Conclusion

The analysis of Arun Joshi’s novels in the foregoing chapters clearly demonstrates that Indian literary thought during early seventies and late eighties led to the emergence of novelists like Arun Joshi and Anita Desai who replace the social themes with existential ones. They give an important push to the creative inertia of Indian English fiction by swamping their thematic concern from outer to the ‘dark recesses of human mind’. Arun Joshi belongs to that generation of novelists who present the problems of well-educated and well-travelled middle class Indians caught in the dilemma and ramifications of the twentieth century civilized world. His is an attempt to collect the shattering paradigms of life and bridge the gap between the individual and the society, the man and the transcendence. Modern man has conquered the entire cosmos with the help of advanced technology and the digital world has huddled every distance but the inner self remains un-bridged and unconquered. Arun Joshi presents the anguishes of such individuals with excruciating life experiences resulting in rootlessness, alienation and disappointment which are solely because of their disorientations due to impurity of heart and ego of mind and failure to understand the real meaning of existence. Consequently, the thematic concern of his novels emerges as crisis - sometimes a crisis of emotions and sentiments as in The Foreigner and The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, sometimes a crisis of ethics and allegiance as in The City and The River, and sometimes a crisis of consciousness as in The Last Labyrinth. Arun Joshi observes this crisis as a by-product of ennui in daily life and the collapse of old age values and since the contemporary society is full of chaos which is the result of egoism and over-rational attitude of man. This chaos gives birth to the confrontation of the self and the question of existence.
This conflict between the inner worlds of his protagonists has been reshaped as the conflict between the oriental and the occidental thoughts. Arun Joshi has observed this while he was a student in America and England and further as a professional in the industrial field in India. His analysis of different facets of alienation and consequent rootlessness, restlessness, loneliness and anxiety makes him akin to the world’s great existential writers like Sartre, Dostoevsky and Albert Camus. On the pattern of these thinkers, Arun Joshi projects his protagonists as questers and tormented individuals possessing everything except peace in their life. But the academic atmosphere of Arun Joshi’s family, his technical bent of mind and his vast experience during his service in India and abroad make him essentially different from his Western existential counterparts and leads him to create his own existential vision. Like them, he recognizes the absurdity of human existence but does not leave his characters ‘thrown’ in the world but offers solution to counter this absurdity or meaninglessness of existence.

The Western thinkers advocate revolutionary or extreme situations such as ‘leap of faith’ (Kierkegaard), boundary situations (Jaspers), pre-poning death (Heidegger) or rebellion (Camus) to counter the meaninglessness. Arun Joshi, on the other hand, seems to be suggesting a ‘common approach’ within the reach of a common man to authenticate one’s existence in the hostile world. In order to establish a good society with happy citizens his search is directed at the inscrutable regions of uncertainty and inscrutability. He believes in the divine nature of man and realizes man’s uniqueness and loneliness in an indifferent and sphinx like universe. This peculiar approach shows the effect of Indian philosophy on Arun Joshi’s mind. His foreign-educated characters turn to India for their peace of mind and to achieve affirmation in life. Arun Joshi has deep roots in Indian culture and is very much influenced by Indian philosophy described especially in the Hindu
scriptures like the *Bhagwadgita* and the *Upanishads* since these ideas are thoroughly existential.

Arun Joshi suggests that detachment from the self and the world, disappointment and sorrow and purgation of the soul and suffering are the unavoidable conditions for the spiritual uplifting of man. It is due to lack of self-realization that the individual lives in illusion. He realizes that withdrawing oneself from all responsibilities is not a proper solution to the existential problem of the individual. He suggests purity of heart, of mind and of thinking. He advocates detachment in attachment and to perform a detached action in order to get affirmation of life. The existential problem arises when one tries to rationalize these beliefs. This perhaps is the gist of all his novels. His practical approach to counter the meaninglessness of life gives cognizance to commitment, action and involvement. He rejects possessiveness as a way of life because it tends to impinge upon the individuality of the person freezing them emotionally. His protagonists realize this final predicament only through their own efforts. They are confessional in tone and they exhibit extreme self-consciousness and individuality and transfer to the inner realms from the external realities of life. They are aware of both the inner world and the outer world but they feel uncomfortable to face the truth because of their self-satisfying conduct. They are not taken from the lower strata of society. They all are rich and well-educated individuals reflecting the urban aspect of society. The narratives demonstrate how they feel unrest wherever they go. Arun Joshi presents them in two ways—as picaroes wandering here and there aimlessly and also the pilgrims searching meaning of life and affirmation therein.

