CHAPTER - 2

Self in Exile

Arun Joshi's first novel The Foreigner (1968) enjoys a prominent place in his literary contour for a variety of reasons. Primarily because it established his eminent place amongst the Indian novelists in English in terms of its literary ingenuity, socio-cultural dimensions and moral preoccupations. Besides, the novel also heralds, almost all important thematic, stylistic, philosophical and technical concerns of Arun Joshi.

This novel therefore, received noticeable critical attention both within and outside India. He was compared and often clubbed with the modern writers of the first rank in India and abroad. S.Regnachari (1) though denies any overt influence of T.S.Eliot on Arun Joshi, however he has pointed out noticeable similarities in the themes of the two writers. O.P.Mathur and G.Rai (2) trace out the Sartrenian influence on Arun Joshi's vision as a writer. They point out that in spite of an obvious influence of Sartre, Joshi does not confine himself to the sheer absurd. He, they point out transcends absurdity and enter the realm of Karmayoga. O.P.Bhatnagar (3) estimates his fiction as: ... "a commentary on the much paraded mode of anxiety, rootlessness and isolation as style of life". Madhusudan Prasad (4) has ranked this novel with Kamala Markandaya's The Nowhere Man, Anita Desai's Bye-Bye Blackbird and N.Radhakriashnan (5) underscores Joshi's creative concern with the feminine and feminist's problematics. He points out that women
characters out number the men and dominate the action. Harish Raizada (6) has expressed admiration and asserts that Arun Joshi dexterously sustains the elements of suspense “by contriving the see-saw movements of past and present events connected with the life of the protagonist”.

The novel, thus, has been approached from various points of view. It should however, be pointed out that, The Foreigner has not received adequate critical attention in terms of the themes of alienation and dispossession, which are in fact, the dominant themes in the text. Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist, in its ultimate analysis emblematises dispossession and isolation in all possible connotations. Alienated and dispossessed he finally falls a prey to inaction and indecision. The novel is about Sindi’s loneliness and the feelings of anguish in the wake of his estrangements from his environment, tradition and from his true self. It is about the problems of involvement in and detachment, diffidence and lack of courage to face the hazards of life; it is also about the lack of commitment and ability to accept the responsibility of one’s action. It is a fictional portrayal of the suffering of an individual who is cut off from his familial, social and cultural ties and is lost in the intricate labyrinth of life. It is thus, an emotionally charged narrative account of the protagonist’s anguished quest to find a way out.

The Foreigner is a first person narration in the mode of reminiscence. It is Sindi, the self-reflective protagonist who tells his own story. He describes with honesty and sincerity his search for the meaning
and purpose of life. Arun Joshi's skilful handling of the narrative strategy deserves special attention here. His treatment of the narrative point of view facilitates his creative task of delineating the protagonist's splintered inner self and shattered outer-world. The first-person point of view is split between an experiencing 'I' and a narrating 'I'. The novel, therefore, assumes the dimension of an authentic record of the extrinsic and extracacies of the human existence generated by a deep-rooted quest for self-knowledge.

The very first scene of the novel sets the tone and texture of the entire narrative account. The reader is taken to the morgue to witness a scene that very subtly makes him reflect on the transience of human life and its uncertainties. It also implies the absurdities of the situation in which a man is invariably and ruthlessly placed. We find that a young, handsome Indian student has met a fatal accident. Unlike death, life too appears to be beyond human control and even imagination. The protagonist is confronted with heart shattering task of recognizing the dead body of his intimate friend Babu Khemka, who had come to America for study. Untimely death of the young friend sends shock waves through his entire self. What is more painful to go through lies ahead. He has to break the news to June, the girl, the deceased young man was supposed to marry. He therefore invites June to a restaurant and over a cup of tea informs her of Babu's death. Another excruciating painful experience that he has to undergo is that of apprising the stinkingly rich father of Babu and his enterprising sister of all the minute
details regarding Babu’s death. Sindi however, does not reveal the entire truth about Babu’s accident and the consequential death. He finds himself at war with his own self in the task of revealing and restraining the truth. He is continually tortured and tormented by his moral consciousness and pricking conscience. Because in the heart of his heart he believes that his relationship with June is partially responsible for Babu’s death. Death, thus, looms large over the entire novel, enhancing the feelings of restlessness, agony and anxiety. Sindi’s parents have already died his guardian uncle too passes away leaving him alone with no familial prop to fall to. The pivot of his feelings and thoughts, June too, dies with her unborn baby. Death thus, reins supreme, generating a feeling of futility and absurdity of life. These events go deep down into the making of Sindi’s psychic structure. Sindi’s psychic structure in fact, has been mainly responsible for his acute sense of alienation and dispossession.

Sindi’s world, socio-cultural conditions notwithstanding, is a world of crass materialism. It is a world beset with people who are self-centred and selfish, there is however something common that all these characters share. And it is the conspicuously missing dimension of the sense of belonging. It is in some sense or the other, exactly like, what David Riesman calls ‘The Lonely Crowd’. Bereft of the spiritual values and divine characteristics, all these men and women seem to have lost in the wilderness of their instinctual pressures and materialistic longing. Driven by their unruly desires, they ransack all the possibilities of
achieving gratification. But all their efforts to obtain peace and contentment ironically end in smoke. Their world is essentially a world of isolation. All their social and interpersonal relation, not to mention their relationship with God, is inherently feeble and febrile. It lacks the warmth of genuine human concern. Some of them do try for enduring human relationship but unfortunately there are invincible hurdles created by the cultural ambience. Their social and interpersonal relationship either lands in clash or ends in worsening their predicament. They also employ at times, their sexuality to reach out and achieve companionship but ultimately it is transience that reigns supreme in the world of Arun Joshi’s characters; they keep applying themselves sincerely though. They keep on moving from person to person and even place to place in search of authentic human relationship that they think might grant them identity, stability and integrity. Sindi, for instance keeps on moving from one place to another. He even keeps on moving from person to person and from one woman to another.

All these men and women are victims of some indefinable and vague extrinsic and intrinsic pressure and its murderous boredom, ennui, satiety and surfeit that keep hovering over their inner selves. Consequently, they all have to fight against a formidable sense of nausea generated by their plights. Nicely placed in their materialistic comforts and coziness, they are constantly haunted by a sense of depravity. The institution of religion has also failed to provide them with a strong foothold. Their society is a godless and directionless society. Even the
institution of marriage does not avail them stability and moral sanity. In search of peace and contentment, they desperately move in and out of the matrimonial alliance. To some marriage is a straight jacket that turns them into suffocating monotony and consequential passivity and helplessness, in spite of their occasional ventures for the gratification of instinctual desires. There is hardly any room for companionship in the real sense of the word. Sindi in his haphazard journey from woman to woman epitomizes the plights of alienated and dispossessed souls. Driven by their acute sense of isolation Anna and Sindi land into a relationship that they believe would generate feelings of mutual companionship and reciprocation. Anna is a minor Soho artist. “She was about thirty-five with dark hair and finely chiselled features. She was plump and pretty and looked younger than her age” (P-142).

