The City and the River

Like his earlier novels, Arun Joshi’s last novel, *The City and the River* (1990) also deals with human predicament and salvation with an affirmative approach towards life and time. The question raised by Ratan Rathore in *The Apprentice* – “how was I going to be my own master when a system was master of me?” (Joshi, 1974: 62); has been dealt with in a broad perspective. This novel appeared after a long interval of nine years in the fictional career of Arun Joshi and perhaps this is the reason behind his change of focus from private to public life. Instead of his preoccupation with the predicament of an individual; he deals with the socio-political and existential crisis of the entire city and thus the whole humanity. In this novel the problem is not of an individual but that of a class of the individuals sharing the same concerns and similar existence. Here are many Ratans and Billys seeking the course of their destiny under circumstances where the entire government is against their mode of existence and individual freedom.

As the title suggests, the novel is based upon two distinguished paradigms, the city and the river. The city presented is a place, a forum where various powers play their parts. There is a juxtaposition of the modern and the ancient, the social and the philosophical, the individual and the society, the religion and the politics and the faith and the doubt. The city is contemporary like any other modern city but the socio-religious issues that Arun Joshi raises are of universal and philosophical nature as well. On the other hand, the river is not merely a stream of water but a mythical-religious and economic prototype for those who have faith in it. If the city represents the artificiality, the river represents nature and to some extent, God because it plays the role of the generator, operator and destroyer. The entire city rises from the river and sinks into the river under a repeated cycle. This
endless repetition is the result of contamination in the heart of its inhabitants. The city and the river also denote certain different structures of human existence. City is politics, river is religion, city is the man, river is the God; thus symptomatic of human choice between these two. As a result, throughout the novel, there is a long going conflict regarding the option of choice between the allegiance to man (city) or allegiance to God (river) or in other words, between religion and politics. The novelist shows how a man is essentially free to choose and create his own environment/course of life by his own consciousness.

The narrative proceeds with the two poles, the political and the metaphysical. These two are artistically woven to communicate Arun Joshi’s vision of life which is affirmative existential. From certain points, this novel is different from Joshi’s earlier works, being in fact a "continuation of and an improvement upon Joshi’s major thematic concerns" (Ghosh,). Arun Joshi has sought the help of various myths and legends in order to convey his message that the authentic existence depends upon right action of man. He has frequent use of yajna, ahuti, karma, avatar and other mythical and legendary concepts with their original meanings. He follows the same path as suggested in the great Indian scriptures such as the Bhagavadgita, and the Upanishads etc.

The novel opens like the purans, portraying the last day of a disciple called Nameless-one with his teacher Yogeshwara. They meet at the end of the winter and begin of the spring. The story is selected from an old book with ‘yellow pages’ which Yogeshwara was reading when Nameless-one enters the ashram. As being his teacher, Yogeshwara has told him everything even the ancient tongue that nobody understands today but this last lesson is very important because "he had yet to tell him who he was"(Joshi, 1994: 10). The Nameless-one hears the story with full attention and his guru (teacher) is relating the events as depicted in his "book of yellow sheets"(14). The mythical opening of the novel is very suggestive to the
readers. As history repeats itself, this story is taken from the ancient times full of mythical references. The "dance of the God" is the destroying dance (*tandava*) of Lord Shiv in the world whenever the vice prevails over virtue. The long going conflict between two different forces such as *sur* (angels) and *asur* (devils) is still continuing and the ultimate responsibility to choose the right way to affirmation rests upon the individual. Yogeshwara also suggests:

> But some of their thoughts are, my son, remain unparalleled in the dark history of man. Both kinds of thoughts shall I teach you. I shall lead you to the grain and I shall lead you to the chaff. Keep the grain and the chaff apart, always, for much harm has come of their mixing. (10)

The motif behind the story is self-realization. A new era is about to begin and the Nameless-one is now a thirty year old man going to start his life in the new city. In the nine chapters of the novel, Yogeshwara is relating the story of the past city and the causes that lead to its destruction, the clash between the city folk and its governor, the Grand Master along with his advisory council that include Minister of trade, the Education Adviser, the Master of Rallies, the Astrologer, the Commissioner of Police, the Commander of the Army and the General starch. Like any modern city, these councilors live in the posh-area of the city which is seven hills and other people live according to their socio-economic status.

The city has three-tire structure divided according to the residences of its people. The highest in power occupy the highest place and accordingly the lowest. To begin with the lowest, they are the labour class people who live in mud-huts "running from end to end, dotted with the green of many mangroves"(12). The Middle class people live in pink buildings made from bricks; hence the novelist calls them the ‘brick-people’. The Grand Master and his councilors live in the seven hills in which the highest hill belongs to the Grand Master himself. Professionally, mud-peoples are the labour class people and the brick-people are
the employees at some major or minor posts in the city administration. There is another class of people also, the boatmen who “live on narrow tortuous streets” and “are not simple as they seem” (14). Their bread and butter depends upon the flowing stream of the river, therefore, they adore it as their divine mother with whom only they have their allegiance.

The city administration is going smoothly till the Grand Master, its governor has a dream. He believes in a mythical prophecy that tells of coming of a king. The Grand Master is proud of his ancestral right over the city as his father and his grandfather have also ruled over it. So far as his interaction with his city people is concerned, the narrator tells how he has grown in the seven hills and has little contact with the middle class but no contact with the boatmen. The prophecy that affects Grand Master's mind immensely is quoted in the opening of the novel as follow:

Who knows, who can read the signs?
The workings of immortal time?
A king I see upon a throne,
In astronomer’s grove the boatmen mourn,
A thing of darkness growing dark,
On city walls the shadows mark.
The river, I see, from a teacher rise.
The hermit, the parrot, the teacher die.
Under a rain the waters burn,
To his kingdom at last the King returns.