Arun Joshi dexterously captures and incorporates the subtle nuances of the shifting pattern from the external to the internal, the outer to the inner world of their soul. The progressive shift from the outer world to the inner world has emerged as peculiar feature of Arun Joshi’s narrative art.
To begin with Joshi’s first novel, *The Foreigner*, its hero Surrinder (Sindi) Oberai, finds himself alienated everywhere he goes because of his own split-personality. He has rest nowhere whether it is Kenya, Uganda, London or America. He alternates between detachment, possession and involvement in order “to do something meaningful” (Joshi, 14). His chance meeting with a priest opens his eyes and he turns towards India to live on the pattern of detached action which has been depicted in the *Bhagwadgita* by Lord Krishna in the name of anasaktikarmyoga. The novel is an attempt to highlight the sufferings of Sindi in the hustle and bustle of worldly existence where he is deprived of love and cultural identity wherever he goes. The firm of Mr. Khemka in India anchors his life and he attains self-satisfaction which is really a detached action. In his decision to help the poor laborers in the factory, he reaches the stage of affirmation. His change of mind-set to work for others changes his meaning of existence and he finally realizes that “detachments consisted of right action and not escape from it. The gods had set a heavy price to teach me just that (Joshi, 162)”. His journey of life turns from detachment to attachment, from subterfuge to engagement. This transformation is his real affirmation because its base lies in his desire to accompany the suffering mass of humanity and his willingness to exist as a conscious and responsible being which can be said to be the result of his deep faith in the spiritual view of life. It is the super dexterity of Arun Joshi’s narrative that he transmutes despair and alienation into a positive vision. It also exhibits a difference from the Western existential literature.

Like Sindi of *The Foreigner*, Billy Biswas of Arun Joshi’s second novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* becomes alienated from this world because of his own despondency with the civilized society and everlasting ambition to join the world of reality. He is more interested in man rather than in the cosmos, hence he studies anthropology instead of engineering. He debunks the futility and
imperfection of the phony and materialist society. His instinctive yearning for a meaningful life makes his case strange and his subjective evolution in the search of an authentic existence becomes apparent while studying his character. This evolution can be studied with Kierkegaard’s existence-spheres as well as in the light of Vedant philosophy. As Kierkegaard also stresses in his philosophy that truth is subjective, for Billy Biswas and what he does is the voice of his soul and it is his yearning for self-realization that summons him to do all these things. He wanted to attain a sense of belonging in the real sense of the term because there would be no need of the intellectuals if the world would not have “initially been hung on this peg of money (Joshi,70). Billy has no interest in this rational and techno-savvy civilization like other individuals but he has a keen perception and belief in the old age values of primitive life because these are untouched by the malicious hands of civilization. These values can neither be understood by the so-called civilized world nor the rational human mind but require a subjective involvement therein. The end of the story is tragic but reestablishes Billy Biswas as a true martyr in the battle fought for the protection of individual freedom.

The main thrust of Ratan Rathore’s story in *The Apprentice* is on the purification of soul and confession of guilty conscience as a result of maladjustment with society. Ratan Rathore fails to establish proper adjustment between himself and society and between other individuals like him. If Billy Biswas was a rebel without a cause, Ratan Rathore is a victim without a fault and he is deceived and impelled to compromise. His plans to lead a luxurious life with the realization that it “is not the atom or the sun or God or sex that lies at the heart of the universe; it is deals. DEALS (Joshi, 51)”. This wastage of life is realized in the end when his ‘dealings’ have priced the life of his only friend, the Brigadier. Ratan’s wiping out the shoes of congregation outside the temple is an attempt of a guilty conscience to retrieve his innocence and honour and it depicts his
confessional adoration to the deity and also his apprenticeship with a desire to learn. It is not necessary to enter the temple to purify his soul but it can be obtained by the service of the public. Such type of apprenticeship in submissiveness arms man to face the challenges of life successfully.

