding out Billy. All attempts made by Romi to convince him to go back home remain futile which at the level of psychoanalysis reflects Billy’s strong bond with the
tribal way of life. He would prefer death to separation from the tribal way of life and the same thing happens at the end.

Romi is posted as collector in a district of Central India (Madhya Pradesh). Once on a tour of the Maikala Hills and the plains of Central India – ravaged by a terrible drought, he suddenly sees Billy wearing ‘a lion cloth and nothing else.’ He takes him to his bungalow and spends the whole day and night in his company listening to the story about his disappearance and life after that. Remembering the events that had happened before ten years, in the month of September, Billy starts telling his story. Before ten years in the month of September, Billy began his expedition taking four students and two servants. They were delayed at Sabalpur and by the time when they reached Maikala hills it was afternoon. The group decided to set their tents on the bank of a stream so that they can have enough water. When it was time for them to set their tents they realized that they had forgotten their ropes at Bhopal Junction. Billy asks the boys to remain there and he himself crosses that stream and goes to village. The head of that village Dhunia welcomes Billy and expresses his joy to see Billy. Billy confesses that this was his third trip to Dhunia’s village. Billy in brief describes those two trips to Dhunia’s village. During his first visit to Dhunia’s place he had stayed there for
two months. That was enough time to develop acquaintance and intimacy. After one year once again Billy visited Dhunia’s place. At that time Dhunia’s niece – Bilasia was suffering from some disease. Billy had some antibiotics with him. He gave those antibiotics to her. It cured Bilasia. The people of that village and also Dhunia considered it a miracle and Billy became the Mahaprasad (the greatest friend) of Dhunia. This acquaintance and intimacy inspired Dhunia to welcome Billy during his third trip.

Dhunia was sitting outside his hut with other tribals. Billy reaches there and reveals that he has come to take some ropes. Dhunia reacts that there are some ropes in the hut but he himself does not know where they are. So Billy will have to wait till the arrival of Bilasia. Billy tells Romi that his life would not have been different; perhaps he would not have disappeared had they not forgotten ropes at Bhopal Junction. His life would have been different had Dhunia given ropes to Billy. But the fate had prepared design in a different way. Billy was compelled to pass sometime in the group of those tribal people. Those tribal’s had their own subjects for discussion. This discussion left a remarkable footprint in Billy’s mind and psyche. They discussed neither politics nor election, neither food crisis nor economic problems like civilized people of cities
discuss. They chiefly discussed supernatural elements like ghosts, witches, and elements of nature like forest, storms of dust, hills, wind, stars and the white rock. They also discussed about women and sex. Billy keeps quiet while the tribals continue their talk. Their talk makes it clear that Bilasia is a married woman, but she has refused to live with her husband. After a while Bilasia comes. She carries a bundle of twig on her head. Her ankles create sweet music. Dhunia tells Bilasia to give some ropes to Billy. Both Billy and Bilasia enter in to the hut of Dhunia and she starts searching the ropes. She continues murmuring something and her ankles create sweet music. Billy is absorbed in that music and for the first time he feels something strange happening in him.

Billy tells Romi that it was such a strange feeling, which he cannot put in words. He takes that bundle of rope from Bilasia and comes out from hut. Billy starts walking in the direction of the stream and Dhunia accompanies him up to that stream. Dhunia invites Billy to a dancing ceremony, which is to take place the next evening. Both parts for that night. Billy crosses the stream and meets his students. It is night and they start setting their tents. After the tent is set, Billy goes all alone to a rock and weeps. He does not know whether he is being attracted by Bilasia or not. Many questions arise in his mind. If he goes, a head then what will
be the condition of Meena, his son and his status? He does not find any answer to it. He comes back to his tent and takes dinner with boys. After dinner, all the boys go to their tent and take rest because they are tired. Billy also goes to his own tent and refers to some magazines but he cannot concentrate on those magazines. Repeatedly the virtual image of Bilasia disturbs Bimal. In fact, he has been having frequent hallucinations and visions of a woman always used to haunt him. Billy discusses this in a letter, which he wrote to Tuula:

“A strange woman keeps crossing my dreams. I have seen her on the streets of Delhi, nursing a child in the shade of a tree or hauling stone for a rich man’s house. I have seen her buying bangles at a fair. I have seen her shadow at a tribal dance, and I have seen her, pensive and inviolable, her clothes clinging to her wet body, beside a tank in Banaras. And once I saw her, her face strangely luminous in the twilight, loading a freight train with sulphur on a siding in one of our eastern ports. Yes, this woman keeps crossing my dreams causing in me a fearful disturbance, the full meaning of which I have yet to understand.”

Billy’s psyche has been so changed that this time, it is not a hunger for sensual satisfaction. This time it is quest for self – realization for a union
with the missing part of his soul. Billy becomes restless. Billy goes to sit on the rock once again. It is during this second sitting that his primitive self comes to surface. He feels as if all the saal trees of those forests were calling him, trying to convince him that he is not the native of New Delhi. He felt as if neither New York nor New Delhi is his destination. His destination is the hills of Maikala. He also felt that he is not a modern man of 20th century but a primitive man – the first man on the earth walking for the first time, sitting outside his tent on a particular fateful night he hears “two clear choices: I could either follow this call, the vision, whatever the cost, or be condemned to total decay.” He was very well acquainted with the idea that, “the price of making such choices is terrible,” and that “the price of not making them is even more terrible.”

From the extracts of the letters that Billy has written to Tuula Lindgreen, his Swedish friend in America, we learn a great deal of the strangeness overtaking Billy. The raw beauty of primitive and tribal nature seems to have captivated his mind. His cynicism almost borders on insanity and now he begins to question his own being, his parentage and his relation to his wife and child. He wonders who they are or what accident of creation has brought them together. Life at lower a ebb of the remote tribals of the Central Provinces now haunts him. He is in a fit of frenzy to explore the
earth, the river, the moon light, the imperishable rocks, the touch and
smell of the primeval night, up to the less. This is how Billy’s primitive
self comes to the surface of his personality and it inspires him to be in the
forest for the whole life. Billy sat on the rock for a long time asking
questions to his own self whether he is doing something proper. He
remembers his father, mother, wife and his son, but he also hears the call
of forest requesting Billy to live there only. Billy finds himself in a
dilemma but that primitive self of Billy and an urge to tribal life prove to
be more powerful. He cannot resist the temptation of hills, forests, tribals
and Bilasia. There is such a psychological change in Billy that he feels
that his soul responds to the voices of the hills, forests, untamed Nature
and the tribal people. They seem to be calling him. Sitting outside his tent
in the forest, Billy listens to the calls of the streams, the hills, the forests
and the tribals:

“They all seemed to be waiting and watching and staring at me. It
was as though I was not Bimal Biswas, graduate of Columbia, the
only son of a Supreme Court judge, husband of Meena Biswas and
father of a handsome child; it was as though I were not at all this
but the first man on earth facing the earth’s first night…Come it
said. Come to our primitive world that would soon or later
overcome the works of man, come. We have waited for you….
Come, Come, Come, Come, why do you want to go back? This is all there is on the earth. This and the woman waiting for you in the little hut at bottom of a hill. You thought New York was real. You thought New Delhi was your Destination. How mistaken you have been! Mistaken and misled. Come, now, come. Take us. Take us until you have had your fill. It is we who are the inheritors of the cosmic night.”

Sitting on the rock that night Billy has undergone a deep metamorphosis. Layer upon layer is peeled off him until nothing but his primitive self is left trembling in the moon light. In addition, Bimal Biswas, a graduate of Columbia, seeks a perpetual refuse in the tribal wilderness, simply vanishes in to the *Saal* forest of the Maikala hills.