She is, as we find, separated from her husband. A minor artist. Anna is a prisoner of her own whims and fancies, desires and expectations. Her convergence upon a point is difficult to be achieved as her inner yearnings would not let her rest on any particular point. Her entire personality is a yearning, a desire, sometimes very concrete and at times, inexplicable. It is painful though of ‘a loss’ that governs her attitude towards human relationship. Sex though at times appears to her as a source of reconciliation and affirmation of a bond of relationship. But it proves transience and futile. She is, in fact, neither in love with Sindi or anybody else for that matter. She yearns for the vigour and vitality of her youth that is irrevocably lost. All her relationship,
therefore, is essentially tinged with a colour of estrangement or alienation. Estranged from the world around her, she paradoxically keeps longing for an enduring human bond. Despite their mutual convergence, both Anna and Sindi ultimately end up in estrangement. Neither of them, in fact, gets any sense of fulfilment or companionship.

Sindi’s intimacy or alliance with Kathy too does not yield any lasting result. Uprooted as he is, Sindi is continually in search of an enduring human relationship that could help him define life and understand its complexity; a relationship that could also rescue him from the absurd situation and rid him of the heart shattering awareness of isolation and dispossession. Kathy’s too, is not an exemplary case. She also, like most of the characters in the novel, is a victim of the insipid and colourless conjugal life. Her domestic discord in its larger analysis exemplifies the chaotic and absurd social and cultural situation. The acute sense of ennui and boredom, enhanced by the monotony of marriage compels her to defy the social and cultural considerations. She desperately tries to wriggle herself free from the unpalatable reality of marriage and gets involved in a relationship with another man of her own-type, a tempest-torn character in search of an anchor – Sindi.

Arun Joshi in this novel seriously questions the validity and authenticity of marriage in the modern society that is morally disrupted and spiritually sterile. Pressurized by the compulsions of the dehumanized society, the characters get into marital alliance expecting
stability and integrity. But to their dismay they are disappointed dejected and finally disillusioned. Because they fail to understand the delicacy, decency, seriousness and selflessness that attribute sacredness and continuity to marriage. Deprived of their innate goodness and divine characteristics they fail to prove themselves up to the levels of love, tenderness and selflessness the very idea of love and marriage proves to be a hard nut for them to be cracked. Marriage to them, therefore, symbolizes possession and dispossession, materialism and consumption simultaneously; it is nothing but a burden, a Herculean burden under which they lurch, moan and grumble.

June Blyth, a beautiful, affectionate and feminine American is another example. Sindi meets her at a foreign students' party. She works in an insurance company in Boston as a statistician. Initially June helps Sindi in overcoming his illness. Slowly their relation grows, they start meeting almost daily. She likes him, Sindi, too, loves her. She invariably comes to his room after her office hours. Their intimate relations continued for a long time and they indulge in sexual transactions. Sindi's relationship with June is the pivot of her life. Sindi, however spoils the relationship for the fear of possession. He loves her intimately but withdraws from being possessed. The dialogue between June and Sindi shows how he tries to mask himself:

"... marriage was more often a lust for possession than anything else. People got married just as they bought new
cars. And, then they gobbled each other up. Sindi said” (P-60).

He tries to impress upon June that marriage is sheer a materialistic, a commercial act: it is tantamount to, he asserts, buying a car or a commodity for comforts, it is an image that like Frankenstein devours its creator. June nevertheless strives to pave a matrimonial way for him. She retorts:

“But marriage is also love, isn’t it!” June said (P-60).

Sindi is afraid of getting involved with June. He knows that in love acceptance of another’s existence independent of oneself is a sine qua non. While discussing about love with Karl, Sindi says:

“Love was like a debt that you had to return sooner or later. And if you didn’t you felt very uncomfortable” (P-54).

Sindi does not want that anybody should know about his idea of attachment. He wants to make love without any attachment. His earlier relations with women were based on non-involvement of any kind of human relations. Asnani aptly puts Sindi’s idea of love:
"Pleasure with involvement and love without possession are the values that condition the attitudes and overall vision of Sindi” (7).

June is humane, sympathetic and sacrificial woman who plays an important role in Sindi’s life and works as a catalyst in his progress towards self-realization. June is an extravert and selfless. She helps others and finds pleasure in it. Sindi knows her good qualities. In fact, it is June’s selflessness, her willingness to be good and useful to others and her ever-readiness to be actively involved in other’s matters that fascinates Sindi, in spite of the disputable dispositional differences. She likes to be ‘involved’ whenever he prefers to remain ‘detached’:

"...she revealed to me all that I was not and couldn’t hope to be. May be that is why I later fell in love with her even as I struggled to remain uninvolved” (P-56).

Sindi continues elaborating good qualities of June:

"June was one of those rare persons who have a capacity to forget themselves in somebody’s trouble. I don’t know how they manage it but it is beautiful to run into them every now and then. June perhaps was essentially so uncomplicated a person that whenever she saw somebody in pain she went straight out to pet him rather than analyzing it a million times like the rest of us” (P-97).
Sindi, however, always contemplates and vacillates like Hamlet or Prufrock. June tries her best to bring Sindi out of his self-styled detachment. This self-styled detachment or the lack of involvement generates a sense of loneliness, boredom and concomitant fears of futility. His problem is that he does not want to involve himself in any relation. The memory of his involvement with other women, Anna and Kathy, always haunts him. He loves June but wants to remain uninvolved. He does not want to merge completely with the other. He loves her but with detachment and consequently is alienated from her. June thinks their marriage can bring the two intimately together but Sindi does not believe in it. Marriage means to him merger of two persons into one. He tells June:

"Marriage wouldn't help, June. We are alone, both you and I. That is the problem. And our aloneness must be resolved from within. You can't send two persons through a ceremony and expect that their aloneness will disappear" (P-107).

This coldness towards June is not a sign of Sindi’s lack of love for June as he does love her. He wants to love June in his own way, as he tells June:

"My darling, my beautiful darling, you have no idea how much I love you. But I have loved you in my own way. I know no other way” (P-108).
In his long discussion with June he puts forth his idea of love, he says:

"All love - whether of things, or persons, or oneself - was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion. Love begot greed and attachment, and it led to possession" (P-145).

Sindi continues in the same vein about love:

"You can love without attachment to the objects of your love. You can love without fooling yourself that the things you love are indispensable either to you or to the world. Love is real only when you know that what you love must one day die" (P-145).

The obstruction in the relation of June and Sindi is not only feared of committing himself, but also the sense of foreigner and alienation in him, originating from the absence of self-confidence or of the sense of permanence and reality.

June is disappointed with Sindi. She loves him intimately and wants to marry him. He is preoccupied with his detachment. She leaves Sindi for Babu. The following dialogue between June and Sindi would show why June leaves Sindi for Babu:

"What has happened to all your detachment? I though you never loved anybody - except perhaps yourself. June said.
Don’t you believe that I loved you? Sindi said. ... you are so tied up with your detachment it makes little difference whether you love or you don’t ... it just made me sad because I thought I was in love with you, June said” (P-136).