The Grand Master is never acquainted with his city people, he is doubtful about his own position as their administrator. Although he likes them but he is not sure about their allegiance towards him. Day and night he confers with the palace Astrologer "to put together new formula to win back their allegiance"(13) because with the passage of time, observes the Grand Master, “the populace has begin to
appear more and more unruly "(13). He is prejudiced that "the brick-people can be
talked to, cajoled, distracted, and, if necessary, threatened.....It is the boatmen
whom he finds both incomprehensible and stubborn"(14-15). This day and night
concern affects his sub-conscious mind and one night he dreams of being the king
of this city.

The palace Astrologer elucidates Grand Master's dream as it better axes his
grind. He relates this dream with the ancient prophecy and persuades Grand Master
that his dream is a sign that he is going to become a king in the days to come. He
convinces Grand Master that "such dreams come out of the depth of great truth and
carry in them the truth of the times"(15). He further adds mythical interpretation
that the city has become "a plaything of the asuras"(15). His interpretation of
Grand Master's dream makes the later high ambitious and proud of his position that
further confirms his pseudo-belief that only he can reform the city and bring the
asuras (demons) to the right path. The whole story of the novel is the result of his
efforts to make his dream come true and consolidate his position. He adopts every
measure what he can.

The greatest dangers to this ‘mission-prophecy’ are the boatmen. They are in
great number hence "the danger posed by their numbers is not only to the city but
also to the palace itself"(16). In order to secure Grand Master’s position, it is
mandatory to have a control over their fast-growing population. The astrologer
prepares a plan to "take matters easier"(17) in which first part is the announcement
of "the way of three beatitudes" before a large crowd. Cunningly, he interprets the
entire plan in the terms of sacred myths and in the language that nobody
understands. Although it was the dream of his Grand Master to rule over the city
but the Astrologer convinces the populace that "God has sent Grand Master to be
your servant. Looking after this city is like a yajna for him, his life is the ahuti"
(17). He further molds the public opinion that "a large number of asuras have
taken human form and have descended to disturb the \textit{yajna} "(17). Like Lord Buddha’s \textit{astangikamarg} to achieve supreme enlightenment and overcome the sorrow of birth and death and get the supreme peace, the Astrologer suggests three ways for the blissfulness of the city. The first being to accept the supremacy of the Grand Master as the "father and mother of the city"(17) and the second being “the wealth of the city belongs to the everyone" (17) which was based upon the equal distribution of resources hence it was mandatory to control the fast growing population. Therefore, the astrologer announced to have “one child to a mother and two to a home" (18). The third way was especially for those who deny contributing in the happiness and prosperity of the city by disobeying the first two ways and they were liable to be treated in accordance with the third way i.e. the "law of compassionate righteousness"(18) which was to be decided by the Grand Master himself. Astrologer’s cunning speech with reference to mythology and in the language that nobody understands pleases the people but they fail to understand the concept of "one child to a mother and two to a home" and "law of compassionate righteousness". The village headman who was a woman scents out the evil intention of the Astrologer and warns him against such practice to befool people:

The boatmen, Astrologer, are children of the great river, and only of the great river. You must know this when you made that speech. How can we become children of the Grand Master or of anyone else? Your speech upset the boatmen. We do not know why you made it.(19)

The village headman evaluates all the three beatitudes one by one and replies the Astrologer strictly. On his second beatitude, she tells Astrologer:

Let the city's wealth be put to use for the benefit of all. Let the boatmen's children have an equal chance with the children of the brick-people, to grow and flourish as it must have been indented for them to grow and flourish" (20).
The Astrologer is very much annoyed and warns the headman to "think about the triple way again" (21) and if they fail to do so, they shall be liable to be considered as per the third beatitude. The village headman refuses because these belong to the very existence of the boatmen and cannot be compromised.

Remaining chapters depict how the Grand Master's "law of compassionate righteousness" is applied to the boatmen. The Grand Master's ambition is to mind wash the boatmen to accept his supremacy but the boatmen are rigid and refuse to sacrifice their individual freedom and accept the allegiance to a man instead of God. The Grand Master is very much surprised at their foolish devotion to "a stream of water, no doubt beautiful, no doubt sacred, but none the less a stream" (22). He decides to teach a lesson to these people and make them fear of the palace. He suggests announcing "the Era of Ultimate Greatness". In the name of this new era, the police are free to crush and arrest the people without telling their crimes. The arrested people are taken to a prison named Gold Mines. The "Era of Ultimate Greatness" is a punishment to those who do not believe in the mastership of the Grand Master and it also means:

...the loss of individual freedom resulting in arbitrary arrests by which innocent people are condemned to be debased life of suffering and agony in a big underground passage which leads to a complete extinction of the soul. (Dwivedi, 127)

The boatmen never surrender to the evil ambitions of the Grand Master and they are not ready to kill their individual freedom of choice. The boatmen live an authentic existence. They believe in the God and the holy river as their mother. Arun Joshi presents them in mythical-religious terms who believe in the purity of the soul. They have the spirit of a common man to lead a happy life against its all odds. Some major representatives of these people are Bhumiputra, Dharma, Vasu, Patanjali and Shailja including the Professor. Their names resemble the mythical
narrative pattern of the artist. They are named according to their actions. These leaders are arrested one by one with the announcement of the new "Era of ultimate happiness". Bhumiputra is a teacher and assistant of the Professor who is thought to be the master mind in conspiracy against the Grand Master. He is wanted by Grand Master's army. His disappearance in the beginning results in the arrest of his neighbor Patanjali, an old man. All these characters are linked to the Hermit of the mountain who represents divinity in man due to his own choice of action.

