Joshi’s Existential Concern in his Short Stories

The preceding chapters reveal that Arun Joshi is among the few writers that have captured life along with its full complexity and totality. His novels have attracted the attention of most of the critics; his short stories are still unrevealed and un-discussed. Though his concern in short stories, like in his novels, is psychological realism and the centre of his thought is the individual again; his works never remain objective and dry psychological analysis. These present his belief and faith beyond the realm of psychology by catching the eternal in the casual and invest a moment with the immensity of time. Although similar in theme and technique, his short stories vary from his novels as these are occasional rather than professional in nature. His only one collection of these occasional events entitled as The Survivor presents before the reader the story of various individuals hailing from different parts of society and those who remained untouched in his novels.

M.K.Naik’s observation about short stories in Indian English as “mostly a by-product of the novel workshop” (15) is all the time right about Arun Joshi also. His stories do not relate the millionaires from sophisticated society, as in his some noteworthy novels, but they concern with the peoples who belong to day to day life-ordinary college principal, the soldier, the jobless youth, eve-teasers, the prostitutes and many more- stood un-presented in his novels. In his interview with Purabi Bannerjee , Arun Joshi has thrown light upon the importance and seriousness of novel as a literary form and what makes a difference with short story in his case:

Each has its own place. In my case it is the theme which determines whether it would be a short story or a novel. For
example, I wrote a short story called 'Gherao' which was about students gheraoing a principal. Thematically, I would not like to handle a novel about the academic world which I don't know about; so a short story. (17)

Therefore his short stories cover a wide range of subjects with a larger gallery of characters because the full length record of Indian life is more authentic in short stories than in his novels. Multiplicity of socio-cultural-economic themes can be dealt with only when the language used therein is the language of men. The flexibility of language and frequent use of Hindi and Urdu words and sometimes Sanskrit Slokas reflect the linguistic and cultural variety of his characters. The basic theme of his concern with human existential problems continues in his short stories also. His deep insight into human reality and character, the authenticity of the scenes he describes and the ease of his style capture the shades and delicacies of expressions of his characters. The characters find themselves in a maze and the goal being to search the way out.

The fictional world of Arun Joshi is that of restlessness, doubts and helpless longing. No doubt, the rapid industrialization, urban development and technological progress have added comforts and luxury to human life but have corrode the inner self of the individual who is the centre of Joshi’s world. His is a world where traditional values and patterns of life are stalemated with the pseudo-western values and the expedience of the age. The dream of freedom fighters is shattered by their vision of a 'jeering, gesticulating India’ wallowing in corruption and filth. The old songs and poetry, myths and legends are lost and replaced by the deafening noise of jazzes and bawdy film songs. The natural emotions have been suppressed in the name of pseudo-morality. Modern man is cut off from his cultural and spiritual moorings and his own roots. He is deadlocked with life and
his search for a way to out often leads him nowhere. Joshi's characters in his short stories, as in his novels, stand overlooking; the menacing abyss of their time - angry, displaced, and sometimes, even amused at their own plight. The substance that emerges out from this convoluted state of things is the problem of survival which appears again and again. His are the stories of frustrated dreams, of aspirations and hopes, sometimes told with irony and satire, but most often with sympathy and a true human understanding. Author’s approach is humanist and the central theme that emerges from his short stories is common man’s anguished quest for survival in an impasse life.

First story of the collection, The Gherao, presents the negative face of modern Indian academia and the decaying culture of teacher-student relationships. In the country where the Guru, i.e. teacher was placed above the Almighty God, is now gheraoed by the rude students. Mr. Chatterjee, a lecturer in English narrates the whole story from a participant narrator point of view. Gherao is a powerful weapon which is often used in politics to make the government accept some demands. The students use this to wench their demands by creating immense pressure on the college principal Ravi Mathur who had been a freedom fighter in the past. The story is a lament on the sudden change in cultural pattern and “vision of jeering gesticulating India” (19) which bewilders the freedom-fighter principal. The story is an implication of the diminishing of social and cultural values in post-independence Indian society and loss of moral values among the students who have forgotten to respect their teachers. The confrontation of the story presents two opposing forces, the post and the pre independent Indian education, the generation gap and the moral degradation. The principal represents the old generation and the pre-independent cultural values and on the other hand, the union of the students is new face of the free India. The tension is woven out of the conflict of these two forces. The principal is shocked at his illusion of the vision that he has seen about
the free India and for which he has suffered so immensely during the days of freedom-fighting. He is broken by a pathetic outburst: ‘please do not destroy my world’. He sobbed lasting once again the thread of his thoughts. His words get lost somewhere in the labyrinth of his enfeebled brain”. (27) He cannot bear it and dies of heart attack. The narrator also feels shocked and he could not sleep that night. Devoid of inner solace, he tries to write down the entire event to ease his mind. The story, in the end is pathetic which makes reader to lament on the death of a principal which is also a defeat of the old age values and death of the indigenous cultural values.