Babu son of Mr.Khemka comes to America to study. He meets June in Sindi’s apartment. He feels relieved when he comes to know that Sindi and June are just friends and they are not going to marry. He is not good at studies. June’s selfless nature and an urge to help others in distress bring her close to Babu. Babu fails in his studies but continues to love June. Babu’s father has a dominant influence on him. Mr.Khemka does not allow his son to have freedom of choice. Sindi and June ask Babu to get rid of his father fixation. Mr.Khemka’s incessant interference in the life of Babu and his sermons to his son makes the life of June bitter. She tells to Sindi about Babu:

“"This father of his seems to be an awful bully. I am sure things would be much simpler if he were not always there in the background, sending those long sermons and telling him what’s wrong with him and how he should carry himself” (P-105).

June wants to help Babu; she thinks he needs her. But she is wrong. Babu’s nature is beyond her comprehension. Her expectations from Babu prove wrong. Sindi asks her what Babu wants from her, she replies:
“I wish to God I knew. I just don’t know. Initially, I thought he just wanted me physically... I told him he could have me whenever he felt like it... Later on I thought that he wanted me for company... But now the whole thing seems to be confused... I have given him all that I have, but it does not suffice. It would have been so much easier if he had just wanted my body. In five minutes it is over. A woman can see the look of satisfaction and gratitude and even feel gratified in return. But here it is just one long drawn-out agony. Each minute is loaded with throbbing of a climax which never comes” (P-136)

June is disappointed when she has close relation with Babu. She notices a mark change in Babu. She thought him naïve and innocent. But that is not so. He finds herself in a great mental stress. She describes her mental agony in a letter to Sindi:

“Babu and I were not particularly cut out for each other even before, but now a strange thing has happened to him. He is just not the naïve, lovable little boy anymore. He has become... jealous and petty and irritable... he suspected me of going to bed with anybody who asked me” (P-137-138).
Babu fails in studies. The university asks him to quit. He becomes jealous and suspects June. She undergoes mental stress. She goes to Sindi, and both make love. After making love with Sindi, June goes to Babu’s flat. She finds him in an angry mood:

“He lost his temper and asked her where she had been. She told him she spent the evening with me. Babu asked her if she had been sleeping with me. She told him that as a matter of fact she had been sleeping with me, and what’s more, she had been doing that for a year before she met him... then he called her a whore and hit her in the face... he had left the flat and driven off blindly in his car” (P-147).

Babu dies in a car accident. The death of Babu shakes both June and Sindi. Babu is an alienated man. His alienation is the outcome of outdated notions of parental authority. He comes to America with a lot of fantasies about a foreign land. Babu represents what R.S.Pathak calls: “Typical Indian fantasies and illusions about a glamorized foreign dreamland” (8). America is a land of wish fulfilment to him. He says enthusiastically to June:

“Indians are so underdeveloped as compared to them (Americans). Sometimes I wish I had been born in America. Not that I have anything against India but there is nothing to beat America” (P-80).
Mr. Khemka sends his son Babu to America to add prestige to his family. Babu, on the other hand wants freedom of a foreign land which is not available in his own country in the presence of his father. In America, he does not adjust with its culture and different value system. He feels alienated and dispossessed in America. His life in America is an utter failure. His failure in academic examination. His affair with June finally leads him to death. His orthodox background does not allow him to marry June. When June tells him that she has been sleeping with Sindi, he drives himself to death.

Death of Babu agonized Sindi. He laments over the death of Babu:

"Babu had kicked out all my beliefs and disproved all my theories. I felt like a desert or like a vast field of naked oaks in winter-time. I felt more alone and naked in the world than I had ever felt before... The feeling of nakedness in the hands of existence grew with every passing day and a strong urge possessed me to once again roam the streets of the world" (P-149).

Sindi feels he is responsible for the death of Babu. Sudden death of Babu petrified Sindi:

"All along I had acted out of greed, selfishness and vanity and had hurt nobody very much. When I had come close
to gaining true detachment and had acted out of goodness.
I had driven a man to his death” (P-148).

A feeling of loneliness, alienation and dispossession haunts Sindi. He feels himself as:

“An uprooted young man living in the latter half of the twentieth century who had become detached from everything except himself” (P-164).

Sindi is a foreigner everywhere, in Nairobi, in India and even in America. Everybody, who comes in contact with him notices this foreignness in him. Sheila, Babu’s sister says to Sindi:

“You are still a foreigner. You don’t belong here” (p-122).

Mr. Khemkha asks Sindi in utter bewilderment:

“Why are you so strange? (P-117).

June notices this strangeness in him in their first encounter itself. Compelled by her cordial kind and cooperative disposition she willingly rushes to help him out, but does not miss the point that he is ‘a queer person’. She regularly attends all parties thrown by the young boys and girls. She, amongst all the people from different countries, like Asians and Indians more and believes that they are ‘gentler’ and ‘deeper’. But Sindi’s tone, his temperament, his attitudes to life, happiness and
suffering perturbs her. This feeling about his strangeness engages her throughout their first meeting. She elaborates:

"There is something strange about you, you know. Something distant. I’d guess that when people are with you they don’t feel like they’re with a human being. Maybe it’s an Indian characteristic but I have a feeling you’d be a foreigner anywhere" (P-29).

June, in spite of herself – her readiness to extend herself for human good-fails to understand exactly what goes into the making of Sindi’s ‘strangeness’, his ‘loneliness’. Like any other light-hearted and friendly American, tries to mollify him and assuage his tormenting feelings of isolation and alienation. She assumes that a friendly company, an association and attachment with other human beings, she would rid him of his psychosomatic disease--asthma--and devastating fear of loneliness. She looks for the way out in external sources and material paraphernalia. It is simply beyond her imagination that place or person, country or creed cannot get Sindi out of ‘aporia’, the labyrinth of the mutilated self or his soul. The dead end of the mutilated self or his soul. The dead end of his life. His foreignness is deeply rooted in himself. In fact, it had become an inevitable part of his existence. Sindi’s traumatic condition can best be understood in his own words. He sums up his own plight:
"I was a foreigner in America. But then, what difference would it have made if I had lived in Kenya or India or any other place for that matter. It seemed to me that I would still be a foreigner. My foreignness lay within me and I couldn't leave myself behind wherever I went" (P-55).