As the title suggests itself, *The Last Labyrinth* treats this entire world as a great labyrinth and the only challenge of the individual is to find out the proper way for himself. The path is full of confusions and so many hungers and Som Bhaskar is confused between the hungers of the spirit and hungers of the body. It seems very difficult for him to find his way out from this intricate maze. His Western-trained intellect is skeptical of Indian religious thoughts and beliefs. But his over-rationalism leads him to doubt everything and leave him spiritually anchorless. This novel is a warning against the intellectual pride of the individual which is devoid of faith and wants, but fails to solve the mystery of his life through Western rationalism and discursive reasoning. The novelist suggests that detachment from cultural moorings and rational attitude cannot solve the labyrinth of life, but faith, love and harmony with each other may provide a positive solution for individual's authentic existence.

In his last novel *The City and The River*, Arun Joshi has tried to focus his narrative from the crisis of the individual to the parable of political society because it was very difficult to preserve one’s individuality when the system was the master of man. The narrative is based upon two dominant structures the city and the river and the narrative is woven in the tussle between the allegiances of either. Arun Joshi takes the help of Indian myths and legends openly to create the impression that mundane values have started a war against natural phenomena, the river which stands for peaceful and ethical aspect of the macrocosm. The City and the River are two main characters and the Great Yogeshwara and the Grand Master represent two opposing values of life i.e. spiritual and material and they are options either of
which man may choose in accordance with his perception of reality. The modifiers ‘Great’ and ‘Grand’ also suggest the quality of approach the two principal characters show in their conduct and activities. There are echoes of the *Upanishads* with the statement that “this city, this world, all this is the manifestation of the One, and not the shadow of the Grand Master’s ego (Joshi 133).”

Joshi’s short stories collected under the title *The Survivor* are concerned with the same problem as dealt with in his novels but at a minor scale hence the characters are chosen from common life having variety of problems. They hail from different strata of society and their anguished quest for survival in the intricate labyrinth of life with its lack of direction and purpose, confusion and erosion of values, deluge of materialism and dwindling spiritual faith, is the dominant theme in these stories.

It is clear that in all his five novels, Arun Joshi has celebrated the glory of man and all other worldly things seem trivial to him. He believes in the re-establishment of human, spiritual, social and cultural values necessary for transcendence. His protagonists hail from middle class society and have everything but they always feel as alienated and they find their final predicament when they return to their roots which are in the Indian soil. Their coming to India is a further attempt to retrieve their pawned soul. The structures of human existence like despair, death and absurdity haunt every character of Arun Joshi. The fear of death makes them skeptical about the meaning and purpose of life. They fail to identify themselves with the pre-existential moral, ethical and religious values and they also fail to establish their own system of values from the experience of their life. Torn between these two dimensions they remain nowhere men. Their ‘foreignness’ lies within them.

Returning to the discussion posed at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state that Arun Joshi is preoccupied with certain existential themes in
his novels. The existential vision that emerges from the novels of Arun Joshi betrays an indelible imprint of Western existential philosophy as well as of Indian philosophy upon his mind. His philosophy therefore can be termed as ‘Indian existential’ since he has indianized the Western existential thinking and the remedy suggested by him in his novels provides appropriate examples. His heroes fail to find meaning and subjective satisfaction in the materialistic values of modern urban societies. They are not able to adjust themselves with the society, socially or morally. This is traceable in the case of Sindi Oberai of The Foreigner, Billy Biswas of The Strange Case of Billy Biswas and Som Bhaskar of The Last Labyrinth. These characters have been caught up in the superficial societies around nations they travel in. For them, every relationship is casual, cruelly objective and grossly functional. Sindi in The Foreigner, for example, experiences decay of human emotions in what according to him constituted the ‘American way of life’. Similar is the experience in Mr. Khemka’s house in India. These parties are hypocritical with people drinking, eating and talking only of money and doing nothing worthwhile. Billy, in the Strange Case of Billy Biswas finds himself chocked by the phony atmosphere of the modern society. He rejects the artificiality, hollowness and snobbery of so called sophisticated, urbane people. Som Bhaskar of The Last Labyrinth also does not find satisfaction in this hypocrite world. They live in this society for the time being only and sometimes they begin to accept this as absolute truth (as in the case of Ratan of The Apprentice), but this proves to be an illusion and offers no values and no meaning to their existence. They live in this world on ad hoc basis devoid of values. Arun Joshi further enhances their existential anguish by creating the situations of dilemma of double cultures that creates split-personality. Babu’s split self in The Foreigner is between East and West and so is June’s indirectly. Sindi’s dilemma is due to his failure to establish a moral system of his authenticity of being and rootlessness. Som
Bhaskar’s problem is rationalization of faith that does not let him believe in Krishna and his divine powers. He is caught between the opposing emotions and alienated not only from his inner self but also from society. As a result, he is never at peace with himself and remains permanently dislocated.