_The Frontier Mail is Gone_ presents story of a young girl who eludes from his hut out of his curiosity to see the places the train goes everyday and to meet those "rich men big men" (42) who lived in that world. This story is also a first person narrative. Leila, the central character is a child widow girl around seventeen, who lived in a hut by the railway track with his brother named Surrinder who becomes friend with the narrator. Like any other girl, Leila was also living with all her comfort that life might offer her. What attracted her world of imaginations was the Frontier Mail that pass every morning before her hut and goes to the places unknown to her carrying men and women. The narrator observes:"Her girlish face was lighted with wonder and, as I was later to recall, a suppressed passion that none of us suspected her to possess" (35). Frustrated by her father in her attempts, she managed to elude the surveillance of her ever-alert father and board the Frontier Mail that had stopped for some moments before the crossing. This incident was soon "blew over, dissolved, as it were, in the smog of our industrial existence" (40). When she reached Bombay, she was caught by a pimp who deposited her to a brothel. She survived in her own way along with her suppressed dream of meeting big and rich men in the world of institutionalized prostitution.
This story is a bitter comment upon the pseudo morality of big men in big cities but having little hearts. Leila is survivor of that morality which has no place for human emotions. Her story reveals how the elite society grows up sucking the blood of these lower people. On the other hand, Arun Joshi projects the perpetual striving of these people towards some middle class possessions, burning themselves out in the process, without probably achieving very much more than others who proceed more peacefully to the inevitable end. Somewhere the story has sympathy with the sad plight of those who seek refuge at Faridabad from the north West Frontier and having a "bristling edge of discontent" (31).

Like Arun Joshi’s *The Gherao*, the *Eve-teasers* is another irony on the diminishing cultural pattern in the name of pseudo-westernization in Indian society. The evil of eve-teasing is a common practice among the college students which has become a social curse to the girls. The story teaches a lesson and attacks on the work of the evil psychology that prompts young boy to seek pleasures by teasing young girls. The twins Ram and Shyam pass their matriculation with third class and get admission through back doors in the university. They took the bus to the university from the same bus stop and it takes forty minutes to reach. In these forty minutes they do everything which is unsocial and abusive to ladies in the bus. They pull out the female cloths and block the corridor to have a touch of the female flesh or to issue catcalls when the indefinite agony in their breasts becomes unbearable. They have proud in their heart instead of shame and think that they have "essentially lived" (45) these moments and boast at length about their misdeeds, thus attain “the sustenance for another day's living" (46) from this mastication.

It was another such day when one of the boys put to shame by his friend who had, in former’s absence sought pleasure by teasing his friend’s sister. When Ram finished narrating in gruesome details how he has teased his latest victim,
Shyam was shocked with horror and shame because the girl in the blue *kamiz* was his own sister. The author offers a sympathetic indignation upon the erosion of old cultural and moral value in our society and especially in the students. The author concludes:

> Where was Bhism? Where was Laxman who knew only Sita's feet? And presently his shame turned into a primordial terror, terror that chokes all those who have sisters, wives, or daughters, the terror of talon-claws that might any moment strike out from the dark, decaying mass of the universe and tear at the fragile flesh we have so tenderly loved.(47-48)