His sense of alienation is thoroughly pervaded in his entire existence that he inadvertently finds himself lonely even in the parties, crowded streets, markets and restaurants. This acute feeling generates in him a sense of futility and absurdity of life – an absurd man in an absurd cosmos. He keeps on contemplating on the very purpose of the creation of life and the universe. The more he thinks the more he is tortured, and the more he is convinced of the purposelessness of life. This thought about his own birth, the hiberidity of his existence, the ‘ascetic’ father and a ‘foreigner’ mother add fuel to the fire of his self-awareness. To make the matter worse he is an agnostic himself. And therefore he is also deprived of the idea of the imminence and ubiquity of God that would have consoled him and provided him with a soothing feeling of redemption. Since he does not totally believe in God, the indigenous Hindu concept of the other worldliness also does not come to his rescue. Left to himself existentially he keeps on soliloquizing:

"Lying there in the bed I wondered in what way, if any, I belonged to the world that roared beneath my apartment window. Somebody had begotten me without a purpose and so far I had lived without a purpose" (P-55).
He, thus withdraws himself from the world. His ideas and attitudes toward life are convincingly portrayed through an appealing image of death that keeps recurring throughout the text. He does not want to live in a world which holds no meaning for him. He appears to be ultra-sensitive to the meaning and purpose of life. He keeps on constantly questing for something in life that could make it eventful, colourful and meaningful, but the materialistic derive of cultural ambience thwarts his inner yearnings. The world around him, he finds to his dismay, is lost in carnal pleasures and transient hedonism. It is what Alfred Nash calls 'a culture of narcissist'. It is a world that grants you deceptive freedom, instantaneous gratification but is highly malignant and malevolent; it provides you the much sought after pleasures and luxuries in lieu of the piety and purity of your existence and castrates your spiritual and moral consciousness. In the dehumanized world a man is dehumanized too. Human existence in such circumstances remain merely a mechanical act; a mechanical act of feeding and maintaining human body, catering to its needs and necessities being absolutely impervious to its essential qualities that differentiates it from other creatures. Highly sensitive and alive in his place and time Sindi considers the act of living as an animalist act that Walt Whitman calls in other context as 'placid' and self-complacent. Sindi pinpoints this issue:

"Twenty-fifth, Christmas on this planet, twenty-five years largely wasted in search of wrong things in wrong places."
Twenty-five years gone in search of peace and what did I have to show for achievement; a tenstone body that had to be fed four times a day, twenty-eight times a week. This was the sum of a life-time of striving” (P-80).

Sindi keeps on experimenting with himself and also with the people around him, he is however, it should be specifically noted here that he is not a man with wicked or villainous intentions. All his experiments in fact, are an effort to preserve his elemental and real self and also to arrive at some concrete conclusions about life. His keen insight into the elusive reality of human relationship forces him to develop armour, a defence mechanism what he considers indifference and detachment. And it is this strategy that very often governs his relationship with men and women simultaneously in spite of his sincerity and honesty. He tries to keep himself totally detached even during his involvement with women like Kathy, Anna and even June who had totally surrendered herself to him. This idea and invariable practice of detachment attribute a tinge of strangeness alienation and dispossession to his relationship with these women. Even with Babu, and many others for that matter, he takes recourse to this idiosyncrasy his sincerity notwithstanding. Absolute detachment, nevertheless, as we all know, cannot emanate a sense of authority in human relationship and make it enduring, without an active and participation involvement all human relationship rendered to the mockery of human stature and the divine
dimensions of human existence. But Sindi has to live more and suffer more to assimilate this verve and vision of life.

Sindi finally realizes the pernicious effects of his idea of detachment and indifference that had devoured two lives, of June and Babu, the most intimate and affectionate companion he had on the foreign land and amongst the foreigners. His reminiscences on June's spontaneity, her soothing and caring presence and her uninhibited submergence in love and friendship, in spite of her American ness makes him re-evaluate and re-examine his stance as a man. June's philanthropic commitment and selfless participatory involvement opens up a new vista for him. June's relationship with him therefore, is an event of the dissolution of the armour of detachment that he had created around himself' K.Radha comments on the detachment of Sindi:

"The story of Sindi's relationship with June is a story of the gradual breaking down of the barriers of detachment and non-involvement that had built up all his life. He was quite conscious of what was happening and he tried valiantly to resist it, but in vain" (9).

Now that he has lost June forever, he realizes the meaning of love and authentic human relationship. He now understands fully that June and he was never aliens to each other:
“For a while it left me completely dazed... For me it was just one long coma. It was as if somebody had given me a big dose of anaesthesia... it left me numb. I had known all along that June would go away some day, but I didn’t realize she had already become a part of me. Our separation had been like an unforeseen abortion” (P-123).

He had also realized the importance of June quite early when she had left him for Babu who was very juvenile and infantile in his relationship with her. A typical Indian mind he could not sustain June’s American ness, her idea of independence and individual freedom that finally leads him to depression and annihilation of the self - he commits suicide.

Rejuvenated with his recently acquires self-awareness and the significance attachment and involvement he decides, in spite of his indecisiveness, with a flip of a coin to go to India, a land of his ancestors to reconstruct his own self:

“I thought the departure as a process of walking up a ramp and a day later finding myself in an enchanted land where nobody recognized me and I could start life a new. Like many of my breed, I believed erroneously that I could escape from a part of myself by hopping from one land mass to another. I was like a river that hopes to leave its dead wood behind by taking an unexpected plunge over a steep precipice” (P-150).
In India Sindi is employed in Mr.Khemka’s factory. He is dismayed to notice the authority of Mr.Khemka over poor workers. They are afraid of Mr.Khemka and his daughter Sheila. Sindi feels pity on workers who work in inhuman condition. He identifies himself with them. He is not happy working in Mr.Khemka’s industry. All is not well in the industry. An Income Tax raid is conducted in Mr.Khemka’s office. Khemka is arrested for cheating the government by not keeping correct accounts. Sindi does not want to interfere. Sheila proposes him to take the blame on himself and go to jail instead of her father. Sindi bluntly refuses the proposal. He knows believes one must accept the responsibility of one’s action:

“Mr.Khemka had to suffer for his own actions. In the past I had tried to put the consequences of my actions on others, or presumed to take over their actions as my own. Both had boomeranged. In the end, both had done more harm than good” (P-175).

He is totally a new man now. The chaos and disorder of life he has come out from has taught him that individual actions effect not only oneself but others also. One cannot lead an irresponsible existence. After the arrest of Khemka, the business is totally collapsed. The workers persuade Sindi to take over the charge of Khemka’s business. The workers are in a very pitiable condition; they are, in fact, starving. Sindi
however, finds it difficult to raise himself to the occasion. His detachment still persists in his subconscious and deters his unconditional involvement. Nevertheless, he overcomes his precautions and calculations. His recent moral consciousness prevails and finally he rests assured that “detachment consists of involvement”. His idea about involvement and moral responsibility is further buttressed by Muthu, a helpless worker with a tubercular wife and host of children living in the wretched condition. Muthu tells Sindi:

“But it is not involvement, sir,... sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved” (P-188).