In the final analysis we find that in spite of being aware of the crisis of contemporary society as we have noticed in the preceding chapters, Arun Joshi maintains an optimistic attitude. He acknowledges the reality of sufferings and miseries of existence. The empirical world we find in his fiction is the source of all kinds of sorrows and sufferings. The protagonists are victims of sufferings so long as they confine themselves to this world. Like the existentialists, Joshi, in all of the five novels and even in his short stories, seems to emphasize that man has no ‘nature’ as such rather he must create his own essence. The uniqueness of the individual emerges from his own emotions, feelings, perceptions and thoughts. Joshi stresses meaning because only through the development of meaning in his life, man can make something out of the absurdity which surrounds him. Thus, in other words, like the Western existentialists, Joshi insists upon the immense potentialities of the individual. At the same time, like other Advaitin thinkers, he affirms the inevitability of death and the transitory nature of human existence. He also affirms that the sufferings of life can be transcended. Man is intended for something greater than his confinement in this world. He can rise above it. These sufferings and miseries of the worldly existence are an aspect of the process of his spiritual growth. Joshi suggests ‘upward path’ and therefore, his characters are transformed at last and are transmuted to a higher level of existence in the course of evolution, through their knowledge (Som Bhaskar), their action (Ratan Rathore) or their devotion (Sindi). Man's greatness is not in what he is but in what he can become. Jean Paul Sartre asserts about man that-"it-is-what-it-is-not and that it is
not what-it-is" (156). Man exists and makes himself develop into what he wants to be.

Furhter, Joshi has echoed the Western existential philosophers like Kierkgaard, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Martin Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre that man is not an object to be known, but a subject. This is similar to the view point of the Upanishads which, in general investigate into the self on the two great propositions— Tattvamasi' (Thou art that) and Aham Brahmasmi (I am Brahman). These two propositions assert that man is neither a thing nor an object. Man is not a product of something. He is one with Brahman. Thus, the self is identified with Brahman, the one. To quote: “In India, 'Atmanam Viddhi,' know the self, sums up the law and the prophets" (Radhakrishnan, 28). This 'Atmanam Viddhi’ becomes the voice of Arun Joshi’s existentialism. Karl Jaspers, one of the existentialists maintains that "My true self is not the individual soul, but the supreme self, the one, and therefore, I reach my authentic being in identifying myself with the one." (Heinmann, 64).

Thus, Arun Joshi’s authenticity of life depends upon this knowledge of the self which leads towards liberation. Like the Western existentialists, he distinguishes between the inauthentic and the authentic existence as between bondage and liberation of the Advaitin thinkers. Inauthentic existence is the life of worldliness, a bondage i.e. self-alienation of the individual from his real being. The authentic existence is the way of individual who wants liberation. Liberation or authentic existence results from the realization of the real nature of the individual. It signifies his attempt to liberate himself from egocentric limitations and the realization of the self in its pure nature.

In this way, we can conclude that despite his limitation only to the inner world of their protagonists, Joshi’s fictions are a bold and provocative attempt to discover the meaning of life devising the ways and means for eliminating the
discrepancy between the individual’s pursuits and his fulfillments. Born in India and educated in America, Arun Joshi amalgamates the Western existentialists and the Indian philosophy especially the Adwait Darshan of the Upanishads in order to liberate the individual from his fallen status and to direct it towards the realization of his highest potentialities. Between the two poles, i.e. between optimistic idealism and pessimistic materialism, lies the area, where one can intervene to make the world better. Herein lies man’s freedom. Like that of Kierkegaard, Arun Joshi’s existentialism offers metaphysics of hope as it is only a transitional phase of the individual development. Radhakrishnan rightly observes: “existentialism is a stage in man's pilgrimage through life. It has to transcend itself: for an analysis of the human predicament reveals the fact of God as Being and God as perfection" (53). A sensitive reader can identify himself with Joshi’s protagonists and scrutinize the relevance of his daily struggles fought with unnerving propositions.
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