In fact, when Billy was sitting on the rock his inner desires have come to surface. The psyche of Billy has changed completely. He goes to sleep but he has made up his mind. Next morning when Billy gets up, he talks with his students about their fieldwork. Billy thinks that if one wants to study Anthropology one needs to know the tribal life – style and social customs. Billy gives them certain suggestions what they should do and
what they should not do while interacting with the tribal People. However, while saying this, a sudden transformation takes place in his personality. He feels that he is talking to strangers. He feels that they have not come to study the life style of those tribals but these strangers ‘boys – students’ have come to study the life – style of him and his people. This feeling of Bimal Biswas clarifies that a complete transformation of his personality has taken place. Billy is now no more a man of civilized world but a tribal of Maikala hills. In the evening, Billy goes to Dhunia’s village. To his surprise, he finds all the huts of that village deserted by the people. There is only one old woman who informs Billy that all have gone to a hill to celebrate the dance. Billy goes to that place and finds that tribal men and women are divided into two groups. They have formed circles in order to dance. Dhunia greets him as Mahaprasad. All the tribals wait for the rising of the moon because they will be able to see the white cliff – chandtola after the rising of the moon. Billy whose personality has undergone a total change, who has become a true tribal also starts waiting for the rising of the moon. Formally, Billy had waited for his exams, results, degrees, appointment letter and many other worldly things but now as a true tribal Billy waits for the rising of the moon. So that he can also have the ‘Darshan’ – glimpses of chandtola. Billy finds this new waiting more interesting and exciting. It also suggests the total transformation of his personality. Formally, he has
seen moon many times but he finds the moon of that night more attractive. He takes wine like other tribals. A sudden psyche change has been found in Billy as his heart after having wine starts developing a feeling of hatred in him for his wife, his family and the whole civilized world. That night he meets Bilasia a forgetting all about whose son he is and whose husband he is. He cannot resist that temptation of Bilasia and when she offers herself to him, he willingly accepts her. Both pass that night together under a Saal tree. Explaining this to Romi, Billy says that it was not just a desire, which compelled him to do that. Billy calls it madness, which forced him to fall for Bilasia. Billy confesses that he never experienced the feeling that he had experienced for Bilasia for any other woman in the past. That night his feeling was the same as is the feeling of a sinner who after committing so many sins and after suffering a lot finds himself face to face with God. The sinner would feel that the very presence of God is his salvation. In the same manner, Billy felt salvation in the presence of Bilasia. Billy passes the whole night in the company of Bilasia. Next morning he approaches Dhunia and desire to stay with them as a tribal. After lot of hesitation Dhunia arranges for Billy to stay with Bilasia. This is how Bimal Biswas, a civilized being transforms into a tribal being. The desires of Id have been finally satisfied. Billy is so much fed up with the so – called civilized world of greed, avarice, hollowness and hypocrisy and feels so much drawn
towards the primitive in life that he leaves his wife, his only child and his old parents. He disappears in to the *Saal* forests of the Maikala hills. Great commotion has followed the heels of Billy’s disappearance as he has disappeared totally without leaving a trace. Various theories have been fabricated. A theory, which ultimately is adopted by the police, is that the man – eater who has been heard repeatedly near their camps that night before Billy’s disappearance has killed Billy and hence the police close Billy’s case. The Strange Case of Billy Biswas – that is how it appears to the civilized world. Billy comes to know how the so – called civilized society has brought havoc upon his hypersensitive mind. Billy is very much alive with a tribal belle Bilasia whose enormous eyes pour out a sexuality that is nearly as primeval as the forest that surrounds them. If the forest and the hills have beckoned him earlier, Bilasia is now leading him by hand. Bilasia is the essence of that primitive force which has been calling him night after night, year after year. Billy is thoroughly tribalized. He wears a lion – cloth, grows beard and is some kind of a demi – god to the local tribals. He emerges among them as an archetype of their collective consciousness:

“And so Billy Biswas, a refugee from civilization, sat in the shadow of a *Saal* tree, a thousand miles away from home, and gradually underwent his final metamorphosis.”
When Billy enters the world of tribals and watches their drumming and dance, his unconsciousness craves to become a conscious part of their world:

“He squatted at the edge of a promontory and stared into the basin of a gorge five hundred feet below while the tumultuous drums chiseled away the edifice of his past.”