Sindi finally accepts his moral responsibility; he takes the charge of business and makes many changes. It is the desire for amelioration, for raising man’s social, moral and intellectual stature that propels him to plunge himself in an act of betterment of the workers. Muthu represents the exploited and Starving stratum of Indian society. Mohan Jha remarks:

“It is the nature of human distress and suffering of which Muthu, among others, is a living image, that derives him from detachment to involvement, from indifference to participation, from neutrality to commitment, and as Muthu says and Sindi sees detachment consists in getting involved with the world” (P-10).
The contradictory and paradoxical problems of 'detachment' and involvement keep haunting Sindi although he takes recourse to momentary resolution and gets settled in business. It has been a very long itinerary from Boston to Delhi from selfishness to selfless sacrifice. He appears to have 'arrived' but in the questions of 'becoming' remained that attribute a tinge of 'foreignness and alienation' to the entire life of Sindi in spite of his arrival he still continues to be in exile like the protagonist of the other novel *Strange Case of Billy Biswas*.
REFERENCES


Arun Joshi’s *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* also continues the exploration of the themes of alienation and dispossession. In *The Foreigner*, as we have already seen in the previous section, the themes of alienation and dispossession are evolved in terms of interpersonal and social relationships and also in the psychological and spiritual terms. In *The Foreigner*, Sindi Oberoi is alienated from the world, from his beloved, from his friend Babu and also from himself. In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, however, Arun Joshi transcends the geographical and socio-cultural conservipism that ultimately generate a frustrating sense of rootlessness, claustrophobic suffocation, ennui, and enters into the realm of conflicts and confrontations between the inner and outer worlds. These conflicts and confrontations further lead to the complex metaphysical problems and moral defiance. It raises the questions about one’ strangeness amongst one’s own people, breathing the same air, sharing the same cultural ambiance.

Different critics have given their views about *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. Prof.Srinivas Iyengar states that in “*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, Arun Joshi has carried his exploration of the consciousness of the hapless and rootless people a stage further, and has revealed to our gaze new gas-chambers of self-forged misery”(1). C.N.Srinath points out that “from *The Foreigner* to *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, there is a movement almost contemplative world of Sindi to the dynamic, vital and active world of Billy Biswas” (2). Meenakshi Mukherjee says that “The
Strange Case of Billy Biswas, is a compelling novel about a strange quest, drawing upon myth and folk-lore to reiterate its elemental concerns” (3). She recognises Joshi’s “direct concern with fundamental metaphysical questions”(4). Jasbir Jain states that “Billy of the strange case like Sindi of The Froeigner is in search of a human world of meaningful relatedness, which he cannot find either in white America or in the upper class Indian Society” (5). Shyam M.Asnani opines that “the novel is the story of horror, suspense, mystery and romance. It presents a clash between nature and art. The hallow ‘civilized’ life acts as a pivot for the theme of alienation to revolve” (6). D.R.Sharma points out that “when Billy discovers that the prevailing social order is difficult to redesign, he opts out for the tribal world, which operates in a simpler and clearer manner. Hence, Billy can be called an Indian Huck Finn, or a Henderson whom mere material prosperity cannot distract from the pursuit of abiding values” (7).

In his interview with Purabi Banerjee, Arun Joshi says, “The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is about a mystical urge, a compulsion which makes Billy go away” (8). The novel is about a mystical urge. Billy is alienated and estranged from upper-class Delhi society. Billy leaves his family and friends and goes to the forest in central India for spiritual fulfilment and self realization. Human soul is explored in the novel. Billy has an urge for primitive life like Mathew Arnold’s ‘Scholar Gypsy’.
The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is a study of alienation and dispossession of its protagonist, Billy Biswas. He hails from the upper stratum of Indian society that characterized by sheer material drives, spiritual shallowness and blind imitation of the western culture. It is undeniably a degenerate society that has ruthlessly topsiturvied age-old traditions and cherishable beliefs and values. The novelist critically examines the degeneration of high society. Billy favours a simple life without ostentations. A life which has no cravings for money or ambition. This type of life is represented in the novel by Tuula Lindgren, Billy’s Swedish girl friend, and Bilasia, his tribal wife. Maikala Hills in central India represents a life which is uncorrupted, clean and lacks ambition. Delhi’s high society represents a life of corruption, polish and degeneration of old values. Billy rejects this life of Delhi high society and accepts the life of primitives in Maikala Hills in quest for his self-realization. The novel reveals the spiritual hollowness, falsehood and superficial pomp of Indian upper stratum. The novel also brings into focus the rotten Indian high society. Billy rejects all these ills, which were plaguing him for long.

The novel highlights all these ills of high western Indian society. The sensitive person like Billy is suffocating in it. He feels alienated, dispossessed and discontent. He feels a sense of irrelevance of life. The novel though presents a harsh commentary on Indian upper class society, has something to offer morally. The dramatic conflict between two cultures is shown in the novel. The protagonist, Billy is in the centre of all
activities. TheStrange Case of Billy Biswas is a struggle between two cultures, one represented by Maikala Hills another Delhi high society. Billy’s efforts end in tragedy because he has genuine concern for the age old values of society. Billy lost his life because people like him have no place in society who dares to stand up against it. Primitivism is used by literary writers as justification against degenerated society. Primitivism is a revelation of modern man’s alienation from his self and nature. Mathur and Rai aptly remarks that:

“The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is a fictional representation of the universal myth of the primitive in the heart of the man ever alienating him from the superficial and polished banalities of modern civilization” (9).

The narrative technique used in the novel is first-person narration. The story is told partly by Billy and mostly by his friend Ramesh Sahai (Romi) the District Collector. Murali Das Melwani says that:

“In this novel the narration does not move in a straight line as in The Foreigner but it is pieced together very much like a “Jigsaw puzzle” (10).

Letters from Billy’s American girl friend, Tuula Lindgren, meetings with Rima Kaul, conversation with Dhunia the tribal headman are some of the
pieces of this jigsaw. The same events are described by different people to stress different facets of alienation.

Billy Biswas comes from a highly respectable family. His grandfather was a Prime Minister of a Princely State in Orissa. His father who studied law at Inner Temple had practiced law at Allahabad and Delhi. He was also Indian Ambassador to a European country. Billy studied in Britain and America. At the time when Billy is in America, his father is a Judge of India’s Supreme Court. After completing his Ph.D. in Anthropology, Billy works as lecturer in Delhi University. His friend Romi is very close to Billy. Romi does not understand Billy completely. It seems to Romi that Billy is not satisfied with his life, life of high society. Billy is interested in the exploration of his inner self. 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 call. 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 be left behind in his turbulent wake” (P-8).
Though Billy lives with his family, he feels alienated and dispossessed. He writes to Tuula Lindgren:

“It seems my dear Tuula, that we are swiftly losing what is known as one’s grip on life. Why else this constant blurring of reality?... 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” (P-97).

Ramesh Sahai, Billy’s best friend is also unable to understand Billy’s predicaments. He tells about Billy:

“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 the Delhi’s smart society, there should have lived a man of such extraordinary obsessions” (P-7).