On the contrary, the people in the service of the Seven Hills are named according to their designations. They are Grand Master's men and ready to do what he orders. But they are not united like the mud people or the boatmen. Everybody is in the service of Grand Master to axe his grind.

In the succeeding chapters there is tussle and tugging between the Grand Master and the boatmen on the matter of allegiance, to man (Grand Master) or to the river (God). It begins with the arrest of Bhumiputra for "making subversive propaganda at the university" (43). The Grand Master is blind of ambition and always dreams to be the king of the city but the boatmen were great obstacle in his dream. He treats the boatmen as impolite and “incomprehensible and stubborn” (14). He talks to the Astrologer:

If a boatman is aggrieved he can go and seek redressal of his grievance.
He can petition the Minister, send a representation to me. But he doesn't do this. He prefers rather to come out in his boat and blockade the river...
He forces us to use the police against him." (38)

They accuse Bhumiputra for being king-pin of the conspiracy against the Grand Master. In the later chapters they calumniate Bhumiputra for doing secret planning to kill the Grand Master in order to occupy his wealth and position. However, The Grand Master gives one more chance to the boatmen to prove their allegiance to the Grand Master. His desecration of the traditional annual festival of
the river is yet another weapon to exploit the religious feelings of the ignorant mass to secure their allegiance. From the time immemorial, the festival was celebrated as an annual adoration to the mother river that nourishes the boatmen. But the Astrologer, once again taking the help of mythical *asuras*, attempts to take the oath that in this struggle; the boatmen shall hold their allegiance to Grand Master. But the boatmen again refuse to take the oath. This miracle of Astrologer has no effect on their minds. The boatmen are not ready even to salute the Grand Master but due to interference of their headman, they agree. The Grand Master coronets his son as the new king of the city. The Astrologer mutters the tongue that no one understands. But the public is still confused at this unexpected practice.

The Astrologer advances attractive arguments in order to justify the whole thing. But all was in vain. There is only the Hermit of the Mountain who understands everything even the tongue that the Astrologer mutters. He tries to make the Astrologer understand that "he was committing sacrilege, because they had meet to celebrate Immortal Time, as embodied in the great river, and not sing praise of kings" (97). But the Astrologer could not be curbed and he continued his practice.

This chapter shows how a man blinded with ambition can play with the holy rituals and befool the innocent mass. The Grand Master is blind of over ambition and fails to see the truth that the festival of the river was not only an ordinary festival but it was the celebration of the supremacy of time and a homage that a mortal man could pay to the immortal time at least once in a year. More or less, every member of the Grand Master's council was conscious to secure his own place in the administration. There are "internal rivalries and cast prejudices among the Councilors that mar the city administration." (Ghosh, 157). Their sole aim was to remain in the limelight in order to improve their hierarchical standing in the administrative ranking. The Education advisor also had an ambition to become the
king of the city and could not understand the eternal truth told by the Hermit of the Mountain. He hates the commissioner due to his cast prejudice and the commissioner also hates not only him, but also those who are in teaching or studying profession.

The boatmen's resentment with the Grand Master is depicted further in the next chapter "The Lottery Stall". This stall is established by the Professor and Shailaja's brother to create a forum and public opinion against the Grand master through Bhumiputra's parable of the "nakedness of the king" and the inability of his flatters to speak the truth in order to prove their loyalty. Of course, it is a parable that resembles the present scenario of the city and its current political condition. Those who have courage to speak the truth shall be punished since, writes the novelist, “the air of this city is privately owned and any sound-and your voice is sound-must be carried by air, you can only utter such sounds as do not displease the owners of this air" (122). At present they have used this air to propagate the guilt of men. The freedom of expression was suppressed and a terror of emergency was imposed upon. Those who think or speak "were lulled into sleep" (127). Shailaja's brother's narrating of the parable has awakened the spirit of the boatmen. It was a celebration of the "city's hoary past and he, an ancient bard who had emerged from out of the depths of the Great River to remind the city of a long-forgotten truth" (129). It rejoices the people and helps them to unite against the corroding effect of the Grand Master on their individual freedom. They talk about the prophecy that speaks the coming of a king but also the rise of a teacher. Now they know who the teacher is. He is Bhumiputra, their beloved Master Bhoma, who has disappeared in a mysterious circumstance and is wanted by the Grand Master's men who accuse him as the king pin of the conspiracy.

In the next chapter, "The Return of the Teacher" Bhumiputra returns into action. The boatmen refused to take the Astrologer's oath of allegiance to the
Grand Master. The advisory council, therefore, decides to set dragnet in motion and use force against these ‘lawless men’. The action is taken and the headman is pulled to the Gold Mines. The boatmen are weary of this battle and every day they condole the death of one member among them by putting a marigold flower in the center of the professor's grove. Since their headman has gone, they were left orphaned to be slain by the army. Nobody was to lead them. They decide "to capitulate and take the Astrologer's oath and put their thumb impression and the affidavits of the same" (144) but in the meantime Bhumiputra appears before them. Before his appearance in the public, Bhumiputra meets the Hermit of the mountain who preaches him like Lord Krishna in the Gita. He preaches that immortality of being and the right path of truth and affirmation to life is implicit in the right action and not in the escape.