Joshi's *The Boy with a Flute* is a fantasy that deals with Mr. Sethi, a successful businessman who is "wealthy beyond calculation" (50). Arun Joshi seeks recourse to the Hindu religious thoughts discussed in the Upanishads that say *ashto ma sadgamay, tamso ma jyotirgamay, mrityormamritam gamay* i.e. "from evil lead me to a good; from darkness lead me to light; from death lead me to deathlessness" (49). Like an obedient child, Mr Sethi has learnt it by heart and kept in his mind when he was fifteen. He has deep faith in this hymn. As soon he grew old, he forgot this amid the contraction of the fever of the world with the steady increase of his business and his wealth. His course of life turns when he realizes the inevitability of death which disturbs his harmony of normal life. In the beginning he tried to ignore it but as soon as it grew more serious, he bothered it and in order to get rid of this strange obsession he takes recourse to a mistress. In her arms he feels "the chill of death falls off his bones" (56) and the touch of female flesh makes him able to keep off the obsessive disquietude of his nights. But soon he is exasperated by the wiles of the girl to extort more money from him. Ultimately, Mr Sethi, angry and disgusted, falls in the trap of a night bird. The man robs him of his belongings at gun point and gagging him up with his necktie,
leaves him in an unknown house. When all his attempts to free himself fail, the fear of death seizes Sethi's mind; light and shadows danced before his eyes beating a grotesque tattoo.

As usual, in the crucial moments of his time, Mr Sethi, groping in the darkness, stumbles upon the long forgotten hymn his mother had taught him in his childhood, *asto ma sadgamay* .... He feverously chants the hymns till he loses his senses. When he regains his consciousness, he finds a boy standing before him. His face was dark with soot and he had a flute in his hands. Sethi cannot identify the boy, who has rescued him from his death, either by the face or by his language. Yet, the boy seemed little familiar to him. Sethi observes: "the boy smiled in the fearful darkness, a smile of such unutterable sweetness that it reminded Mr Sethi of his childhood, his mother, indeed all the goodness that had ever known and somehow lost" (68). The Boy escorts Sethi to his hotel and disappears somewhere leaving no sign. Sethi is overwhelmed with joy but he is not sure whether the boy with the flute is a simple village boy as he claimed himself to be or the enigmatic lord Krishna himself in the appearance of a boy.

The Story reminds the reader of *The Last Labyrinth* where Som Bhaskar, the protagonist, in spite of so many indications, fails to accept the presence of God. The Godless universe and the loneliness of the individual both have been woven very artistically in the story. The author seems to suggest that only unflinching faith upon God can lead a man out of the labyrinth of life. The hymn outlines the urge that prompts all Joshi’s heroes to set out on their respective voyages on the turbulent sea of life. Lost in the maze of life with evil, darkness and death lurking in its shadow, they pray, like Sethi, to be led to goodness, to light and to knowledge of immortality.

Joshi's next story in the collection, *A Trip for Mr. Lele* tells the agony of modern man under the impact of money-minded civilization upon personal
relationships. The economic consideration and machines have turned the individual into a machine having no time for his family. The protagonist of the story, Mr. Lele is a helpless husband and a sensitive father whose separation from his daughter helps him emerge from their cocoon-like existence and rebel to realize his personal freedom. It is a touching tale of sentimental relationship between a conscientious father and his disabled daughter. The conditions around have reduced him to functional role and is totally conditioned by norms and requirements of his works by his acute anxiety about living up to the expectations of his superiors. He is the highest paid vendor of toothpastes in the country, next only to his boss to whom he is accountable. However, the job is not a bed of roses because he has to always maintain the rise in the sale by introducing innovative gift schemes. So he carries on with his job, in spite of himself. He is continuously insulted by his boss who is fifteen years junior to him but his family concerns prevent him resigning and stamping on the ‘horn-rimmed glasses’ of his boss who being practical, does not care for sentiments and tries to extract more from him.

Besides, Mr. Lele is a victim of the subversive ideals of his wife. Interestingly, it is she who keeps him back, unlike other women, not by tears or threats but by simply letting him know of her social status. She is a representative of the “western emancipation and oriental indolence”(68). She believes that marriage is a ‘solemn contract’. It is her personality and the force of her ideas that have obliged Mr. Lele to believe that the contract is “not only as solemn as something the violation of which might let loose divine retribution”(68). Over the years, he has developed a totalistic attitude towards life. He makes no attempt to impose his will on his wife. He is obliging in his dealings. But he is a responsible father. He has a daughter who is pale and small for her age. She also has a club foot. He is very much concerned for her. It is not really love but a sense of sympathy that draws him to the handicapped child. He finds in her “all the
beautiful and perishable things with which so much of life’s mansion is furnished”(69). He longs to be in her company to let her feel assured. He is always careful not to let his official responsibilities interfere with his paternal obligations. He cannot brook to see his daughter suffer any more since she is already struck with “so disabling and grotesque an affliction”(69). He is filled with a secret sorrow for the pathetic condition of the child.