He has become the *Mahaprasa*, the greatest friend of Dhunia, the village headman. Billy is described in mystical sweetness and classical tradition. To the tribal people of the hills, Billy is,

“…like rain on parched lands, like balm on a wound. These hills have not seen the like of him since the last of our Kings passed away.”

The reason why Billy chooses living with the tribals is that “nobody here is interested in the prices of food grains or new seeds or roads or elections and stuff like that. We talk of the supernatural, violent death, trees, earth, rain, dust storms, rivers, moods of the forest, animals, dance, and singing. And we talk – a lot about women and sex.” He is also driven to the forest with “a sudden interest in my own identity.” Money has no place in their
life as they have conquered wants. Even if they suffer from a severe drought, they do not forget singing, dancing and love – making. Billy tells Romi that they live at the subsistence level:

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

Billy’s psyche has undergone change to such an extent that he says:

“It was more or less the same with me except that I could not figure out what excited or troubled me unless it was a sudden interest in my own identity. Who was I? Where had I come from? Where was I going?”

Being fascinated by the primitive surroundings, fed up with the strange, unresponsive, wooden Meena and corrupted by the charm of Rima Kaul, Billy gets a glimpse of Bilasia in Dhunia’s hut. This pull is very powerful. Her presence transforms him:

“It was I who had changed. Or, rather quite suddenly and unaccountably I had ceased to resist what was the real me. All that
I had been confusedly driving towards all my life had been crystallized, brought into focus, so to speak, by what I had gone through during the interval between this visit and the time I had first met Bilasia.”

The charm of Bilasia is not only sensual. It imparts thrill, nay vitality, to the very soul. When Romi meets her, he is overpowered:

“As I stepped forward I had the distinct, if somewhat confused, feeling that I was facing not merely a human being but also the embodiment of that primal and innumerable force that had ruled these hills, perhaps this earth, since time began and that, our proud claim to the contrary, still lay in wait for us not far from the door step of our air – conditioned rooms.”

So, in Bilasia Billy finds the right woman who can enliven his soul. Meena deadens his sense, Rima corrupts him and the material civilization kills his innate natural instinct. It is Bilasia who causes explosion of senses – the proper medium to reach soul. Billy renounces the civilized world and its symbols in Meena and Rima. From Meena to Rima and from Rima to Bilasia is not a mere trifling in Billy’s life, it is a
development from sex to sympathy and from sympathy to sublimation. In Bilasia, the physical and the elemental meet. She is both Laurentian and Blakean. Bilasia, to use Jungian concept, is his missing self. Arun Joshi’s protagonists are Pirandello’s cluster of identities in search of wholeness. In term of psychoanalysis, Billy and Bilasia are two selves of the same personality.

Consequently, when Billy encounters Bilasia alone in the festive moonlit night, he cannot resist her. She is attractive sexually no doubt, but she is captivating as the primeval force. “Her enormous eyes, only a little foggier with drink, poured out sexuality that was nearly as primeval as the forest that surrounded them.” When Bilasia makes herself available to him, he does not feel that it is a union of two separate bodies as in the case with Meena, or union of flesh as with Rima. It is merging of a split self to realize the whole.

“Desire was too mild a word for what I felt at that moment. It was closer to madness, the terrible madness of a man who after great sin and much suffering finally finds himself in the presence of his god. It was that passing moment that rarely comes in a man’s life, when he feels that he has suddenly discovered that bit of himself
that he has searched for all his life and without which his life is nothing more than the poor reflection of a million others.”