Bhumiputra relates his story to the great Hermit how he has escape from this world deep down the mountain but a presence of something "turned his face toward this city once again and seemed, indeed, to say that it was the city not the hermitage that would be the stage for the play of my life and that needed to be the goal of my travels" (143). Here we find a divine motivation in the Bhumiputra that helps him to realize his true field of action. His dharma kshetra and karma kshetra was not the hermitage, or the escape from the city as in the case of Billy Biswas of The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, but it was the city, the service of those who badly needed him. The Hermit of mountain meets him to tell that he should not lose his heart and help the boatmen because "they were like orphans in an evil world" (144). Bhumiputra has no confidence in him to lead these men. The Hermit makes him believe that he is only a medium and a tool in God's hands. Later on, Bhumiputra inspires the boatmen in the same way and tells them not to fear death and be united. He tells: “If you choose the death of your soul above the death of your body, then no one, man or god can help you”(146). He also inspires them with
a vision of immortality that the guns can kill your bodies, yes. Are you, then, afraid to die?" (146). He calls them to revolt against the tyranny of Grand Master and further compares him with "a wisp of the morning mist that for a moment dances upon the river's deep waters" (146). All this is but an effect of the Hermit of the Mountain that Bhumiputra gets a chance to realize the authenticity of being. The Hermit seems to be a mouthpiece of the author to give the true meaning of existence. To ‘exist’ implies to retain one's own individual freedom, the liberation of the soul which is not possible if one has a fear of death. On hearing Bhumiputra being afraid of Grand Master's prison, the Hermit says:

And I meant that nothing enfeebled man more than fear that nothing but fear stood between him and his liberation... And I saw that where men had thrown off this blanket of fear there alone truth had triumphed and great civilization flourished and men had taken another step towards God." (156)

He encourages Bhumiputra to throw off the fear and do his duty and choose the path of right action:

This city, this world, all this is the manifestation of One, and not the shadow of the Grand Master's ego, as the Grand Master might imagine. And it is He, the One without a second, who, secretly supports and guides all that you see and what you do not see; " (156)

On asking Bhumiputra his purpose of existence, "where in the scheme of the Almighty do I come in?" (156), the Hermit insists that the course of individual's existence depends upon what he chooses.

But the Almighty can manifest through men only what men allow him to manifest. That is why men and cities and nations must choose. There is the upward path that leads to freedom and there is the downward path that, for the moment at least, must lead to perdition. (156)
The great Hermit relates all happenings of novel in the terms of Indian myths and insists upon doing one’s own duty and choose the right action in order to achieve liberation. Bhumiputra thinks himself as a cause of the Professor's arrest. The Hermit consoles him that it was not because of Bhoma but the professor was searching for "some lost bit of himself. For his lost faith in his city, his civilization" (159)

The next chapter "A New Decree" opens with the imprisonment of both, the village headman and the professor to the 'dark dungeons'. The headman is tormented to take the allegiance to the Grand Master. On her strict refusal, they pierced her eyes with long pointed needles and pour acid into the perforations. The Professor was on hunger strike in the prison demanding (i) trial against the Grand Master and the Astrologer and (ii) either to tell the prisoners about their crimes or set them free. His demands were carried to the administrator of the Gold Mines. No action is taken and the professor dies while at strike.

These sufferings are treated by the Hermit as *ahuti* in the *yajna* to purify this world and the city as well as its rulers. He tells:

> This yajna of the mud-people, Patanjali, burns only on sacrifice. When the fire is low, when the flame is dying, men must feed it with their own lives. And who knows the god now call for the Professor's life? Who knows this be the great purpose that they have reserved for him.(166)

The Professor's death is kept secret. The concerned authorities denied the existence of any professor in the Gold Mines. The Grand Master, in order to regain his popularity in the name of restoration of the traditions of justice, decides to behave with magnanimity and orders to set free all prisoners. The prisoners were "urged to have charges framed against themselves without loss of time" (171-72). Since everyone declared that he was innocent and no record of his crime existed, a new decree followed that “no prisoner was to be set free unless he proves his
innocence" (172). This new decree is also an ‘eye-wash’ and "not worth the paper it was written on" (174). Now the boatmen were all in darkness and the oppression of the ruler led them to strike. Bhoma asks them to:

Let the boats be pulled out and upturned. As the great river is our witness
let us vow that not a boat, not a leaf, not even a piece of straw, shall
move on the river's breast, until these dark phantoms open their eyes, and
their ears give us heed. (178)

For the Grand master, the boatmen's strike is taken as their gross misconduct and also their revolt against the throne, their treason. Consequently, an open war is launched against the arch-criminal Master Bhoma and his men that results in the death of one policeman and twenty boatmen. This gave a chance to the police captain to kill more boatmen to avenge the "death of a public servant on duty" (180). The fight for righteous living goes tough. The internal rivalry between the Education Advisor and the Commissioner on cast prejudice results in defeat of commissioner because, with the help of Minister of Trade, the shock brigade which consists of teachers and students joins the boatmen and they teach a suitable lesson to the student-hater commissioner. Due to this internal conflict, the council is breached down by the grand Master and the new council of people is constituted. This reflects decay in city administration.

The succeeding chapters "The Day of the Generals" and "The Supreme Council" depict boatmen's final refusal to take back their strike and its consequences. A deed for national partnership is signed between the army and the Minister of Trade. The Grand Master calls a meeting and insists upon to take the Hermit on their side because he thinks “If the Hermit comes to our side, they shall surely reciprocate" (202). The ministers fear that the Hermit might replace the palace Astrologer; hence they do not agree and tell the Hermit "as mysterious as the mountain, deep as the river" (202). The matter is now turned towards the
appointment of a king to the city. After much discussion over cast and heredity factors, the Grand Master is selected as their king and the Minister of trade is promoted to the new Grand Master of the city.