It is this sentimental concern of a father towards his daughter which gives the story a human touch. The physical deformity of the child symbolically represents Mr. Lele’s own inability to articulate his inner protest against both, his wife and his boss before whom he appears as weak and fragile as the child. It is perhaps the realization of his weakness which makes him more attached to the child than to his wife. To compensate, as it were, for the terrible injustice meted out to the child by fate, Mr. Lele makes it a habit of keeping her happy while his wife is busy attending to the problems of ladies club. He takes pleasure in satisfying every wish of her. In fact, he finds a sense of solace in her company and takes her wherever she desires to go- to the zoo, to the children films. Due to this immense love, he never forgets to join her birthday which is only five days away when the story begins.

On her birthday, Mr Lele is ordered by his boss to make a trip to southern part of the country to check the sales of his toothpastes from “ratting into a trough” (70). Lele does not want to go there living his sick daughter back but he has no option as "company can expect" (74) but to promise a return to her daughter and live for his business but it takes more time than he expects and he feels anxious about the child back home. He sends a telegram saying that he may not attend her birthday. Symbolically, the trip Mr. Lele undertakes from north to south brings a transformation in him. His sojourn in different places and his confrontation with different situations peels the layers of his self which he for the first time, feels and
rebels. He is on the way to good bye to this dehumanizing nature of job and to return back to the world of affection. He does not find meaning in this job where he has no time to join the birthday of his dear child. During his sleepless nights in a cheap hotel at Hyderabad, he questions the meaning of life: "Was this- swatting bugs in the middle of the night in a squalid room-was this the meaning of his life, the sum of the matter" (78). Consequently, he fails to show any interest either in his assignment or in the new places which he visits because his heart lies with his daughter. This is further aggravated on his way to Cochin where he meets a boy who is returning to his home in Quilon from his school in Ooty on vacation. The boy tells Mr. Lele that he wants to paint “the sea, the sky, the sun, the stars, the night, especially the night, and even the wind, except that ... has no colour”(78). He says further that he had a sister whom he loved dearly. But when she died of leukemia, he was not informed as he was away at school. This sad tale of the boy really touches Mr. Lele and he, thinking only of his daughter, takes the next flight to Delhi to greet her on her birthday and it costs him his job. His daughter is sleep when he arrives. He kisses her awake and greets her with happy birthday. He loses his job but gains the most precious thing in his life which is more valuable that getting and spending of money. Jobless, he stands in the dusty corridors waiting his turn to come in the interview but in the evening, he sits with his daughter and watches the sky. Lele, the victim of a dehumanizing economic system, finds the essence of human living in his love for his daughter.

The title story of the collection, *The Survivor* assumes significance in that it reflects Arun Joshi’s basic concern in the anthology. It focuses not only on the growing dominance of modern women in all spheres of life but on the resultant rupture in the human relationships both in the family and the society, on account of urbanization and commercialization.
Kewal Kapoor, the narrator-protagonist of the story is a typical modern man who has no illusions about the progress made by human civilization. The corruption and hypocrisy of post-colonial Indian society has left the modern man at nowhere and even his own family and friends have no faith in him. The story goes on the pattern of *The Apprentice*; in the first person narrative in confessional mode which harps on its theme and depicts an individual’s desperate attempt to survive “that fantastic racket that passes for the modern Indian society (96). The confession of Kewal Kapoor gives an indication of the inner as well as the outer world of the fiction. Arun Joshi effectively employs the device of dramatic monologue to reveal the inner self of the protagonist who, unable to adapt to the prevailing social norms, “sets sail towards terrible shipwrecks” (97). He provides us an insight into the life of middle class people who, in their anxiety to reach the higher rungs of the social ladder, hurtle down to the pits of eternal despair and lose the essence of their beings. The language is comic-serious and it perfectly captures the tedium of the protagonist and his disillusionment with the society he lives in.