The first part of the novel shows alienation of Billy’s soul in the midst of the upper class Indian society which is phoney and superficial. The alienation and dispossession of Billy is due to loss of traditional
values in the materialistic pursuit by people in general. Romi meets Billy in New York while searching for accommodation relates the story. Both of them stay together during their higher studies and Romi noticed in their first meeting: “the incongruity of his eyes... what went on in their dark depths” (P-12). Billy had his schooling in Europe. At present he is half way through his Ph.D. in Anthropology, although his father thinks that his son is doing engineering. Billy explains his fascination for Anthropology to Romi:

“All I want to do in life is visit the places they describe meet the people who live there, find out... the aboriginal ness of the world” (P-14).

He stays at Harlem in New York though he can afford to live at some better place. But it is a natural choice for Billy because he feels that it is ‘the most human place he could find’ (P-7). White America is “much too civilized for him” (P-7). Romi’s host describes him as an “Engineer, anthropologist, anarchist...’ (P-8, 9). He has elegant demeanour: “He was one of those rare men who have poise without pose” (P-11). People who meet Billy consider him a light-hearted good sport, but his eyes which are the dominating feature of his face never lost their deep sombre look.

Tuula Lindgren, the Swedish girl, doing an advance course in psychiatric social work and Romi are the two persons who understand the dilemma of Billy’s life. Romi feels: “What happened to Billy was, perhaps, inevitable” (P-10). He could not have behaved otherwise. It is his vision
of life which persuades him to search for “the tenuous thread of existence to its bitter end (P-10). Tuula is a Swedish girl yet her values are centred on the vitalizing force of this life which brings her closer to Billy. She observes the spiritual degeneration in society objectively and knows how to encounter this utter confusion. She is a sensitive girl and understands the reasons and impacts of hallucinations in Billy’s life. She knows: “What went on in the dark, inscrutable, unsmiling eyes of Billy Biswas” (P-19). She is the first person Billy meets who has “total disregard for money” (P-176). She is humane, and according to her, once the basic needs for survival are fulfilled man should “contribute as much to the society as you can” (P-176). But what attracts Billy is Tuula’s belief that the search for truth is a lonely business”... “You had to be prepared to go it alone if you really wanted to be honest to yourself” (P-177).

Billy’s choice of books, music, places reflects his deep interest for the primitive life. There is an inherent protest mechanised, dehumanised civilised world where no one has any concern for others. Throughout the first section Arun Joshi gives a view of the rich inner recesses of Billy Biswas’ world. Another evidence of primeval longing in Billy is seen in the ‘music session’ – he has at a party in George’s apartment:

“Billy’s session – for that was how it came to be known subsequently – lasted for nearly a quarter of an hour. I am certain it was nothing very skilful or sophisticated from the view point of music. What it had I think, was a mesmeric
pull that held us by its sheer vitality. Little package of sound detonated in the smoke-filled air in quick succession, falling in one rhythm or another... carried a more fundamental message although what it was I, or Billy for that matter, could not have said” (P.20-21).

Billy explains to Romi how he often has hallucination:

“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” (P. 18).

Tuula is able to see the danger awaiting Billy on his return to India when she says that his well-connected family ‘may be part of the difficulty, the difficulty in what he wants to do” (P. 22). Tuula is able to perceive that mysterious urge in him. She tells Romi, “Billy feels something inside him but he is not yet sure” She calls it “A great force urkraft... a primitive force. He is afraid of it. But it is very strong in him, much stronger than in you or me. It can explode anytime” (P. 23). Tuula believes that the conflict is between the primitive and the civilized. Billy tries to come out of alienation and estrangement by participating in life with Tuula and Romi. During one of the conversations with Billy, Romi observes that 'they were revealing not only the mind of the speaker but also the dark
unknowable layers of the mysterious world that surrounded us” (P. 26). Talking about his glimpse of the other side Billy Tells Romi:

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’ (P. 18-19).

This other side concerns the primitive life untouched by the sophistication of the civilized world. He wants to penetrate deep into human life. He longs for integration with ‘Reality’ which he termed as totality of ‘Nature’, nature here not in the physical sense alone but something at the level of which man’s very being is seen in its totality, devoid of all external frills.

In America, Billy stayed long but does not suffer much, except for passing spells of loneliness from that alienation “that many other Indians seemed to be burdened with” (P. 25). He is averse to the superficial reality of life. Billy alienated and dispossessed in America, returns to Delhi to experience only a change of scene with the reality remaining almost the same as in white America. In fact, the upper-upper crust of Indian society in Delhi, which he originally hails from, is as spiritually dead and morally bankrupt as materialistic America itself. The people he meets here are nothing more than a group of emotionally dry and intellectually barren, aping the ideas of the west. Billy unleashes his sharp moral and intellectual reaction against the sham play acting,
relentless hypocrisy and crass moral indifference that govern the attitudes and actualities of this particular upper stratum of Indian society. He tells Romi:

"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 don't really get to know the others. I don't think I have ever met a more pompous, a more mixed-up lot 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 to go to one of those wretched restaurants and dance with their wives to a thirty-year-old tune" (P. 178-179).

It is a society that is lost in the labyrinth of trivialities and petty pleasures. The people that constitute that society are the victims of the materialistic and carnal drives, bereft of their genuine passions and sensuality. Their speeches are just utterances and their acts are a thrust for gratification that is deplorably transient. Prisoners of the pseudo-westernization, they have turned a blind eye to their cultural heritage and spiritual values. Their companionship is guided by their ulterior motives and biological fantasies an absolutely inorganic selves. He gives out his tirade further:
“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” (P. 79).

Billy naturally feels alienated and dispossessed in the westernized Delhi society. He is, therefore continually haunted by inner yearnings and tormented by a mystical urge. His intense desire for a clean, organic and natural world and contradictory prevailing realities constantly keep threatening his integrity and equilibrium. Billy therefore decides to marry. He feels that his marriage will enable him to put a check on his “runaway imagination” (P. 128). He joins Delhi University as lecturer in Anthropology. He marries a Bengali girl Meena Chatterjee who is unusually pretty. At that time he finds no better girl than Meena. Billy thinks that his marriage is like ‘taking out an insurance on my normalcy’ (P. 182). He expects Meena to help him. After the marriage he realizes his mistake as it is a marriage between uneven minds:

“The game I had been playing was the stupidest gamble one could think of. It was lost even before I had put up the stakes” (P. 184).

He could not have imagined that one can be isolated from the other while staying so close. In spite of being married Billy is essentially lonely as he can not feel free to be mentally independent and share his natural feelings with his wife. Even his wife does not try to understand him.
Meena herself tells to Romi: "It is all probably my fault. Perhaps I just don't understand him as a wife should" (P. 176). Billy is totally shattered. He feels that he has been caught in a cobweb. He understands that he can overcome his alienation only through true, spiritual love. Meena is only a representative of the erosion of values of the times. His last refuge failed him miserably. Marital incompatibility between Billy and Meena is the result of their commitment to different creeds and inability to appreciate and accommodate the other viewpoint. Even his outward appearance undergoes a thorough change:

"His expression was a mixture of nearly all those emotions that one tends to associated with a great predicament. It was drawn and had that peculiar intensity of concentration which... seen only on the faces of doctors or rioters. Yet it had no violence in it. It had on the other hand, the clear stamp of a sorrow that seemed as out of place in a person like Billy as clouds on a spring afternoon... His eyes, shaded in darkness, wore a tortured almost haggard expression (43-44).