But there is no change from the boatmen side. For them, the king is naked still and death is more preferable to surrender to this newly-born king. They have realized the meaning of human existence and thus have left away the fear of death. The Hermit of the Mountain has shown them reality of the human existence. The headman says: "each moment the river dies and each moment she is reborn. Death is certain for all and here is a reason to die. As I told you, the course of our struggle is set. Let it run." (208). These lines echo the Gita where Lord Krishna teaches Arjun to prefer death in fulfillment for his own law rather than to follow that of another’s (Gita: 3.35). Dr. Radhakrishnan observes: “We must play our part manually, be it great or small. Goodness denotes perfection of quality. However distrustful one’s duty may be, one must be faithful to it even unto death” (147).

The Hermit realizes the end of the city is at hand. He wants to know the final predicament of the city’s existence. He asks the river in dejection: " What should I do?...Is there still time? Is there hope? Is there a point?" (216). He opens the city horoscope which was "covered with geometric forms and words that no one understood." (216). At last it has parallelograms with black sides and red diagonals. This was a part of the prophecy that talks of the appearance of the king. The Hermit remembers how he and his brother the Astrologer had long debated the meaning of this prophecy while they were students. For the Hermit, the river rises from a teacher but the Astrologer explained that the teacher rises from the river. The Hermit thinks to reinterpret this part of the parallelogram and he sends it to the Astrologer to consider again:

As you had hoped, a king now sits on the throne. My death and the death of the teacher is certain. The king has nothing to fear from us... Now, on
bended knees, I beg of you to once again consider the meaning of the line we have so long disputed. You are an honorable man. I beg you to bring both the interpretations to the knowledge of the king. Let him choose...More than the future of the king, Astrologer, what is involved here is the future of a city, a civilization, I hope you will not misunderstand. And now, farewell-till, in another birth, we meet again."

(217)

The Astrologer has a mixture of love and hate for the Hermit yet he realizes his fault and tells the real interpretation to the Grand Master. The Grand Master is blind of his powers and denies any existence of the things like God and faith. He suggests the Astrologer to rest in peace and not to fear:

What are you afraid of? The boatmen? The councilors? God? The boatmen shall soon rue the day they refused their allegiance to me; the fangs of councilors have also been extracted. And God- what is God? Where is He? Does He even exist? He must surely have other things to worry about than intervene in the affairs of this city where we in any case now rule.(219)

The king blinded with passions thinks himself as a super power ruling over the dead bodies of the poor boatmen. He further orders the army to act with every possible weapon to teach a lesson to the rude boatmen and also the mud-men if they accompany them.

The king is blind but the Hermit has foresight. He sees the destruction of the city at hand. He hears a music of time reminding the tandav of Lord Shiv to destroy the universe as the corruption goes its zenith. The last chapter is named upon the great Hermit as "The Night of the Hermit".

The shock-brigade that accompanied the boatmen were gone except Shailja'a brother. The boatmen are betrayed, insulted, lynched, blinded with needles and starved to death. They were never treated kindly. Now all was lost. Nothing could
be done and the boatmen have been defeated and their revolt shattered. The banner bearing 'king is naked' has been changed into 'Long Live the King'. Remaining boatmen were still subject to search operation by the army. They could not face the strong canons with their spears and arrows and are crushed by the heavy tanks of the army.

The great Hermit was noticing all this from the corner of his eyes. He also looks to the sky which “had once again gone overcast. The clouds hung low and they were black."(227). The river was also rising below him. It continues to rise. He performs the yajna of "Immortal time and the great river consorts him. It was performed on the Annual Festival of the River by the court Astrologer but the court Astrologer had blasphemed" (249). The hermit performs this purifying yajna to erase the blasphemy done to the mother river by the Astrologer.

After the holy yajna, there is a deluge. The rain water and the river merge into one and it engulfs everything in the city, the mud huts, the pyramids and even the seven hills. There was "nothing but boiling leaping water as far as the eye could see"(257). Everything in the palace of the Grand Master "floor by floor, frame by frame, fell into the sea"(257). The king decides to fly away with his helicopters but the ADC announced that "a fight had occurred between the Education Advisor and the new Grand Master and their respective supporters. All of them were now dead but so was the helicopter" (259). The narrator ends this story from his yellow pages as follow:

For seven days and seven nights it rained without a stop. On the eighth day the sun rose and from a clear sky stared down at a vast sea of water. The sea was calm and gave no hint of the agitation that had gone into its making. Of the Grand Master and his city nothing remained." (260)

The novel ends with an epilogue that tells the substance of the story. The life begins from the water. The city which was the divine mother, the birth giver, the
sustainer proves to be the destroyer. Why? It is because of the corrupt practices of its offspring. The flood has destroyed everything in the city which was the end of one civilization as well as the birth of another on the "ruins of that city"(262). It will give rise to another Grand Master who may be wiser and the laser and other weapons may be sharper. The men will have another names but the conflict will be the same," a matter of allegiance, to God or to man"(262). All this repetition is the *Lila*, the *Maya* or the humour of the Lord.

In the Epilogue, Arun Joshi also suggests the remedy to prevent this "endless repetition" through the purity "Of egoism, selfishness, stupidity"(263). In the end, the novel leaves a moral lesson to try this purity without concern of success and failure. Purity comes through sacrifice. The novelist suggests:

>If the Grand Master had set his ego aside for a moment and read the boatmen's uprising in the right way, the wheel of sacrifice might have moved further. In the yajna of the boat people many men and much else was consumed. Could it not be that the Grand Master's ego could also truly be the *ahuti* as the Astrologer proclaimed? Could it not be, then, that things would have ended differently? …This entire cosmos is but the manifestation of the Lord himself. We are only instruments in the hand of great God who is the master of the universe- "His is the will, His is the force"(264)

If we consider upon the narrative and its message that the novelist wants to convey along with its mythical and ritual perspectives, we can easily trace that this novel is a philosophical investigation of the central problem of human existence by transcending his limited situation. The narrative develops through myths, rituals, and philosophy although this reflects a peculiar feature of Indian vision of truth. The novelist successfully presents it through his skilled use of indigenous myths and rituals. The setting of the narrative is very much according to the peculiar feature of Indian philosophy which is a counterpart of religion since it has never
become deferential to religious dogma and at the same time religious thought have never ignored the results of philosophical investigations. To quote:

Philosophy and religion in India have mostly been developing side by side, often in some form of collaboration and often influencing each other. What has been highly conceptually formulated in philosophical texts, has been, in a more popular way, expressed in religious symbolism, mythical tales and ceremonial rites and vice versa. (Warner: 15)

Here, in this novel too, the myth, religion and the politics go side by side in order to determine the authentic existence of the entire civilization but the problem rises due to lack of proper understanding and evil ambition to dominate over the religious faith of the people by means of politics. This results in destruction of the entire civilization. Here the existential philosophy is the assortment of myths and rituals. The Yogeshwara's telling of the story and the opening lines of the novel remind the rich Indian thought enumerated through the stories of the Purans compiled by sage Vyas. These are explanations of the Indian Philosophy of the Upanishads through the medium of stories intended for different types of men. The motive is to conquer the darkest region of material existence. In the novel the Yogeshwara tells the story to his disciple to make him know "who he was" (10) because the individual is in the state of forgetfulness of his relation with the Almighty due to his ignorance and his being excessively attracted to material sense gratification from time immemorial. His struggle for existence in the material world is perpetual; and it is not possible for him to get rid merely by making plans. If he wants to overcome this perpetual struggle for existence, he must re-establish his eternal relationship with the Almighty through his purity of soul and devotion (Bhakti). This devotion is defined as a form of disinterested services to God, hence it constitutes an action.
Like the *Purans*, the story of *The City and the River* is designed to motivate both, the rulers and the ruled and proves to be a mirror in order to help them regain their lost position and get out of the hard struggle for existence. The Yogeshwara and his disciple, the Nameless-one, in this sense, are *Puranik* characters and the story teller is like *Vyas* telling the stories to the sage *Shaunak* from his “book of yellow pages” (10). Like the basic concerns of *Purans, The City and The River* deals with the exploration of metaphysical questions in the socio-political context that reflect man's ambition, his egoism, and his self-motive to conquer all. It also tells the suffering caused by the defiance of truth and unscrupulous pursuit of throne and power. The setting is modern and the author does not preach any mysticism that is enormous and concerns only with the inner spirit of the individual. The novelist's vision is relevant to both, the individual and the nation. It has both sides of religion, the personal and the social and "stresses upon the need for spiritual commitment and collective responsibility to get rid of social and political evils" (Ghosh:). The novelist successfully denotes how religion cannot be detached from both, the individual and the political system.

In the novel the river denotes different aspects of faith. For Grand Master, it is "but none the less a stream"(22) but for the boatmen "they consider themselves to be the children of the river" (14). It is their religion, their *Bhakti* towards the river in which they have faith and any action against the river is action against their faith and their individual freedom of choice.

So far as the question of freedom of choice and allegiance is concerned, Indian philosophy has already assumed some kind of freedom of individual choice between various courses of action. The conflict in the novel is a protection of that individual freedom. The individual has certain measures of freedom in choosing the course of his life such as freedom to worship and held allegiance. the Upanishads also present two options before the individual *Shreya* (spiritual) or
Preya (pleasant) and it depends entirely upon the individual what is to choose (Kathopanishad: Ch.1. Valli-2 Verse.2). This spiritual message of Upanishads is woven through the help of politics and the religion and the city and the river embody these resemblances. The Hermit of the mountain suggests:

But the Almighty can manifest through men only what men allow Him to manifest. That is why men and cities and nations must choose. There is the upward path that leads to freedom and there is the downward path that, for the moment at least, must lead to perdition. (156)

In the Gita also the Lord tells Arjuna to do as he chooses (Gita, Ch.XVII, 63). This is so because “man is possessor of freedom” (Radhakrishnan ,46). In other words, individual is always free to create and form his own essence. Basically, a man is what he has chosen to be which means that he is fully responsible for what he experiences. In this novel, the basic right of the individual is taken away in the name of 'Era of Ultimate Greatness “which results in the complete extinction of the individual and the society.

The fabric of structure of the novel is woven on the pattern of opposition between these two ways of existence described above. Such confrontation proves to be a determiner of the limits of human existence. These oppositions are apparent in the title of the novel itself. The city is human while the river is divine, the city is synthetic, and the river is natural. Complete absences of natural objects such as flowers, gardens in the city are sufficient examples. The author emphasizes the lack of flowers and trees. The pyramids, the link roads and even the palace lawns "leave much to be desired. All brown and yellow. No trees. No flowers. Not a patch of green" (31).The "absence of flowers in the seven hills suggest their detachment from nature symbolized by the great and bounteous river" (Ghosh, 156). On the contrary, "flowers bloom along the banks of river and in the mango-groves" (136). Flowers are nature's precious gift to humanity and have occupied
prominent place in rituals as holy offerings to the Lord. Bhumiputra relates the Hermit how he felt "a force, as palpable and concrete as a living presence" (143) when he visited the valley of flowers. This presence inspired him to come back with the boatmen. Further, a marigold flower is also presented to the professor's grove “for those who were missing” (144).

The river in the novel has two poles: physical and spiritual. In physical, it is a stream of water that provides bread and butter to the boatmen and feeds the entire city with its water. Spiritually, it is a symbol of immortality to the mortal men. The spiritual aspect of the river is further stressed upon in the celebration of the annual festival. The boatmen call it as their mother and have harmonious relationship with this. She speaks to those who are innocent and pure at heart. It has spoken to the Hermit and the Professor also. Even the master of Rallies has felt a presence of God on the river when he was child. But as soon as the innocence turned into experience, he lost his purity of heart, the river forsakes him. In the end the river turns as destroyer and washes away every impurity to recreate a pure world. In nutshell, it is the river which is the creator, the sustainer and the destroyer of the entire society.

Joshi's technique and art of characterization is based upon the existential choices of the individuals. They are set against each other. The Grand Master has been presented as asur, having tamsi nature with no belief in God. He lives in a doubt and “at times, he is not certain” (13) about his own people but the greatest paradox lies in the fact that he requires faith and allegiance from the boatmen in lieu. He lives in darkness as he “never saw the coming of the dawn because where he lives, the first rays of the sun were never allowed to reach” (55). It symbolizes the darkness of soul as the Grand Master is devoid of virtues. He is a selfish man and his cunning Astrologer has added flavor to his utilitarianism. He fails to hear the sound of his soul to follow the right path of action which was given to him as a
warning in a dream in which The Grand Master was seated on a top throne of the hill surrounded by the waters of a river. He watched a group of naked men “started to climb towards the Grand Master’s throne…did not glance at him… but continued to climb (14). He cries in the dream “this hill is mine” which tells his possessive attitude because of impurity of his soul and the ego. He cannot hear the message of his soul and instead of providing services to his people; he begins to crush them to prove his only right over the human resources. Through the Grand Master, the author presents how the seeds of corruption, ambition and tyranny lead to the destruction of the civilization. Tapan Kumar Ghosh rightly observes:

Suffering for spiritual myopia, the Grand Master tried to lord it over the city and secure the people's unquestioning allegiance. Under his despotic regime, the city became corrupt and alienated from the river and all that it stood for. (171)

As contrast to the Grand Master and his violent attitude, the boatmen possess human qualities such as faith, devotion and belief in live and let live. Their revolt is an attempt to restore such qualities for purification of the city and rehabilitation of human values protecting their right to allegiance. On the surface, it seems as a struggle over political or social issues but in fact it is a protest against their freedom of choice hence, they turn their rebellion into a holy ritual, a yajna under the guidance of the Hermit of the Mountain. They seem to believe in the right karma leading to the path of salvation of their soul. Their leader Bhumiputra is like Arjun of the Mahabharat. The 'Era of ultimate Happiness" begins with his arrest and the story ends with his active participation in the revolt of the boatmen. He escaped in the beginning chapters but returns because of the divine inspiration in his mind that affirmation lies not in escape but in the right action at right place and his place was certainly among his fellow-beings. It turned his face towards the city and he comes to realize the goal of his travels. Arun Joshi echoes the Gita that real
knowledge lays in human efforts (Gita: 2.47). Inertia is not liberty but death. Bhumiputra’s arrival in the city signifies his performance of action in a detached spirit. The ethical teachings of Gita also stand “not for renunciation of action, but for renunciation in action”(Hiriyanna: 121). Bhma’s parable of the nakedness of the king is eye-opener to those who have forgotten the reality behind their mask of over-ambition and also provides a chance to introspect and prevent this malpractice of oppression.

In the novel it is the Hermit of the Mountain whom the novelist presents as a perfect man. His can be said authentic living in pure Indian existential context. He inspires and paves the way to everybody who comes to his contact. Like Krishna of Gita, he takes no active participation in the battle but always remains a Sanyasi whose being is steadfast in spirit (sthitprayga) and is ready to suggest the dharmamarg. He lays stress on man’s capacity to change his fate, to choose the circumstances he must live. He tells Bhumiputra:

I met many wise men and learnt the lore of many lands. And I learnt that nothing enfeebled man more than fear that nothing but fear stood between him and his liberation. And I learnt that fear was greatest ally of the kings and grand masters of the world, for without fear to freeze the hearts and the limbs of their subjects many a throne would have been toppled and many a crown blown off with breath of the oppressed.(155-56)

The Hermit presents Arun Joshi’s existential vision of life. He tells the Minister that everything was subject to the law of the world and any attempt to violate it would lead to destruction. The Hermit knows the cause of suffering which is solely because of the egoism of the individual. He also insists that the cure of this suffering is within, not without. He believes in the divine being of the individual. According to his conclusions, the individual is a possessor of Spiritual Existence, as it were, enveloped with concentric circles of Matter with various
degrees of intensity. He tells Bhumiputra that all this is “the manifestation the One “ (156) who is “One without a second, who, secretly supports and guides all that you see and what you do not see” (156). As enumerated through the Hermit’s ideas we can conclude that Arun Joshi claims to prove that the innermost layer of human existence is the subtlest while the outermost layer is grossest matter; envelopment around the spirit.

Among other characters we find the Professor is a renowned astronomer and a teacher of Bhumiputra. He is totally detached from the world and devoted to his work of astronomy and unaware of the recent happenings in the city. He sets out to rescue and return his vanished student which is “no different from the unexplained disappearance of a star of the heavens” (46). In this noble quest, he faces the hypocrisy, corruption and the evil practices of the city administrators. He is dejected at the sad plight of the city. It is his final quest that he practices fast to awake the dead sentiments of the administrators but his satyagrah also fails and the Grand Master does not yield. Although his death provided an opportunity to the Grand Master to wash his hands of all sins and brighten his image.

In this way we notice Arun Joshi’s existential vision of life which he succeeded to reflect through his characters. In this novel, he seems to believe in the spiritual existence of the individual as a part of the divine and his duty is to recognize this fact by means of purity of his soul and his right actions. To quote: “he from whom all beings arise and by whom all this is pervaded- by worshipping Him through the performance of his own duty does man attain perfection. (Gita: Ch.18 V.46). The “work is worship of the supreme, man’s homage to God” (Radhakrishnan: 300). If the individual fails due to his ego, selfishness and impurity, he will lose sight of his self and will be devoid of salvation. The Grand Master and his councilors present the dark side of his vision, the ‘downward path’ whereas the boatmen and other present the ‘upward’ path of the human journey.
The tragedy of the city is because of Grand Master’s non-realization of this divinity in man as well as in the river and his failure to see the truth through the eyes of his citizens. They are afraid of facing the truth and of seeing in Bhoma’s parable a mirror for their own thoughts. The Master of Rallies says to Vasu: “A great city is preparing to immolate itself because its Grand Master and his council dare not to lose face” (75). The Grand Master wants respect and obedience as the king of the city but forgets his dharma and instead of being slave and protector of the common man, his praja, he begins to crush them. This is because of his ego and impurity. The ‘three truth syndrome’ is another symbol to reflect this whole situation that the cure is within not without. The Hermit therefore suggests to “exercising your soul. Take it for walks. Let it speak when it wants to speak. Let it rip” (134).

Thus we have seen Arun Joshi has presented before us the ‘upward path’ leading to the purification of the sole and the ‘downward path’ leading towards destruction. On his narrative and skillful art of characterization, Arun Joshi presents how this dichotomy of being is based upon the individual's freedom of choice. The Astrologer and the Hermit hail from the same background and they both have been taught by the great Yogeshwara but it is their own existential choice what they are. Arun Joshi, unlike the European existential thinkers, does not present the individual freedom as an existential problem but he believes in the presumption of the Indian philosophy strictly of the Upanishads that the individual has always freedom of choice between various courses of action in the concrete situations. He has power to create and determine his essence. Yogeshwara tells the listener: “And do not forget it is what you are inside that governs how you read the outside” (263).

Besides dealing with the freedom of choice, Arun Joshi further deals with the other preoccupations of modern existential philosophy—despair or dread and
death. In the Indian philosophical thought, the world has not been left as an alien reality, but it is a sum total of volitional actions of all individuals who are faced with those parts of it which they are helped to form by their own acts. This is impurity, ego and selfishness that the individual falls again and again in the cycle of death and rebirth. Indian seers of truth, therefore, have allowed some space for calculated volitional actions to bring desirable results in the world because all the volitional acts of the individual are condemned to personal frustration, although temporarily they seem to make sense. In the repetitive world process in which the individual participates in a sequence of successive lives, the individual existence finally loses all its meaning and sense. Frustration, disgust and despair are the result. Only remedy is to prevent “this repetition of things” (262) by means of salvation. In order to convey these ideas in the simplest form, the novelist insists upon purity “of egoism, selfishness, stupidity” (263) which is within the reach of a common man. One has to sacrifice his ego in order to purify himself as “purity comes only through sacrifice” (263). This was the gist of boatmen’s rebellion. Once “the Grand Master is purified within he will see the world in a different light” (263). When the Minister asks the Hermit of the mountain, the Hermit clearly tells him that it is within not without.

Death is not a serious question in *The City and The River*. Choosing death is an act of freedom and escape, for in the Indian sense, death is only a change of scene for the life of the individual and the veiling of his memory. When this situation is recognized and understood by the individual, death is then a strong reminder to transcendent his limited existential situation. Death, as we find in the preceding chapters, is a great eye-opener in Joshi’s fictional world. The idea of death reminds Master Bhoma to transcend his limited situation. Influenced with Hermit of the mountain, Bhumiputra says to the boatmen not to fear death and prepare to die for a noble cause. He addresses the boatmen:
“What does your soul care if a man is powerful and a man commands the guns. Guns cannot kill you, my brothers and sisters.”

“But they can”
The guns can kill your bodies, yes. Are you, then, afraid to die?

…

For if you are afraid to die then your soul is already dead and the great river, your mother, cannot help you, nor can the Headman help you even if she were back from the dungeons of the shadow. (146)

In this way we find that in *The City and the River*, Arun Joshi takes the problem of human existence at a wider level and seems to suggest that if the inner world of individual is purified, the outer world itself be purified because it is the result of what the individual wants to make it through his freedom of choice. Joshi adds further dimension in his existential view with the help of Indian philosophy and myths by presenting the story in *puranik* forms and sends a message to modern civilization to purify their soul and transcend the limited situation and follow the upward path to prevent this endless repetition.

Although Arun Joshi’s existential philosophy in the *The City and the River* concerns the humanity at widest yet his dexterity lies in fact that the philosophical observations are presented so naturally in fictional terms that the book never ceases to be a fiction rather than a philosophical treatise. The fusion of philosophical and religious fervor into the uncertain secular-political world without marring the fictional concern of the novel and the reiteration of an unvaned hope that meaning and order can still be constructed upon the chaotic foundation of our time, are central to its overall meaning. In the wake of the monumental failure of one system of order, the spirit of hope affirms the possibility of finding another, even a better one. Arun Joshi’s effort through this work is a reaffirmation of Indian wisdom and
his fictional technique becomes an experiment to convey his existential vision with the help of myths and political satire.

Thus we can conclude that in the theme and technique both, Arun Joshi transcends the time and being. The novel ends where it begins. The use of various myths and the circular movement of the plot show the effect of Indian metaphysics and the narrative symbolize the eternal human quest for spiritual fulfillment, thus providing a new dimension to human existence in the world.
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