Kewal Kapoor wants a ‘bit of life’ but he gets a ‘bloody-minded nagging’ and a constant talk of money. Kapoor dislikes everything, particularly all that is associated with money. But as an ideal husband, he is expected to earn to meet the growing needs of his wife. He leaves one job for another till he gets fixed up in a drugs company where he has to do with the public relations. Ironically, he himself has many a complaint to voice, but he is fated to listen to the complaints of others. Though he tries to do his best in his new assignment, it takes him no time to realize that he is a misfit. The society he lives in, he finds anxiety, hatred about everything, about every relationship. He hates the society where he has forgotten how to laugh. Fed up of insensitive people and hypocrites generate dissatisfaction and absence of love for living in him. The agony of not belonging is so intense that he runs away from his office to seek peace of mind in the artificial things like
cinema and transistor. As a result, he gets hooked up to the Indian theaters seeing twenty films a month.

His infatuation with self fulfillment through films and womanize results in the loss of his job. He is estranged from his wife. However, it does not scare him. He moves from one place to another only to feel despair and depressed. He realizes that the modern society with all its progress is devoid of human love and sympathy and money is the master of all. Fed up with “money talking imbecile world”(97) Kapoor flinches towards total alienation from the society. Interestingly, it is the thought of his daughter that brings him back and gives a sense of relief to his tormented soul.

The only persons who love him in the world are his brother, Robu and his little daughter. He confesses: “I kept missing my daughter...As Divali drew closer I grew desperate. I just had to see her. I was terrified she would forget me”(97). Thus, obsessed with an urge to see her, he joins hands with thieves who putting on masks, enter the house on the day of Divali. While he enjoys the company of his child, his associates rob for jewellry. Ridiculous it may seem though, the act of Kewal Kapoor has a sense of inevitability that it is only love that sustains human relations and imparts meaning to human existence.

The story of Kewal Kapoor recalls the problem of Billy Biswas of Joshi’s *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. Billy is disillusioned with the phony values of the modern world and he selects the primitive world instead. He becomes one with the tribes who are free from the hypocrisy of the mainstream urban life. Similarly, Kapoor also leaves his home. But unlike Billy, Kapoor attempts to realize his individuality and consolidate his position in the society and not away from it. Kapoor is not idealistic as Billy. However, he, like Billy, is in the quest for a
humane society which is filled with natural love and where people feel secure in one another’s company.

In the end, Kewal Kapoor, after throwing the booty into the dark sea, utters a few words which indict the dehumanized morals of the modern society. He is scathing in his outburst:

I am a survivor of that fantastic racket that passes for the MODERN INDIAN SOCIETY. I am a survivor of mendacious mothers and relentless fathers, of two-penny politicians, of lawyers and doctors. Above all, I am the survivor of that greatest disaster of them all: THE MODERN INDIAN WOMAN (95-96).

Kewal Kapor is survivor of the cataclysms and disasters of the so-called progressive society. The society he lives in also provides his way to affirmation and therefore it is not wise to leave it for the sake of personal or individual freedom. Being alive to his inner self, he defies the system which has encroached upon the personal freedom of the individual because he searches a way because society has in fact no right to decide his destiny. It is natural right of an individual. He craves for simple love which he finds in his daughter who, as an innocent child, serves as invisible bond between the overriding mothers and sensitive fathers. The Society which traps and challenges man also provides a way for liberation. And it is the man who has to fight with to realize his dream of freedom. As such, a transformation from conformity to confrontation is discernable in the narrative.

Loneliness and problem of adjustment with the phony society is once again the centre theme in Arun Joshi’s *The Home Coming*. It is a dark and stark portrayal of the hypocrisy and ignorance that plagues our society, especially in the self proclaimed high-brow, intellectual circles. It relates the story of a war return soldier who fails to adjust himself with the society. Everything for him is changed, the social behavior, the human relationships and many more. The change that
occurs in his consciousness as a result of the devastating experience of war conditions his response to others. The root of his alienation is the lack of harmony between what he has seen in the battlefield and what he sees at present. His psyche has been splintered off as a result of his excruciating experiences in the war. He wants to share his emotions to somebody but nobody has time to listen to him. The city, the people, the society which was once familiar to him, now seems strange and changed. His sister takes him to a party and he discovers that the whole lot is just shallow phonies, the kind of people who are big on the words and minuscule on the action. He realizes that these people keep talking about things they have no experience of, but they do it anyway because it makes them look and feel intellectual.

This contrast between what the soldier has known about the war and what others have experienced is important. He did not know “what they have read but a lot of things they said were not quite correct. They mixed up terms” (101) The nightmarish experience of the gruesome death of his fellow soldiers and of the neck to neck fight in the dark trenches with the enemies, the memories of a school buildings full of girls that had been brothel for a battalion and above all - his sympathy with the young widow of that Subedar who saved his life; all these keep “swirling about his head”(104), whenever he is alone. The war memories always keep open his wounded psyche. His homecoming, his family members and his fiancée's welcoming him home at the railway station fail to cheer him. The irrationality and futility of life turn him into a recluse in his native environs and he gropes for meaning and purpose in life out of these 'strange' things. His dear and near are too engrossed in ‘their little worlds’ to come near his heart. As they have turned ‘strangers’, the protagonist can no longer feel ‘oneness’ with them. Even his sister's marriage party is a desensitized situation turning him into a sort of dandies
and robots that wear fashionable dresses and mouth high sounding platitudes in the name of ‘modernization’.

The story further goes on to relate the doings of a self proclaimed poet, the most intellectual and well read person in the party that the protagonist joins. We find him indulged in banal discussions that reminds very much of the pointlessness that occur in our mainstream media with alarming frequency. His rush to define ‘genocide’ and to paint a picture of a terrible war from the comfort of his metaphorical arm chair is despicable and Arun Joshi is bent on tearing away that facade.

Quite unmindful of ‘the ceaseless war’ that goes on inside the mind of the protagonist; the world around him is as ever bent upon carrying on with its engrossing existence. Being ‘static’ in their respective worlds, both, the protagonist and ‘the outside world’ do not know how to get reconciled with each other. The story is a brilliant comment upon how popular culture and society often paint pictures that they want, despite the fact that they often know nothing about it. It assumes a wider significance as a tragedy of men who have through traumatic experiences and as a result, find themselves unable to relate to a world of make belief. Moreover, it is noted for tearing away the fake facades under which modern society tends to lie low, modern fads which are but hypocritical. The story is about all those pseudo-intellectual campaigners who pretend to have nothing but the interests of our jawans in their hearts, about those poets who write poems about a soldier’s widow when they are yet to see even a soldier, about those critics and analysts who dish out trivia on wars and conflicts but could not operate a slingshot to save their lives. The story stands against the hypocrisy and deceit that has penetrated deep into our society, falseness perpetrated by the elite and the so-called intellectual who have no idea what is actually going on.
*The Intruder in the Discotheque* shows hopeless longing for that thing which is impossible to attain because it is contrary to natural law. It relates the story of two old men Shambhu and Vishwa who are contrary to each other in nature. Vishwa passes his days and nights in studying spiritual scriptures whereas Shambhu approaches young people and brothels because of his fear of death. In his view all these things will help him to get rid of his fear. He regularly intruded discotheques of the city. In one such discotheque, he fell in love with a young girl who seemed like *apsara* to him. Vishwa advised him to leave this desire because it requires an impossible thing, the return of youth to Shambhu. Shambhu did not care Viswa’s advises but insists him to do something for the sake of his love towards the girl. Viswa who is helpful in nature, leads him to a magician who promised to make him young provided that Shambhu should not touch the girl. Night after night the newly young Shambhu danced with the girl forgetting all of his age and sorrow. One night, Shambhu revealed the secret of the borrowed youth to girl and feverishly appealed her to share the burden of his age. As the girl jumped in panic and attempted to leave, she cried hysterically and Shambhu, forgetting the caution of the magician, clasped her wrist. The magic was broken and Shambhu collapsed to never rise again.

Joshi’s *Harmic* is least popular to Indian readers as it is set in the foreign cities, London and Copenhagen depicting the night-clubs and cafeteria and the perverted sexual pleasures like strip-teases and live-shows provided there. It tells the story of two Indian immigrants called as Harmik and their humiliating life experiences of job hunting in a world where deceitfulness and fraud are the laws and hard work do not pay. The story concentrates on the agony and privatization of immigrant labours struggling for survival in an unfriendly world.

*The Servant* is a new experiment of Arun Joshi in the field of crime fiction. He presents this story as a form of criminal case diary, providing information,
gathered from various sources telling about a servant who is accused of an attempt to rape the wife of his master and drive her to death. The main focus of the story is the circumstances and the motivation behind this dreadful act. The retrospective account of servant’s neglected childhood and adolescence, the humiliating jobs he had been forced to do, his suppressed sexual urge etc are dealt with in a psychoanalytic manner. The analysis benefits his act of criminal investigation. The pieces of information received from various witnesses from a college throws illuminating light on the private lives of the people belonging to the upper crust of Indian society, which are marked by superficial glamour and inner hollowness. It is a society where servants are treated not as human beings but simply as servants. The story is a critique of society with the boredom and hypocrisy of its people, their insensitivity, marital discords and extra-marital contacts.

_The Only American from Our Village_ is the story that projects an ironic comment upon how a successful man selfishly forgets his roots and those who contributed in his success. The hero of the story is Dr Khanna, "most outstanding immigrant physicist at the University of Wisconsin" (55). The story relates what happens when Dr Khanna, an Indian scientist who has settled in America, returns to India for a visit. At the age of forty, he comes to India, the country he has left fifteen years ago. He receives a warm welcome by Indian Scientists and Ministers who invite him to inaugurate many functions and address many conferences. In the last of the four weeks, Dr Khanna delivers a lecture in physics at a college in his former home-town. At the end of the talk, he was insisted by Radhey Mohan, a stamp-seller to listen to his story. He introduces himself to Dr Khanna as a long friend of his father:

I am the _stamp farosh_ of the town. I knew your father. I am very happy to see you. I came here only to see you because I am only a _stamp farosh_ and do not understand such matters. Nor do my sons
because they are not even matriculates. I have not been out of this town. I live in the village which was also your father's village and is, therefore your village. Ha! Ha! I can take you there if you like.

(58)

Dr Khanna listens to the old man's story uninterestingly. Radhe Shyam tells the story in a haunting manner along with enthralling intensity of voice that grips Dr Khanna's attention as the old man exposes, with a mixture of banter and pathos, the hollowness of his claim for so-called success. The story shakes him through and through.

The gist of the old man’s story is how Khanna’s father Kundan Lal passed his last days in India. He was a friend of this old man and both studied in the village school. Their names are still carved on the school desk. Kundan Lal was a brilliant student and stood third in his school and received a scholarship to continue his education. Consequently, he left village for higher studies and did not return before his retirement. His children were settled now, the daughter was married and his son, i.e. Dr Khanna has settled in America being the first American from that little village.

Kundan Lal waited for a long time that his son will arrive one day to his village but the son did not care. He married and settled himself in America. Ultimately, Kundan Lal expected a return ticket from Dr Khanna to visit America. The narrator relates:

Why in God's name did he have to shave every day. He took me aside and said he was expecting a ticket. What ticket? I asked him. He said he was expecting a ticket from you to visit America. A return ticket. He looked at me when he said that his eyes twinkled.'

(57)
Kundan Lal was very much frustrated when his son did not send a return ticket. The old man asks: “Maybe you don't have villages like ours in America but you must try to understand what it meant after the whole village knew you were going to send him a ticket. Did you send him a ticket?”(57). The incident shattered Khanna’s father and he withdrew himself from the village and began to wonder around the temples, the rivers, etc. He had no money neither his son did care to assist him. The old man says:

He talked all the time. And he talked only of you. We got fed up with his talk, to tell you the truth. We had a foot in the grave, all of us. What did we care for your achievements; what you did and what you did not do. I told him so one day. He was angry with me. I suppose I should not have said that.

His sister came to nurse him during his father's illness. Radhey Mohan, at Kundan Lal’s request sent a telegram to Dr Khanna but neither did he replied nor returned to have a last visit to his father. Kundan Lal died in harness. The old man ends his story here.

The old man’s story touches Dr Khanna very deep and he returns to America quite changed. He feels something is wrong with him. Dr Khanna visits a psychiatrist because "he has periods of great burning in his feel. He has further indicated that he thinks he has been cursed. Dr Khanna's output of research since he came back has been zero." (60) Dr Khanna is left alone at the end of the novel. This is the curse of neglecting his cultural belongings and parental roots.

Arun Joshi’s last story, Kanyakumari depicts the hopelessness of an Indian youth who fails to see any dawn out of the labyrinth of life. The absurd condition of man, crisis of faith and corruption in every field of life are some dominating themes of the story. The endless waiting for the sun to rise reminds the conditions of the vagrants in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot. The hero, a young
unemployed engineer is waiting for the dawn at Kanyakumari, the end point of Indian subcontinent. The dawn for him is a symbol of spiritual enlightenment and individual progress but the rock provides no relief to him although it is the same rock that enlightened Swami Vivekananda some hundreds of years back and named after him but it leads the narrator to the experience of a greater disappointment, violent politics and corruption all over. The glorious Indian culture has been a place of political rivalry among parties. The nature, the seas, the turbulent waves are the same but the sea of faith has been disturbed. The narrator observes:

One early dawn in March I swam off Kanyakumari just as the great Swami had done back in 1892. The sea was turbulent and shark-infested as it had been for the Swami... So, I crossed the turbulent, shark-infested waters and took position and began my wait for the sunrise and I looked back at the great continent of India which is also known as Bharat. (211)

The narrator reaches Kanyakumari at the end of his All India tour. During his whole travelling, he has seen a clash between the opposing political parties and ‘mara-mari’ between them not easy to know who was fighting whom. Sitting on the rock, he thinks of the big country which he has left behind and which is full of very small people like the three-penny politician actors. He finds young men like him who are also waiting for sunrise and, perhaps, looking for the God but he cannot join them because, he has come here to see the sun rise and not the God. He has no faith, although his fellow traveler Ayappan has told him that his hope of seeing sunrise at Kanyakumari was also a kind of hope. His grandfather, a retired railway guard has told him that world was like big clock and everything was connected with everything else and he has seen his mother praying to God to
secure a job for him but it has given no results. The sweeper, an old man with a broom appears from somewhere and surprises him.

The protagonist has faith in books like Som Bhaskar of *The Last Labyrinth* but his experience proves the old man's words to be prophetic. The time of sunrise passes but still the eastern horizon remains enveloped by a haze giving no sign of the sun, not even a glow. Out of frustration, he returns to the mainland. Standing on the rock in the postures of Vivekananda, he concludes that there was a haze all over and the sun is yet to rise. The sun of faith, the sun of brotherhood and the sun of love encompassing all humanity in this country is still far off.

The story presents a contrast to the time through this rock. "The lack of faith and the moral conviction that had enabled Vivekanand to have a vision of glorious India in the midst of hundreds of ills including political slavery, the youth of free India find only a haze that envelops the country." (Ghose, 212). The rock gives no relief because the sea of faith which was once at the full, has been lost somewhere and we have only its melancholic and withdrawing roar. The youth is left to a darkling plain "swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, where ignorant armies clash by night" (Arnold, Dover Beach). The youth of free India find only a haze that envelops the country. Assurance and promise of politicians and euphoria about the success of five year plans and democracy has failed to remove the gloom and cheer up the youth of the country who, unable to put faith either in God or in scientific and technological progress, are still waiting in the cold dawn for the sun to rise.

From the foregoing analysis of the stories of Arun Joshi we find that he has continued his existential philosophy revealed in his novels with his consummate artistic skill by not facilely resolving the psychological crisis of his protagonists but the indeterminate ending of his stories highlight the seriousness of the problem which may have no satisfactory solution. Moreover, his stories stimulate the
readers to ponder over their existential problems. The crisis of the protagonist as we find in his stories has universal ramifications also, as at any time, one may find oneself stuck with a situation akin to the protagonists, and thereby languish forever. Further, Arun Joshi seems to suggest that the existential tragedy of human life is because of his faithlessness, over-materialism and mechanization and neglect of the self due to his intellectual pride. All of these have kept him alone from his own self and his fellow beings. Arun Joshi’s vision of life can be traced not only in his novels but also in his short stories. His short stories, observes Tapan Kumar Ghose:

Treat on minor scale the central thematic concern of Joshi’s fiction-man's desperate and anguished quest for survival in the intricate labyrinth of contemporary life with its lack of direction and purpose, confusion and erosion of values, deluge of materialism and dwindling spiritual faith. (Ghose, 216)

Thus we can conclude that Arun Joshi's fundamental question about the human existence and his spiritual destination, individual freedom and his estrangement from society form the theme of his short stories also. His philosophy is based upon existential concern of individual as enumerated in the Indian philosophy and especially in Hindu existential thoughts. Arun Joshi seems to suggest that neither escape from life, nor a revolution in the life are necessary but the most essential thing is the purgation of individual soul by brushing off the *ahankar, avidya* and over-materialism of modern man. He suggests a remedy for blighted life of modern man without any idealistic or philosophical overturn or any compromise with his artistic integrity.
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