Billy suffers from alienation, estrangement, dispossession and isolation. This listlessness had its impact on his physical appearance also:

"He seemed duller than most dull men ....... Nor did he show much interest in the feelings or activities of any of the rest of us. 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 was turned upon some obscure segment of himself, ferreting out a bitter secret, settling 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” (P-70)

Billy wants a world devoid of hypocrisy and selfishness. The world, which he does not want, he is at the centre of it. He thinks he doesn’t belong to the world where he is presently in. He feels lonely in the midst of many. He is dissatisfied with the modern civilized culture. The atmosphere of modern society chokes him. He feels himself: “pinned down there, like a dead butterfly” (P. 45). He starts behaving like other corrupt people in corrupt society. He starts to behave in a manner that in other men he always despised. It is during this degeneration he seduces Rima Kaul. Billy is aware of the fraudulent nature of this relationship on his part and knows that he does not intent such a thing. Billy asks himself whether he belongs to the category which has thin self-image. He feels horrified at his behaviour:

“It gradually dawned on me that a tremendous corrupting force was working one me. It was as though my soul were taking revenge on me for having denied it for so long that other thing that it had been clamouring for... if you have
not the guts to break away from this filth, well than, I am
going to wallow in it until it makes you sick” (P. 189).

It (seduction of Rima Kaul) is the last warning signal to Billy which gives
him a preview of the corrupting force which awaits him if he continues to
defy what his soul longed for. His longing for his spiritual being can be
traced to a very young age of fourteen when he feels concerned with the
eternal questions like: “who was I? Where had I come from? Where was I
going?” (P. 122).

Billy now is aware that all his efforts to integrate with society are
futile, they only enhance his sense of alienation and dispossession. He
listens to his inner self. He comes to know that Meena has failed to bring
him out of the hallucinations. He tries to find his identity in Meena but
fails. “I tried very hard to communicate with her” (P. 185). After
marriage what is still lacking is a sense of the unity of existence. Refined
feelings ultimately reject what initially appears likeable. A deeper insight
is lacking in Billy at the moment of decision, therefore, the happiness or
solace he seeks betrays him. The urge to live like a man in a primitive
world has become stronger. In order to forget him and the agony of life,
Billy takes to anthropological expeditions to various parts of India with
his students.
During one of his anthropological expeditions along with his students he goes to Maikala Hills in Central India. Here he feels that he belongs to the primitive jungles rather than to the cities:

"The curious feeling trails me everywhere that I am visitor from the wilderness to the marts of the big city and not the other way round" (P. 96).

His other self has grown stronger and he realizes that he has been running after illusory appearances. To Romi's question:

"But, don't you think you had responsibilities towards her, towards your son?" Billy's answer is, "I had greater responsibilities towards my soul" (P. 186).

He decides to participate in a reality which in itself is the truth, namely his 'true being'. He transcends the mind, and once he is beyond the mind all his problems look as if they are somebody else's problems. Billy wants to detach himself from the illusory situation as he has experienced his freedom in anguish. There is no method by which he can hope permanently to establish a community of ends with other human beings, since he is locked in inevitable conflicts with others. The only remaining option is to choose his freedom. Billy all of a sudden disappears into the wild and dark sal forests. The whole area is combed for a year to trace him but the efforts prove futile. People believe that he has been killed by
a man-eater. This disappearance from the civilized world is the termination of the pseudo self and an initiation into the deep, mysterious, real primitive world. He leaves the civilized society because he is conscious that staying in it will yield evil consequences. He knows that it is a fraudulent society and appearances of its people are deceptive. His observation on the dichotomy between the social appearance and reality is highly revealing. His intense awareness of the lurking reality adds fuel to the fire of his agony and annoyance. His acute moral consciousness and pricking conscience continually drag him into a war simultaneously with his own febrile self and murderously suppressive and deceptive society. Besieged by the predatory men and women, by the stinking realities of the decomposing society, and ultra sensitive man like Billy, naturally is confronted with the problem of his own authentic self and his own identity. The relaxed manner in which Billy departs from the phoney world shows his acceptance of the verdict of his state. Billy withdraws from trivialities of life in the sophisticated society, which fails to sustain him and fulfil his urge for a meaningful life. This withdrawal is for the realization of his true identity and for integration with the vital forces of nature that will lead him to higher plane of experience. It is an effort to integrate with the real primitive self. In a way his authentic essence has the first opportunity to come into its full glory, into its absolute splendour. Billy Biswas is determined to carve out his own destiny.
The night he sees the tribal dance he has the premonition that it may not be possible for him to go back. Even as a boy he had been deeply concerned with the problem of his identity. Amid the dance and liquor he realises the edifice of his past being chiselled away and a new primitive self come to the force. Even if the whole world dislikes it, if his conscience approves of it, he should indulge in it. He realises that it is wise to accept the life of which he dreams regularly rather than continuously running away from life in search of the real meaning of life. He laments why he:

“Had been afraid, afraid and foolish, squandering the priceless treasure of his life on the hoop, of tinsel that passed for civilization” (P-141).

Billy Biswas looks into future with his insight and instinct that tells him what to follow and what to avoid. It is these flushes of vision that lead him to seek suitable spiritual companion. He believes:

“If anyone had a clue to it (read self) it was only the adivasis who carried about their knowledge in silence, locked behind their dark inscrutable faces” (P-124).

The strong question has found its object; Bilasia and forest as his world. He undergoes a metamorphosis and the real self now says:
"Come, come, come, come. Why do you want go back? This is all there is on earth. This and the woman waiting for you in the little hut at the bottom of a hill. You thought New York was real. You though 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’ (P. 121).

Billy responds to the call and becomes one of the primitive people to find not only his roots but also identity. Once he is in forest, he is obliged to take the inhabitants as one vast family, of which he is a potent member, God’s vehicle. The civilized world calls him a rebel while tribal consider him as their friend as he cares Dhunia’s niece Bilasia.

Billy’s frenzied search is over when he sees the primitive girl Bilasia. He finds his fulfilment in the love of Bilasia.

"The essence of that primitive force that had called me, night after night, year after year’ (P. 142).

His love which had remained unspelt and inarticulate so far, now blows with the wild breeze. The meeting with Bilasia in Dhunia’s hut on the night prior to his disappearance brings about a change in him:
“It was as though, during that half hour, it was not Bilasia I had been writing for but my future, my past, indeed the very purpose of my life” (P. 113).

Bilasia helps him to discover:

“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” (P. 142).