In fact, Bilasia is the essence of the primitive force. Now Billy’s fascination for primitivism becomes an experience, a realization. Now he knows what he has been wanting and what he has realized. Bilasia, freed from the strange hold of money – minded civilization, knows how to experience joy from communion with Nature, from naked primeval passions and the rhythm of the integrated and harmonized souls.

Billy’s unconscious urge to be a primitive has come to surface and Billy knows that what he has been really wanting and what he has practically realized. He knows that his love for the primitive is a step towards his spiritual awareness, his realization of the soul, his inner self and his quest to find meaning and values in life, as it is clear from the following conversation between Billy Biswas and Romi Sahai:

“‘That Other Thing was, and is, after all, what my life is all about.’

‘You mean your desire to become a primitive?’
He hesitated.

‘I don’t want to sound too pompous, old chap.’

‘What is that?’

He seemed to be thinking.

‘God?’ I prompted.

‘There, there, old chap, that is too big a word.’

‘Something like that?’

‘Yes, something like that.’”

Billy now knows his destination. He knows that he is a pilgrim. Primitivism will lead him to his goal. “Becoming a primitive was only a first step, and 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.” So, Billy is like those saints of India who want to realize unity with the divine through awakening of their senses. Like the Sadhakas of Tantra, Billy hankers after self – realization, the experience of identification with the cosmos, the divine. He gets a taste of it and he cannot return to Meena or Mr. Biswas. For him Bilasia is Prakriti, he is Purush (male), and the cosmic whole can be experienced in their union.
Hari Mohan Prasad rightly remarks –

“According to Sankhya System of Philosophy evolution takes place when Purush and Prakriti come in contact. Prakriti needs Purush in order to enjoy and in order to obtain liberation (apavarga). As the ever – active unlimited power, Prakriti is called Shakti. Bilasia is Shakti for Billy. This consciousness of Shakti is extensive in Arun Joshi. In his The Last Labyrinth, Anuradha becomes soon Bhaskar’s Shakti. Only when Billy meets Bilasia and unifies himself with her, he finds his real self and gets liberation. He gets his goal. That the pilgrim is near his goal before his death becomes amply clear.”

Billy’s death accentuates the contrast between the ephemeral authority of ‘the so – called organized, civilized society’ Romi represents and the primal and invulnerable force of Billy’s world, its weird unintelligibility and inexplicable glory. The contrast overwhelms Romi – so much so that he suffers from self – doubt and almost feels like giving up his job. This change in Romi adds an extra interest to the novel.
Billy’s renewal of contact with Romi is not at all accidental but a deliberate act of decision. Billy is deeply worried about his friend and his corruption. The law and order situation in the district deteriorates in the wake of the terrible drought and Romi resorts to strict measures to restore normalcy. It is not very difficult for him with the help of a trigger – happy, sadistic police officer like Rele. However, what is significant is that Romi realizes his own moral descent. A change sets over him that hardens his heart and he has a vague feeling that he is losing his sense of moral values. In the face of police atrocity, he feels nothing but indifference. Billy intervenes to protect Romi not from the violent and hungry crowd but from himself, to prevent him from killing other people. He knows the risk he runs, but he is worried about the insensitivity of his friend. Moreover, with his healing touch and knowledge of herbal medicines he cures Situ, Romi’s wife, of a painful migraine. Things go beyond Romi’s control when his nagging wife compels him to divulge the secret and passes on the information to Billy’s father and Meena. They come to reclaim Billy and put tremendous pressure on Romi to reveal his whereabouts. The more Romi tries to convince them of the undesirability of the effort in view of Billy’s drastic break with civilization, the more ‘they converted the story… into a stereotype childish escapade which was all that their ordinary minds were capable of.’ Romi, however, is not surprised by their incomprehensibility:
“They were only the representatives of a society which, in its middle-class mediocrity, bracketed men like Billy with irresponsible fools and common criminals and considered it their duty to prevent them from seeking such meager fulfillment of their destiny as their tortured lives allowed.”

The entire authority of the government is brought against Billy Biswas, who, by his act of rebellion, has put the civilized society to shame. Ironically, Romi becomes, much against his wishes, the paw of this authority. A terrible ‘witch – hunt’ begins to retrieve Billy, and in the face of the direct encounter between Billy’s world and the instruments of the organized society, Romi feels alarmed. The search leads to the final tragedy. Billy, who spears down a police constable in order to wrench his freedom, is shot dead:

‘Billy,’ I cried. ‘Billy’.

He opened his fast – glazing eyes for a moment and appeared to look at me.

‘You bastards,’ he said hoarsely. Then he died.
This is Billy’s final verdict on the civilized society, which is not natural, but ‘bastardly’ and which has put an end to his quest. Only a handful of ash in a mud pot is all of Billy that reaches the civilized world, and his ‘strange case’ is ‘disposed of in the only manner that a humdrum society knows of disposing its rebels, its seers, its true lovers.’

Romi is deeply grieved at Billy’s “and so unbearable tragic” and feelingly reflects:

“Gradually it dawned upon us that what we had killed was not a man, not even the son of a ‘Governor’, but some one for whom our civilized world had no equivalent. It was as though we had killed one of the numerous man gods of the primitive pantheon.”

Thus ends the existentialist quest of Billy for values and meaning of life in the mad, bad, absurd world where none tries to understand his problem even after his death. Meena, Mr. Biswas, the Chief Secretary, Rele along with his men, Situ and others are “Only the representatives of a society which, in its middle – class mediocrity, bracketed men like Billy with irresponsible fools and common criminals and considered it their duty to prevent them from seeking such meager fulfillment of their destiny as
their tortured lives allowed.” None of these persons could understand that Billy was seeking a “search of truth.”

The protagonist, ultimately, has to pay price with his life for not conforming to the norms of the so-called civilized society and for daring “to step out of its stifling confines” and The Strange Case of Billy Biswas had at last been disposed of. It had been disposed of in the only manner that a humdrum society knows of disposing its rebels, its seers, its true lovers.”

Billy’s death should not be taken as the death of an isolationist but as the triumph of his ideals and principles. The civilized world is all out to destroy him. Even Romi, his trusted friend and the only link from civilization that Billy keeps, ultimately betrays him. He betrays the confidence reposed in him and fails to protect Billy as things get beyond his control when his wife Situ discloses the secret to Billy’s father and wife. On the other hand, the tribal world seeks to perpetuate the memory of the man–god by offering him a shrine. Billy’s dying words “You bastards”, watching his close friend Romi approaching him, are significant and meaningful. It is at the same time a direct abuse, an
expression of anger at the betrayal of friendship and the meaningless assault of the civilized world on his creative privacy. As Billy uses the expression thrice in the novel, it is his finally confirmed verdict on civilization, which is not natural but bastardly.

The story also presents myth – making psyche of the tribals through character of Dhunia. Dhunia comes out with a folk – legend. The gist of the story can be examined as it has a direct bearing upon Billy. Thousands of years ago there lived a great king who built a temple for which he wanted to have the chief idol for the inner shrine made by himself. He went on working, and the idol was so beautiful that God decided to enter it. That night the brothers of the king who got scent of this divine benediction on their brother poisoned him and the queen, Devi, immolated herself prophesying that she would return when her husband returned to the forest. Dhunia identified Billy as the King. For the tribals he is a mythical king who is destined to return and on his return Chandtola, the peak, will glow again on moonlit nights. Billy’s story parallels the king who attempts to sculpt the face of God, but is spoiled in the midway in the mad, bad, absurd world.
And it is here, while narrating the story of the king, Joshi introduces another recurring mythical concept in the novel: the concept of Mantra. According to the Indian tradition, men who transgress their “mantra” (i.e., natural limits) are punished for it by a kind of Nemesis. Legends and fables may have this common underlying pattern – how men who overstep their “mantra” are finally punished. If Billy knows that he is the king he will lose his powers. Dhunia says:

“Those who must not will hear of it, and Billy Bhai will lose his powers.”

Joy Abraham writes in his article “The Narrative Strategy in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas” –

“Dhunia regards Billy as the best magician who has got his magic power from Devi Mata of the Chandtola abode. The efficacy of magic implies a belief in magic. His chief functions, however, are those of a priest. So we are inclined to consider him as the archetypal hero, as the Saviour or Deliverer undertaking some long journey during which he must perform impossible tasks, battle with monsters, overcome insurmountable obstacles in order to save his subjects. Rama in The Ramayana belongs to this category. Billy
who in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* takes up a long journey to understand himself and the nature of reality does a lot of miracles. He is a sort of man – god, an *avatara* to the tribals and this sort of belief is in tune with the Indian tradition:

“The East is trying to see God in man (hence the *avatara* or incarnations) while in the West the difference and distance between God and man is unbridgeable.””

Dhunia is reported to have narrated a number of miracles performed by Billy even though Billy himself questions the credibility of some of them at the time of his conversation with the narrator. Billy drives away a tiger roaming in the jungles, he brings Dhunia’s grandson who is as “dead as that fly” back to life, restores the health of Bilasia, cures the migraine of Situ and even predicts the rainfall. It seems odd that his regret over the appearance before Romi has proved to be true even though the latter is devoid of any ulterior motive to betray him. The superstitions prevent among the elite society are also in keeping with the tribal beliefs. The “bad omen” of asking water by Romi when they are about to set out in search of Billy proves to forestall disaster, for the search ends in Billy’s death.
Thus, apart from the allegorical function all myths are used with a view to bring out Billy’s experience in line with that of *rishis* and other “refugees from civilization.” Myths and legends form the underlying design holding together all the digressions, the tales within tales enriching the main structure of the novel. It is as powerful as many other Indian English novels.

The entire novel is an attempt to discuss and justify the primitive instincts of Bimal Biswas. Since the narrator cannot write anything that he does not know, the narration turns out to be purely subjective and in the first person singular. It is not merely the events of his life that the narrator recounts but he also tries to find the truth hidden behind them. So, instead of a straightforward narration of events in their chronological order, the narrator leads us through the introspective memories, inmost thoughts and feelings, analysis of intimate human relations, personal letters and discussions. Several characters are made to have discussions with the narrator, including the hero himself. Most of the characters, except Bilasia, have been drawn simply for the expediency of the plot. The discussions with Rima Kaul who is so “head over heels in love” with Billy, Bilasia his paramour, “the nosy little fellow from Patna”, and with the drooling old advocate all serve this purpose. The discussion with
Dhunia, the tribal headman, is important because he explains in his own tribal dialect the nature of the psychological impact made by *Kala Pahar* on Billy Biswas, which forms the foundation of the novel.

“‘You see what you can when you are awake, and what you cannot see when you are awake comes to you in dreams. It is all the same.’”

The following passage brings home to us the use of a style that reflects the rhythmic sensibilities of the Indian psyche:

“‘When the *Kala Pahar* calls you, Collector sahib, there is nothing you can do but go. The first time I heard his drumming I knew the Rock had called him. It is like a woman calling you. You become blind…. All you hear is its call. Day and night, it calls you. Night and day. And you go like a fish hooked on a string, in spite of yourself, bound hand and foot. There is nothing you can do but go, when the *Kala Pahar* calls you. Yes, Collector sahib, the Black Rock is the Master of us all.’”

The quick succession of the precise sentences here suggests the nature of the over powering effect of the big Rock on Dhunia who fails to
communicate something more for which human language is grossly inadequate.


“In the title of the novel, the words “strange” and “case” have thematic significance. Billy’s case is “strange” because in the materialistic world where everybody is mad after civilization and its comforts, he, being professor in Anthropology at the Delhi University, the America – educated anthropologist and a member of the sophisticated class of Delhi, opts for the primitive life of the tribals. His “case” is an interesting psychological case – study for psycho – analysts and psychiatrists. His predicament is psychologically concerned with the inner psyche and “those dark mossy labyrinths of the soul.” Unlike Sindi in *The Foreigner*, who is assessed by others in his quest, Billy’s experiences are mainly psychic and he remains all along a lonely quester.”
Joy Abraham writes in his article “The Narrative Strategy in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas” –

“He is definitely a “strange case” for psychoanalysts and psychiatrists. As for the word “case,” normally “case” means a psychological case. In fact, Billy’s case is a good psychological case study. For his predicament is something psychological and his search is also after the psyche and reality. In the legal sense Billy’s disappearance is treated as a case of killing by the man – eater and in the end Billy himself is hunted by the police as a killer. The title also suggests the civilized world’s comment on Billy’s behavior which to the conformists looks “strange” indeed.”

The major issue, which the present novel raises for the discussion, is: can such a thing happen with a human being and if it happens, what could be the reason for it? In fact, this question is also an issue of psychoanalysis because it takes to the root of human temperament. Human temperament is found in specific manner by birth on which environment can have influence but very little. Nurture and Nature are the two formative principles of human temperament but it is with a basic truth that whatever is received by the way of nature can be developed with surrounding nature. It cannot be changed, Billy’s temperament right from his infancy.
is given to love for the tribal way of life, which compels him to think, behave and act in a particular manner. Even if he makes a conscious attempt to behave the other way, his conditioning with the tribal way of life would never allow him to do that. The psychoanalysis of Billy’s character proves that he is like a bird in the cage of his own temperament and so he has to live life in a different way from his wife Meena and his friend Romi. For them it may be something uneven, improper and unnatural but for him that is the only natural way of life. He is defeated in the form of his love for the tribal way of life. The psychoanalysis on Billy’s character suggests that he is a primitive man living in modern times and that is why he finds himself misfit first in America and then in Delhi. The only place where he gets peace is the village of Bilasia. The only company that he can relish is the company of Bilasia and other tribal because for him there cannot be any other way of life.

Placing Billy in the four quadrants of Johari Window, we come to know a lot about Billy Biswas. As discussed in Chapter – II Johari Window has four quadrants or four panes. The first pane is known as “Open.” This quadrant includes information, which is known to me and to others. The second quadrant is known as “Blind.” This quadrant includes information, which is known to others, but not me. The third quadrant is
known as “Hidden.” This quadrant includes information, which is known to me, but not to others. The fourth and last quadrant is known as “Unknown.” This quadrant includes information, which is not known to me or to others. Details, which are known to Billy about himself and to the other characters of the novel, are that Billy is an educated fellow, son of an ambassador, a man who speaks English with good accent, his childhood experiences etc. These are the details, which are in the “Open” quadrant. Details, which are known to others about Billy but not known to Billy, are his abnormal behaviour and hallucinations. Billy has hallucinations and it is known only to Tuula, his Swedish girlfriend. Later on it is also known to his friend Romi. These hallucinations can be dangerous is known to Tuula but its consequences are totally unknown to Billy. These are the details, which are in the “Blind” quadrant. Details, which Billy knows about himself but other characters in the novel don’t know are his love for tribals and urge live life like a primitive being. Even his passion and love for Anthropology is unknown to his parents. These are the details, which are in the “Hidden” quadrant. Details, which are not known to Billy about himself or to others, include the major incident of the novel. Billy was not knowing that his urge to live life like a primitive will be so powerful that he will leave his parents, his wife Meena and his only son and will live with Bilasia in Maikala Hills. The
other characters in the novel were neither knowing this about Billy Biswas nor had any hint that Billy will take such an incredible act.

Thus, through the help of Johari Window we come to know several details about Billy and certain aspects of Billy’s personality.