He feels that layers of superficiality are peeled off until nothing but his primitive self is left:

“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... I had changed. I knew that” (P. 116).

In striving for growth, he identifies his real being with the germinal higher part of himself. This is the first instance of recognition of his individuality; what he had sought all his life, the realization of the ‘being’ in him. Now there is a gleam of hope. A disturbing knowledge dawns on him:

“Something has gone wrong with my life. This is where I belong. This is what I have always dreamt of” (P. 125)
Billy Biswas now, starts his quest for self and he knows that he will be able to peep into dark cells of his soul by fleeing from the suffocating modern civilized society. A sort of precipitation occurs of what might be called insights or dreams. The tribal’s dedication to the deity and their deep and overpowering love for him becomes the driving force and code of his activities. He finds a world where he is related to it through love and not through submission or dominance. It is a marriage of loving souls where love finds its consummate fulfilment far removed from the sanctimonious bonds of wedlock. This is a state of consciousness where Billy’s identity merges into the cosmic identity. It is his love for the tribal and love in return from them which give him a feeling of rootedness, belongingness. He eats their kind of food, speaks their language and wears their kind of dress. He experiences their joys and sorrows, living their beliefs and the tribal people soon adore him as their ‘Mahaprasada’. He becomes as he himself thinks ‘some sort of a priest’ (P. 191). He feels happy in the forest not because of money, position or a job but because of:

"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" (P. 148)

His embrace of primitive life is a part of the maturation of his being. Now he begins to realize his own self. When he finds his real self among
the forest people, he is a different being, refuses to do anything with the modern civilized life. In rejecting modern society he rejects all wrong self-images to recognize his true self. His acceptance of the death of Rima Kaul and his mother with calmness reflects his maturation. Billy’s calm acceptance of death is a sign of his living in close proximity with nature where life and death are natural routine events, imbued with a meaning which people outside don’t understand. He has stripped the old ties and is in the world of Bilasia. Billy becomes a tribal himself and comes to know that it is only in this world he can understand the ultimate motive of life.

Billy always searches for something divine and ‘Divine’ he himself becomes – he is accepted as the king by the tribals. Different factors point to his magical powers. As soon as he arrives in their world Chandtola comes to life, it starts glowing after a long time, tigers run away at his sight, he can revive a dead man. He is believed to be the mythical sculpture king who ruled over the region thousands of years ago. It is the call of Chandtola that brings Billy to the primitive world. Billy’s primitive love Bilasia helps him to integrate with the primordial force which does not accept the temple as her abode earlier. Now after the union with the divine the devi takes abode in Chandtola.

Romi’s impression about Bilasia is:
What was Bilasia? What is the playful effervescence of mountain stream? What is sunlight filtering through a glade? What is the thunder of a volcano or the hardness of granite?... 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 invulnerable force that had ruled these hills, perhaps this earth, since time began and that, our proud claims to the contrary, still lay in wait for us not far from the doorstep of our air conditioned rooms' (P. 225-226).

Bilasia symbolizes the primitive ethos. She is an integral part of nature and an embodiment of the primitive world and it is she who helps Billy to replace his restlessness with 'Divine' serenity. She helps Billy lose all sense of bondage to the past, and with the loss of that bondage he is freed from the phoney world. It is a joyous and liberating moment for him. The insight he gains is from his 'inner being' and not from someone inside. Bilasia can be compared to Tuula Lindgren who exerts a great influence during Billy's stay in New York. She is the first person whom Billy meets and finds devoid of superficiality. Tuula understands his mind and suggests to him to keep a check on his hallucinations, while Bilasia helped him win over hallucinations and see reality. Whatever appears to be happening in the dream, at all times is wholly created in Bilasia's world. He thus realizes on awakening that there is complete oneness permeating and encompassing Bilasia's world, and all the activities and attributes are essentially the same from the beginning to the
end. And with this realization, there comes to him a glorious and complete liberation from the sufferings, the ups and downs, that he had been suffering in the state of dream. With the removal of dream illusion and ignorance, and direct knowledge of his real nature and self, he regains his basic and natural equipoise and peace. He views the world and all the creatures from a completely changed and revolutionized standpoint.

Romi finds a divine force in Billy. He becomes a healer, a priest and a magician who cures dying children, wards off tigers, and helps the primitive people with their worldly problems and spiritual troubles. To the primitive folk, he appears: "like rain on parched lands, like balm on a wound" (P. 236) Dhunia even looks upon him as the reincarnation of the tribal king, who had passed away thousands of years ago and upon Bilasia as that of his wife, Devi Mata. Billy cures Situ (Romi’s wife) of a painful migraine. Romi, a part of modern society becomes an instrument in the final tragedy of Billy. Situ compels him to divulge the secrets and passes on the information to Billy’s father and Meena. For Billy’s father and Meena his disappearance is still a ‘childish escapade’. They put tremendous emotional and official pressure on him to reveal Billy’s whereabouts. Romi, however understands 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 meagre 
fulfilment of their destiny as their tortured lives allowed'
(P. 231-32).

Romi refuses to deceive Billy’s confidence in him as Billy had said; “If they ever get hold of me, they will not leave me alone. And you know what havoc it will play with my life there” (P. 205). Romi warns that something serious would happen if they persist in that but the entire government machinery of the organized society is put into force to retrieve Billy. Romi has forgotten Mr.Biswas’ advice:

“Don’t ever quarrel with your boss, whatever the provocation... Secondly, never let the police get an upper hand in time of crisis. Remember these and you will never have trouble” (P. 52-53).

It is irony of fate that this is precisely what Mr.Biswas has managed to achieve. The tribal world joins together to face the encounter but fails and the tragedy finally strikes. Billy spears down a police constable and is shot dead:

“Billy, I cried, ‘Billy’. He opened his fast gazing eyes for a moment and appeared to look at me ‘You bastard’, he said hoarsely. Then he died (P. 233).
Billy in a way finds himself in the primitive world and his search is a conscious search. He thinks that a change could be brought about in society through Romi. He forgets that civilized society would be as it had been. Billy cannot have existed simultaneously in two worlds. He has to sever his links. Again, his friend Romi tries to save him out of the tribal world which ultimately leads to destruction. Primitive world has its own boundaries which you have to honour. Symbol of comfort in one world is not the same in the other world. For the representatives of modern society like Meena Billy's father, Billy is somebody being caught hold of by the tribal world and the man needs to be saved. This clash between modern day world and somebody who wants to make a change in it prevails till the end. That the protagonist is killed in the end reflects the indifference of the civilized society. Romi disillusioned and dejected makes a revealing comment on Billy's death. He says:

"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" (P. 236).

In this way:

"The Strange Case of Billy Biswas has thus been disposed of in the only manner that a humdrum society does with its rebels, its seers and its true lovers" (P. 240).
Billy's intense sense of alienation and dispossesssion lead him to seek a passionate union with the primitive world. So what happens to Billy is inevitable:

"As inevitable as the star-constellations in which he came so absolutely to believe" (P. 8).
References:


