CHAPTER III

NEGOTIATING IDENTITY IN ARUN JOSHI’S NOVELS

The present chapter addresses the subject of identity and the related conflicts in the fiction of Arun Joshi. Characters in Joshi’s novels experience a dialogue of highly complex kind carried on between the different identities they partake from that of the society and the needs of the ‘self’. They are all highly sensitive beings with an ever alert conscience hence we always find them struggling to escape from one or the other of the identity; of both personal and social which they carry more or less like an “an endeared burden” to use the words of TRS Sharma. (270) Of the five novels which the present study scrutinises to discuss the intricacies of identity conflicts, three of them namely *The Apprentice, The City and The River* and *The Last Labyrinth* are set in India and two novels *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* and *The Foreigner* are set both in America and India. In the former three novels the identity intricacies particular to India serve the background for action, in the latter two the identity niceties of both India and America influence the characters. But none of the characters live the social identities obliviously as majority of the people do but are highly sensitive and conscious of the same often inquiring of them instead of passively accepting. The alert conscience keeps interfering and makes them the prey to the intricacies of identity conflict. Sharma’s observation “And how about those caught up in the diaspora grappling with their ever fluid identities? The problem becomes much more complex then!” (270) is indeed verbatim applicable to them. The heroes of the Joshi’s novels who move between India and America are bombarded by the ‘ever fluid Identities’ than those confined to India. The fluid identities or lack of definiteness of identity is as much attributed to the ambience of
heterogeneity and the related feeling of uprootedness from their real homes is acutely experienced. Elbaki Hermassi’s description as to the effect of heterogeneous cultural ambience, “They are unable to possess in the spiritual sense the land they have in the physical sense” hold true to Joshi’s men (6). They all belong to the modern society, to the era of globalisation where transcultural identities and dualities/binaries of opposing nature keep influencing their identity claims. Fred Dallmayr’s (26) in observation in the book between tradition and modernity has said that globalization has not only changed the demographic scenario of culture but also has unsettled people and cultures creating new identities and affiliations and also generating conflicts and collaborations of varied kinds is very much applicable to the characters of Joshi’s novels.

If for the diaspora, multiple identities galore, for those exclusively in India modernisation and its counterpart globalisation has generated intense clash between the local and the global with varying repercussions. For Indians dilemmas keep cropping up as to the choice they need to make in an ambience where the East-West or Oriental-Occidental cultural norms co-exist. The inherited traditional roots always conflict with the alien socio-cultural practices causing lot of stress and strain in day to day experiences. Thus in the context of the modern society weather in India or and abroad ‘East do not meet West schism’ keep affecting the Indians. Every Indian does quite often feel like “a confused wanderer between the two worlds” (20), to express in the words of K. R. Srinivas Iyengar used to describe the dilemmatic situations in which an Indian writer in English works. So what Aktar has said of the plight of the Indian Americans with little modifications can be applied to the plight of Joshi’s characters as well. Aktar S as quoted by Alan Roland in his book Cultural Pluralism and Psychoanalysis has said “As Indian Americans, walk the bicultural
tightrope over extended periods of time, they gradually develop a bicultural self, or an expanded identity encompassing both sides of the cultural divide” (32). The same is true to all who live in an ambience of cultural diversity.

Many scholars have commented on the nature of reactions invoked in a pluricultural context and have qualified the reactions variously. Phrases like ‘simple adaptation’, ‘acculturation’ (involving acceptance and adaptation), ‘social commensalism’ or ‘plural association’ and ‘contra-acculturation’ capture and distinguish reactions in a pluricultural context. Of these ‘acculturation’ provides ample scope for both the retention of selected elements of traditional cultural heritage and also the adaptation and assimilation of new elements from the ‘other’ culture. “Contra acculturation” (Madan 11) a reaction thwarting integration and is said to happen for the following reason:

When people adopt or imitate alien habits or ways of life, they find themselves cut off from their own traditions and community and when they find they are not equal to those whom they imitate ... develop the inferiority complex, in which case many do fall back on their own systems of beliefs, values and activities (Madan 11).

According to cultural critics’ contra-acculturation is best avoided if there exists mutual respect and understanding, and if the dominant or the ruling group shows respect and understanding. In such cases cultural adjustment is always smooth and easy. Conflict or crisis ridden ambience ultimately always induce effort towards ‘individuation or identity formation’ in those caught up in the plight. ‘Identity formation/individuation’ is the development of the distinct personality of an individual based on set of accepted identities. Identity formation, supresses all
confusions as to the choice that is to be made from the plethora of contradicting identities. Identity formation moments thus signify the resolution of identity conflicts and attaining of what psychologists’ regard as stable identity “where inner personality traits and outer personality traits are one and the same.” Identity individuation has similarities with what Kakar described as “Ideal adulthood” (118) or “psychological maturity” (119). To Kakar an individual’s psychological maturity are encapsulated within him/her thus:

The ‘healthy’ adult has the ability to tolerate anxiety without being crippled. He has the capacity to experience pleasure without guilt and can adequately distinguish between his fantasies and the objective reality, irrespective of the reality’s painfulness and intensity of his own needs. He has insights into conflicts; an acceptance of his strengths and weaknesses and can use his aggressive energies for achievements, competition and the protection of his rights (119).

Identity thus formed at times may be against the expectations of the societal norms but essentially coincides well with the individual’s earnest desire to live life as per his/her personal choice. Independent evolving of an identity of personal choice should always be guided by one’s voice of reason or enlightened consciousness. Not all are capable of enlightened awareness to resolve identity conflicts raging within. Unresolved identity confusions in fact have become a grave sociological problem in modern globalised world characterised by transnational cultural confrontations. Loss of identity, experiences of rootlessness and alienation signifying of crisis are perceived everywhere in modern society. In Indian context identity conflicts arise not only for transnational cultural confrontations but also for
other reasons of multi-linguistic intricacies, north-south discrepancies, marga-desi cultural dichotomy and so on. Though capacity of Indian culture to amalgamate exotic cultural elements is much condoned yet an individual always experiences lot of psychic upheavals in such dichotomous ambience. Even claim of cosmopolitan or global self is more a myth for it doesn’t mean complete absence of conflicts between the self and the other. Interestingly in contexts of cross-cultural confrontations it is said that a sense of crisis is never experienced by someone capable of strong faith in one’s native culture. In Kamala Markandaya’s novel “Nowhere Man”. Srinivasa’s wife, Vasanta, has no crisis like Srinivasa because she remains an Indian all along in everything. But usually many in multi-cultural contexts experience an acute sense of being torn between variable sets of values, indicative of identity crisis. Against the background of the subtle briefings on the intricacies of identity conflicts (a detailed study of which has been chapter two) the present chapter will analyse identity conflicts in Arun Joshi’s fictional works.

Arun Joshi is an Indian-English novelist of post-independence era. The socio-cultural ambience of his novels represents post-independent society of India in some novels and some other exclusively does have the social ambience of America for background. Irrespective of the country, his characters are shown as undergoing sociological, psychological and existential maladjustments significant of identity crisis. They do suffer from acute feelings of depression followed by moods of alienation and isolation. Identity conflicts in Joshi’s characters quite often are caused for socio-cultural reasons but at times impress us as having greater depths and meaning. The conflicts more than for social reasons seem to belong to the inner recesses of the self or to use Joshi’s own words in that mysterious underworld which is the human soul. Hence the readers always have the impression that his characters
do suffer less from social dilemmas but more from metaphysical or existential dilemmas. But the reality is that either the social dilemmas cause existential angst or tendency for existential feelings make the social identities meaningless. It means that there is always a reciprocal relationship between social and existential meanings. For the same reason the identity dilemmas represented in his novels impress as too grave and serious as if questioning the very meaning of human existence all the while contesting social identities. Thus identity conflicts in Joshi’s fiction have sources both in social issues and in existential dilemmas. The ‘I-self’ or the private self and its needs collide with the community ways or the ‘we-self’ ensuing in conflicts. The decision to heed the needs of the ‘I-self’ will be reached only after suffering lots of anguish though the resolution made may look abnormal as per the parameters of societal norms.

Joshi is too contemporaneous a writer and the identity problems he portrays cross national barriers to be inclusive of cosmopolitan sweep. That is to say we find his men struggling with the oddities particular of modern contexts. His characters being men of acute sensitivity with ever alert conscience suffer from maladjustments with the ways of the world. A fine proof of the acute sensitivity of Joshi’s men is noticed in the fact that amidst all worldly successes his men are vulnerable to existential angst. Madhusudhan Prasad’s observation on the novel *The Foreigner* implies the same thus: “*The Foreigner* takes us to the lower depths of human suffering and the inferno of existential agony” (28). This observation indeed is applicable to other men of other novels as well. The angst or psychological rifts causing reasons in Joshi’s works range from the post-independent corrupt ambience of India to the sham pretentions of egalitarian claims of developed countries (mainly America) along with the personal liability for such feelings. In summation the crisis
of identity in Joshi’s novels is explored at various levels; national, international, individual, interpersonal, industrial and business relationships. Joshi’s novels have not much to convey at the level of the plot but are thought provoking at the psychological and existential level of meaning and socio-cultural causatives of the same.


Before analysing each of the novel selected for the study in detail the essential features of Joshi’s thematic leitmotifs will be surmised in general.

Joshi was born as the youngest child of his parents at Benares on July 7, 1939. The city of Benares and its labyrinthine streets figure as the locale in Joshi’s fourth novel, *The Last Labyrinth*. In this novel Benares is set against the business metropolis, Bombay. Joshi himself had studied in America and many of his characters as well have studied in America. Billy Biswas in *The strange case of Billy Biswas* and Som Bhaskar in *The Last Labyrinth* and Sindi Oberoi of *The Foreigner* all have studied in America and for the same reason share experiences of similar kind and do have autobiographical value. Many having experienced the metropolitan ambience of America, all modern day problems related to industrialisation, urbanization, intergenerational tensions, economic pressures, due to the rising market economy and cross cultural dilemmas become the crux of their knowledge. The sensitive characters caught up in maze of the related vices of
contemporary times undergo acute moments of identity crisis for varied reasons. Crisis related to existential angst couple up with usual human vulnerabilities and social ambiguities to complicate identity conflicts. Scientific and industrial achievement looked very promising when it began with immense assurance of happiness and comforts but with time unleashed new evils. It just became a great aid to human propensity for evil all the while precipitating new kinds of problems. Because of human inability to be civilized in the real sense of the term science and technology has furthered only material comforts and the modern man continues to feel uncertain and unsettled followed with feelings of existential angst. But what is interesting in Arun Joshi’s novel is that it is not the ordinary mass that is shown as caught up in identity conflict but instead the most successful; education wise, career/profession wise and wealth wise, are affected the most. It is the affluent, the luxurious, the most successful and the overfed who feel the existential angst, a clear indication that the real happiness of man lies not in material success but elsewhere. The alienation causatives are not just the modern sociological and psychological conditions but also existential haunting man since time immemorial. Or in other words feelings of social alienation and the related condition of isolation are followed up with self-alienation that generates feeling of nihilism. Both post-independent India and America propose labyrinths of life modes precipitating in modern man acute dilemmas while engrossed in his search to attain honour, power, riches, fame and women. In this sense it is the crisis of the present and the same will be analysed in all the novels in much greater detail. G. S. Amur makes the following observation on this matter “Joshi’s vision of the modern world and man’s place in it is Manichean and his heroes though rooted in the industrial civilization have always been at odds with it” (153).
The novel *The Foreigner* has vast intercontinental geographical space within which the action of the novel is spread. The central character of this novel is Sindi Oberoi and he inherits mixed cultural identity; of Kenya, India and Britain. That is to say he is a child born of mixed parentage; to an English woman and a Kenyan Indian Father. On losing his parents at a very young age is brought up by his uncle settled in Kenya. He had his education in Kenya, London, Boston and New York and the experience is indeed significant for it enables to expand one’s horizon of experience. It means an opportunity for dwelling in multicultural ambience and tending one’s capacity for cosmopolitan identity. It also means becoming aware of universal principles of morality, instead of limiting oneself to the cultural imperatives of any one nation alone. But Sindi feels nothing of the kind instead he is restless and unhappy all the time tormented by feelings of absurdity and meaninglessness. His acute feeling of meaninglessness about his very existence has its source in his social identity and also it is a personal liability with him. Both his orphaned state on the one hand and his cosmopolitan identity significant of cultural un-rootedness on the other are indeed the source of his anguish. Instead of feeling pride at his cosmopolitan identity he is quite unhappy and anguished at his fate being thus. He often relates his feeling of anguish to his uprooted state and to his sense of non-belongingness embroiled in his upbringing in a pluricultural ambience. That is his multi-cultural exposures instead of giving him a sense of pride in his cosmopolitan status make him cringe with feelings of rootlessness. If lost childhood or starvation from parental love cause mental perturbations, his hybrid identity as well generate feelings of displacement and the related agony. Educated in varied countries, being cut off from his racial roots; neither a complete Indian or Kenyan nor a British, he is haunted by a gnawing sense of alienation. Caught up in such
turmoil of feeling he thinks of the world as a lonely planet. His sense of seclusion or isolation impregnates not only his inner self with sorrow but also modifies his impression of the external world as a lonely planet. Thus the image of a lonely planet becomes an objective correlative of his inner loneliness. He feels that people are happy for the wrong reasons like egotism, evil or even absolute ignorance on this lonely planet.

The master emotion that overrules Sindi is alienation and the title of the novel *The Foreigner* implies the same. He feels an outsider both to his society and to his own self. In not feeding the exact needs of his self and in his inability to anchorage in any one culture makes him feel a stranger everywhere and all the time. Critics often relate Sindi’s anguish as not specific of him alone but as representative of the angst of many sensitive men in modern cosmopolitan society. In this sense Sindi becomes a prototype of “the archetypal Everyman living in the ‘Wasteland’ of the contemporary society” (Prasad 28). Sindi’s anguish has many more dimensions other than his lost childhood and hybrid identity, which is often expressed implicatively in his behavioural nuances. He is tormented by obligations of contraries; spiritual/physical, personal/social and divergent emotions; of pride/disgust and sincerity/hypocrisy and so on. He finds experiences of life too mundane and unexciting and seeks ardently for something else which he is unable to concretise. He shifts experiences or quite often experiments yet fails to give a tangible experience of what exactly he needs. To distract himself from his torments he flirts with girls only to feel bored at the end. Even with June Blythe with whom he is really more serious than with other girls he has no desire to evolve an enduring relation and never contemplates marriage. He flirts but cannot feel responsible to get engaged in marriage. All his relation with women is just a distraction from pangs of
absurdity and alienation he felt of his own life. His apathy towards human relations is expressed in his non-conformity to social norms especially the norm of marriage. If for the whole lot of people, the experience excites and satisfies, for Billy it’s of no consequence at all. Therefore, he fails to evolve an enduring or long-lasting relation with any one of his girlfriends and derive meaning out of it. Sindi lives none of the social experiences as essential and authentic and has the daringness to reject them. But at the same time he is unable to evolve alternating experiences that can save him from his agony of metaphysical anguish or existential angst. But the fact that he cannot easily escape social effects however indifferent he may act is proved in the fact that the happenings of the real world around him aggravate his anguish. His orphaned state makes him hate people enquiring of his parentage and he always reacts to such queries with anger and frustration. Sindi reacts thus: “I hated to talk about my parents. I hated the pity I got from people” (77). His sense of inner turmoil is heightened on witnessing rampant exploitation, corruption and denial of rights in the independent India (which he visits later). He feels humiliated by the racist practices of the American society even as he experiences humiliation of ill treatment and discrimination due to his social identity as a Kenyan Indian. He responds for the same thus:

Born an Indian, I had been spat upon; had I been a European, I would have done the spitting. What difference does it make? I would still die and be forgotten by the world. And spitting had not made the world’s big shots any happier than we were (30).

Thus the identity conflicts in Sindi in The foreigner is to be perceived at both socio-cultural level and personal level. The event of Sindi’s social humiliation proves the fact that one cannot escape ones’ social identity easily. Even when an
individual disclaims them, he/she is hooked to them by ‘social ascription’. All the intensity of Sindi’s existential feelings cannot detach him from social tenets, that is, he cannot present himself free from social identity of racially inferior status. Even his hybrid identity doesn’t save him from getting identified as one belonging to an inferior race, and he cannot escape shame for the same. His British lineage is overlooked and his Kenyan and Indian self are foregrounded. The dominant–subordinate relational differences between races and the fact of belonging to an inferior race on father’s side subjects Sindi to humiliation. He feels lost for double reason: of his existential self and his social self as a Kenyan Indian, permanently etched by social ascription modalities. Sindi’s plight is a fine paradigm of the way identity politics works. The identity of inferior race in him is foregrounded neglecting the lineage of white blood (that of his British mother) in him. Sindi’s inferiority is born of his status of being born to a Kenyan-Indian father. His English blood that of his mother doesn’t elevate his status and virtually is derecognised reminding us of ‘one drop rule’ followed in social practises of a racist nation. One drop rule had been framed to justify racism based slavery practises in America. As per the U.S. Law Book, a person with mixed blood having one black ancestor in the parentage or one drop of black blood was to be categorised or treated as black irrespective of the white blood in him. Accordingly, his/her status in the society was decided and even miscegenation norms and slavery practises were defended by this law. One drop rule was deployed during the time when practice of slavery was legal, to classify anyone with one black ancestor as black and hence could be treated as a slave. Sindi inherits double inferior racial identities, that of a Kenyan and an Indian. Thus he realises that the whites in America can give reasons powerful enough to consider him as inferior. Though One drop rule is not a law today but the
same attitude still characterises the social consciousness in white man’s society. Even Identity politics with reference to other identities; caste, class, race, gender, religion, sexuality and ethnicity work similarly and hybrid identity doesn’t provide an escape from the ugly embrace of identity politics. In modern categories of group identity like profession (occupation), nationality, sex orientation one always has liberty to choose and avoid ascription. But group identities of cultural heritage /of the past are difficult to shun or outgrow. Freedom of choice of self–identification or personal identification is always discouraged in relation to traditional and historical social identities.

Sindi also refers to the way the carriers of racial identity of inferior connotation is vulnerable to feelings of inferiority even when there is no cause to feel so. He refers to the way Indian students behaved in the party hosted by Americans at the International Students Association. He describes for instance how in the reception party arranged at the MIT the Indian students feel ill at ease for no reason in the presence of the fellow American students. The acute consciousness as to their inferior racial status reduces the whole party to a shallow formality instead of impressing as a happy and hilarious get-together between equals. The modern categorization of the nations into identities of third world and first world nationhood based on economic difference might as well be controlling the Indian students to behave submissively. Thus every individual is controlled by the social consciousness that has been partaken from the practises of social structure of the society to which she/he belongs to and the same is believed as authentic and real. Racial consciousness is a part of western social consciousness categorising the people as inferior and superior based on racial identity. Indian students as people of third world and a lesser race are vulnerable to inferior feelings and hence in the
welcome party they fail to feel at home though the American students as a matter of fact were all very courteous.

Interestingly Sindi feels a foreigner even when in India because of his hybrid identity. The British identity he partakes from his mother and the Kenyan-ness in him impedes his complete identification with India and therefore he continues to feel a foreigner even in India. Hence Sheila says “You are still a foreigner. You don’t belong here” (149). His estrangement from Hindu social structure with its components of religion and caste specificities very soon makes him feel like a stranger. Sindi Oberoi tells Khemka (his employer in India) the difference between the two of them thus:

You had a clear-cut system of morality, a caste system that laid down all you had to do. You had a God-you had roots in the soil you lived upon. Look at me. I have no roots. I have no system of morality. What does it mean to me if you call me an immoral man…? I don’t even have a reason to live (143-144).

Sheila’s brother Babu misunderstands Sindhi’s plight, calls him a hypocrite who purposefully pretends obliviousness of his Hindu identity in America, meaning to say that he like many immigrant Indians was ashamed of his ethnic lineage and lacked self-respect. Babu’s opinion is based on instances of Indians glorifying west at the behest of their own nation. Sindi’s angst no doubt lies in his feelings of alienation from any specific culture but he outgrows the same in his metaphysical search for a meaning beyond all social entities, something Babu cannot grasp. Babu’s unfair attack of Sindhi reminds us Hollinger’s assertion as to the essentiality of identities both for a society and an individual thus:
Identity is not just a passive condition, but active, carrying expectations for social behaviour and character. To whom do you belong, to whom do you owe something always, (or to whom do you look up for special help) is closely observed. Where exactly a person should show his solidarity (distribution of one’s affections and resources and energies) is much debated by (32).

Sindi’s reply to June Blythe’s question whether as a Hindu he believes in God, “Anyway I can’t be really called a Hindu. My mother was English and my father, I am told, a sceptic. That does not seem like a good beginning for a Hindu. Does it” (242), proves the dilemmas of someone with a hybrid identity. In drawing our attention to his father’s denying of any religious identity, Sindi is hinting at the conflicts his father had felt due to his hybrid identity as a ‘Kenyan Indian’. Sindi impresses us as a victim of identity confusion—at times he poses that his hybrid self and resultant alienation is the cause of his anguish and at other times his anguish appears to emanate from the deeper recesses of his existence beyond all socio-cultural meanings. He suffers from alienation everywhere; Kenya, London, Boston and New Delhi, nothing can comfort him. His search becomes a quest for exact or real meaning of life beyond all hubbubs of human activities. He all the while contemplates thus: “death wipes out everything for most of us anyway. All that is left is a big mocking zero” (140). He feels thus: “My foreignness lay within me and I could not leave myself behind wherever I went” (128). The strangeness in Sindi’s character is accounted by June Blythe as foreign Complex. She traces the roots of his anguish to his Indian identity thus:
There is something strange about you, you know something distant. I’d guess that when people are with you, they don’t feel like they’re human beings. May be it’s an Indian characteristic, but I have a feeling you’d be foreigner anywhere (69).

Sindi himself accounts his foreignness to his sense of acute meaninglessness expressed in the following lines,

My fifth Christmas on these alien shores. And yet all shores are alien when you don’t belong anywhere. Twenty-fifth Christmas on this planet. Twenty-five years largely wasted in search of wrong things in wrong places. Twenty-five years gone in the search of peace and what did I have to show for achievement: a ten-stone body that have to be fed four times a day, twenty-eight times a week. This was a sum of lifetime of striving (98).

Sindhi in his desire to overcome his sense of absurdity and to seek meaning in life often exposes himself to novelty of experiences. He engages in diverse jobs; as a dish-washer in a night club, as a librarian, other than newly entertained relations with Anna, Cathy, he even tries religion; discusses God, mysticism with a catholic priest. All these engagements only give him temporary relief and he is affected in no time by monotony and boredom. Such diversions only provide him interim relief followed always by feelings of meaninglessness. He contemplates, “All love - whether of things, persons or oneself was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion. Love begot greed and attachment and it led to possession” (36). It is indeed because of such tendency in Sindi that he is referred to as a “a perennial outsider” (The Foreigner 26). His desire to escape from feelings of boredom is of little use and he compares himself to a castrated bull given to a monotonous life. Unlike Sindi
other characters like Khemka and Sheila are little affected by identity confusions. Not being exposed to the nuances of other cultures of other countries and never having experienced existential doubts accounts for their stable self. Deeply rooted in the socio-cultural and ethical specificities of their motherland they are given to a kind of Identity fixation. Never do they vacillate between dualities or binaries nor are they tormented by doubts like Sindi. Khemka however derives his identity exclusively in terms of desire for wealth, power and affluence and we find him single minded, pursuing the same. To him, to become more and more rich and to extend the empire of his business alone matters and he plunges into this affair deeply. Flouting of tax laws and other ethicalities to flourish in his business is accomplished unscrupulously even at the cost of abuse of labour rights. With Babu Rao Khemka we witness identity conflicts of a different kind. He does not, like Sindi, suffer from any kind of metaphysical anguish nor is he like his father greedy of wealth. He undergoes identity confusions on being exposed to a different culture from the one he had interiorised since his childhood. Or in other words his identity confusions emanate from cross-cultural encounter and at times it has its source in issues of nature-culture dichotomy. Babu too is a case of lost childhood as he is brought up by a single parent, his father Khemka as he had lost his mother while too young. He is a clear case of the effect of parental domination/monopoly on children in the times of their growth. Even as an adult he has not developed capacities for independent thinking and is incapable of individualism. His problems in the novel inspire us to think of the norms of parenting followed in India. Mr. Khemka’s upbringing of his son Babu signifies authoritarian mode of parenting; quite often the mode of Indian parenting style, says Diana Baumrind. Authoritarian type of Indian parenting limits individual autonomy and inhibits personal agency and assertiveness.
by the overprotective parent. Dependency on parents is detrimental to developing individual self-identity. Babu who is brought up under the strict and rigid supervision of his father, has his instincts and impulses suppressed. Thus when he lands up in America for his studies, he finds the prospect of unfettered individual freedom too alluring and in a way mismanages his life. His hitherto suppressed instincts find fertile outlet in the liberal ambience of America. To flirt with American girls and to make the utmost of it becomes his prime concern. His emotional confusion is clear in his thoughts of his father while in America “On the one hand he loved his father, on the other, on the other he was mortally afraid of him” (119). June Blythe, Babu’s American girl friend who has grown up in a more liberal parenting culture calls Babu’s father an awful Bully, on coming to know of his ways from Babu. She traces the over indulgence and interceding nature of parenting particular to Indian culture as mainly responsible for his death. She comments on Babu’s death thus: “if father were not there in the background sending long sermons of telling him what’s wrong with him and how he should carry himself” (95), Babu would have managed his life better. His fear to declare his marriage with a girl of his love to his father seems very enigmatic to June; a paradigm of cultural gap or misunderstanding. She has grown up in a culture that nourishes capacities of an individual for independent thinking and acting and so fail to understand the part of Babu’s identity that dictates him to live up to one’s family name, and also to fulfil one’s dharma (duties) to the family and to the community.

Babu and his idiosyncratic behaviour signify the failure of acculturation in the cross cultural ambience. Among the forces shaping an individual’s life today, socio-cultural realities of cross-cultural ambiances and the confusions it generates has its own place. Cross-cultural ambience generates contacts and interactions of
various types, resulting either in peaceful or violent repercussions for individuals. It demands capacities for adjustments and learning, and that indeed takes place but not without conflicts. Cross-cultural encounters also lead to ethical and interpersonal conflicts because of no similarities in attitudes in two different cultures towards sex, religion etc. Cultural scholars have said that with people the tendency is to enumerate ethical standards of one country alone (that into which he/she is socialised) as they are incapable of ethical relativism. Asymmetries of power between cultures also have prevented people from non-dominant culture to participate in the conversation on equal footing. Ethical or cultural relativism between people of different cultures require imaginative empathising with the experiences and modes of thoughts of the persons of foreign origin.

The novel The Foreigner has many paradigms of misunderstanding and misjudgements between people that happens in cross-cultural encounters. Babu lacks capacity for what critics describe as successful cultural integration—which signifies the capacity to refrain from thinking that one’s own ethical standards and cultural traditions represent universally valid truths in an ambience of multiple cultures. Babu had grown up in a culture where boy-girl interaction is restricted very much. His impulses in this matter had been suppressed a lot and hence in America the most alluring aspect to him is the easy availability of beautiful girls to befriend. He whiles his time away with girls at the cost of his education. Even the system of education in America and its difference from that of India affects Babu. In the face of liberal culture and different educational parameters Babu fails to handle the situation effectively. Then there is the American system of education he finds unadjustable as it is incompatible with his hitherto experienced Indian mode of education. The strict rigors of learning in America where an individual is
continuously evaluated throughout the academic years prove burdensome to Babu who had adjusted to year end evaluation mode followed in Indian examination pattern. The anticipation of his father’s angry retort at his academic failure further attracts him to entertaining world of America and his bubbling youthhood finds no better option than whiling time away with easily available American girls. The difference between Babu and Sindi speaks a lot as to the influence of culture on Individuals. Babu is controlled by his father in his pursuit of the career of his choice and Sindi having grown up in the liberal ambience of European and Western countries is in full of control over his life though suffers from metaphysical anguish of meaninglessness. He had a greater freedom of choice to live the way he wants and hence though he is trained to be an engineer, he changes jobs of all kinds, which includes those very little connected to his formal education. He serves in a hotel and works in a library in his desire to find meaning to life. But Babu has no such choice to pursue the passion of his choice and Sindi understands the anomaly in his life and attributes his failure to the kind of upbringing he had and also to the values of the class to which he belonged.

His death could have been heroic. But the pity of it was that even the dreams were not his own. They were the products of the turbid flotsam of a rotten class (“a world with sculpture in the drawing room”) he was supposed to perpetuate (69).

In the above remark Sindhi is as well attributing Babu’s failure to the smugness of the upper class society; always status conscious and imposing the same complacency on to their younger generation. Babu is torn between the desires of the self and that of his father’s upper class dreams or etiquettes. Liberal ambience and
the joy of unfettered freedom in America makes Babu dislike India and hence he says “I would never go back to India if I had a choice” (96). But at the same time he fails to make any specific charges against India and he contradicts his own earlier statement thus: “Not that I have anything against India but there is nothing to beat America” (97). Of the many girls Babu flirts with, he finds the American girl June Blythe more endearing and even plans to marry her irrespective of his father’s opinion. Or he is ready to commit filial disobedience (a serious offence as per parenting norms in India) for the sake of June Blyth. He loves June ardently and even gathers courage enough to oppose his father but he cannot digest the news that June had, had affairs with other men before her commitment to him. Having grown up in a culture where strong taboos subsist over girls having affairs he cannot stomach June’s history of affairs. So when he comes to know of her relationships especially with Sindhi he has a nervous breakdown and is killed while driving recklessly his car. Thus Babu is victimised by his own surging emotion; a situation created by a clear context of cultural incompatibility. Sheila, Babu’s sister’s hatred for June Blythe is one more paradigm of cultural incompatibility. Sheila calls June a harlot offended by her free behaviour with men as she fails to grasp the liberal ambience of western culture in which June has grown up. It is a proof that perceptions cannot be objective, reasonably neutral culturally and socially. Sindi behaviour in this matter serves a great contrast to that of Babu. He who has grown up in the liberal culture of America where free sex is no taboo seeks the pleasures of the flesh to distract himself from tormenting thoughts of meaninglessness. He has the tolerance to avoid being judgemental and is capable of a liberal view, something Sheila and Babu are not capable of. Sheila calls June a harlot for her easy go behaviour with men and Babu is irritated by June’s history of affairs but Sindhi has
lot of respect for June and feels that it was Babu’s innocence that precipitated the disaster in his life. Babu’s innocence he thinks is the result of authoritarian nature of Khemka’s parenting, his condition of lost childhood and his exposure to a culture quite different from his own. He relates Babu’s tragedy to the innocence concocted by domineering Khemka (often the Indian parents presume that innocence better prevails upon youths from inculcating bad habits). While Sindi makes highly independent and decisive choice as per his individual needs extending all the while the horizon of experience, Babu succumbs to the dangers of innocence and inexperience. In contrast to Babu, Sindi successfully rationalises his identity conflicts arising out of cultural differences though he struggles to locate his existential dilemmas. Having grown in a multi-cultural context and with his hybrid identity Sindi manages the rifts that an ambience of cultural diversity causes. He practises a greater freedom of choice, shows the capacity to individualise in cultural matters and his actual struggle is his inability to subdue the sense of void within him that makes all experiences look meaningless. Unable to suppress the raging sense of meaninglessness Sindi wanders aimlessly from one job to other and from one country to another. Finally, he decides to go to India-the land of his forefathers and his coming to India turns out be lucky for some kind of solution he is able to seek to his confusions and stabilise his identity. The sense of crisis Sindi suffered from and the source of his crisis lies not only in his psychological disposition for existential angst but as well in the kind of world he lived in. Mary Kutty Ana in “Social Milieu and Sense of Estrangement in The Foreigner” says:

The Foreigner carries a bitter commentary with much paraded ode of estrangement, anxiety and isolation as a style of life and condemns
detachment and inaction as the redeeming factor for the problems of existence (89).

His aversion for the material and commercial impulses of the modern world is suggested in the kind of machine he invents. It is a machine that will throw twenty thousand people out of work and make them “feel so small that they would go home dead drunk” (33). The machine is symbolic of the disaster modern society is perpetrating by its excess dependency on machineries for all kinds of work. To have a machine to work is to deny hundreds of people to live a forthright life of earning their own livelihood and avoid feelings of void or purposelessness. Billy comes to Delhi and accepts a job in Mr. Khemka’s Factory. Even the ambience in Khemka’s factory is highly demoralising kind. He observes lot of exploitation of the workers and the relation between Khemka and his workers is nothing better to that of a master–slave relation. While Khemka earned thirty thousand per day the workers are paid only three rupees per day. The employees looked upon Khemka with the mortal dread. But when the factory suffers lockout and Khemka is arrested for flouting income tax and there is the real threat to the life of the workers Sindi finds a purpose to channelize his energy. He learns the joy of thinking about the wellbeing of the others than pathetically being obsessed with the needs of the self alone. It is the pleadings of a worker by name Muthu that awakens Sindi to a meaningful existence. His words “detachment lies in actually getting involved” (239), clicks and he decide to revive the factory under lockup to help the workers. He is motivated by the virtue of unselfish service, a message which he derives from the philosophy of the Bhagawad Gita. In fact, as Ghanshyam and Usha Iyengar in “The Concept and Conflict of Tradition and Transition in Arun Joshi’s The Foreigner” concludes:
The journey from Boston to India finally becomes a shift from alienation to arrival. Sindi is akin to existential heroes like Meursault and Roquetin in representing the crisis of civilized world, but he differs with them in his latent human element, his inner urge and restless quest for peace. He inherits a genetic mystic drive. The primordial symbols of hill, the river and the sun indicate that Sindi is on the right path of becoming. The dawn breaking the dark water is the breaking of the darkness within him. In the beginning, his experiences in India are obviously not much different from those in the west. Only the theater has changed, the show continues. But gradually Sindi Oberoi’s understanding deepens as he roots himself into the world of the miserable who lives in rags. Human suffering purges him, awakens him to the real meaning of detachment. In India Muthu, who is really a Karmyogi, becomes the human voice of divine truth. It is from him that Sindi learns the lesson of Karmayoga. What has been dangling before Sindi earlier now turns washed in dangling. He understands finally that detachment does not mean escape or alienation; it means involvement, devotion and sacrifice. Sindi finds his root in Indian soil, in the matrix of Indian culture. The truth that detachment does not consist in withdrawal but in involvement, in devotion, in sacrifice is deeply entrenched in Indian way of life. It is this primitive, simple life that gives a meaning, significance to his existence and identity(104).

Sindi is bruised at man’s exploitation by man. He considers himself quite a misfit. Bhatnagar in “Arun Joshi’s The Foreigner: A Critique of West and East” points out that as the modern society is “eating away humanity from Indians....
Sindi feels driven like torn bits of paper on a windy day” (12). He is surrounded by estrangement and emptiness. It leaves him a total stranger.

The novel *The Last Labyrinth* discusses the meaning of life against the background of the tangle of human relationship and business engrossments. Interestingly the action of the entire novel spreads between two cities of Bombay and Benares, which is in itself symbolic. These two cities have striking differences and the meaning of Benares is specially etched in a Hindu’s consciousness as the spiritual capital of India and Bombay is called the financial and commercial capital of the country and is the economic hub of India. These two cities represent two main polarities characteristic of India. If Varanasi symbolise the mystical and spiritual lore of ancient India, Bombay symbolises the material extremes; inclusive of wealth, entertainment and commerce, embodying the nuances of a modern metropolitan city. The central character Som Bhaskar commutes between the two cities though for the purpose of business, yet it symbolises his ever shifting consciousness between two realities of life. Bombay and Benares represent two extreme polarised dualities between which Som Bhaskar interestingly vacillates, confused, unable to confine to any one of the reality or amalgamate between the two. Benares by virtue of its identity as the spiritual capital of India sensitises Som to the experiences of spirituality and Bombay represents the material greed and mundane pursuits of Som. Caught in between two entirely different meanings of life, inept to strike a balance between the two he vacillates confused. Som as per the parlance of social life is a highly successful man in every possible way. He had studied in the world’s most famous prestigious university of Harvard in America and had profound knowledge of the philosophies of both east and west and is well versed in teachings of Buddha and Krishna. He inherits intelligence from his father who is a scientist and business
shrewdness from his grandfather and his mother is ardently religious and his wife is well bred and loyal. He is so assured of his talents in business that he keeps on adding sick industries both to extend his business empire and to whet his skills in rejuvenating them. To an onlooker Som typifies the very paradigm of a happiest man. But in reality Som is not at all happy and the causatives of his worries are of the strangest kind. He wallows in duality, he can think cynically of money as “dirt and whore” but at the same time is haunted by an insatiable desire for more and more wealth and his rallying cry thus is “I want, I want, I want” (11). Even as he experiences feelings of meaninglessness or purposelessness, he craves for wealth and material success. His friend Leila Sabnis attributes his torments of identity conflict to his hybrid cultural identity; to his bicultural self, that of America and India. He owes to America his capacity for doubt and cynicism and his cravings for material rewards. As an Indian he suffers as Leila observes from alienation from his Brahmin roots, the social setup and mystical nuances particular to India. Bi-cultural identity with Som as much signifies his condition of cultural unrootedness. Imbued with capacities for doubt and cynicism, he no longer can carry the baggage of his Indian culture with a sense of blind faith. Leila though had tried to relate Som’s cultural identity with his torments, Som rejects Leila’s explanation. In fact, he is not ready to relate his feeling of meaninglessness to the category of mystical knowledge instead he describes it as ‘an unknown labyrinth’. In fact, his real torment is his inability to amalgamate his feelings of meaninglessness with his immense desire for material wants. He alone is a victim of such enigma in his family and others had single minded pursued their respective needs or had expressed identity stability that way. His mother had been a woman of religious devoutness, his father had pursued single minded the enigma of the first cause with his faith in science and philosophy,
his grandfather had been an atheist “a man-about-town, gourmet, fond of women and drink”, (156) without any qualms. Som finds his ‘self’ neither devout like his mother nor inquisitive like his father nor does he involve in revelry without suspicions like his grandfather. Leila grasps his difference with others and senses his problem thus:

You would be surprised. There are people whose sense of identity at the end of life doesn’t go beyond: I own this house; earn so much; have four children; drive this car; have so much in the bank and so on. May be such identity is not enough for you (112).

She elucidates that while others were socially anchored in the cultural identities of caste, religion, morality, family ties, lineage, profession and personal relationships, Som is too sarcastic to be affixed to all of these. She declares “I’d guess when people are with you, they don’t feel like they are human beings” (81). Leila’s credentials; a philosopher cum psychologist, a polyglot with fine scholarly pursuits though qualify her to be an authentic voice of Som’s bewilderment yet Som considers her as equally messed up like him. When she accounts his confusion to too much of scepticism, he refuses to accept the explanation and brands Leila as equally muddled like him and was only pretending stability with rigours of intellectual arguments. He sums her up thus:

She had ideas of her own that she catapulted with singular ferocity, charging them with the electricity of the brain. You couldn’t say she hadn’t worked at her thoughts. She had slogged. She had studied and understood and memorized. Oh yes, Leila Sabnis knew a lot. Even if she had experienced little and suffered even less (79).
Som thinks that she pretends only make believe integrity but fails to grasp that at least she had complete faith in her intellectual acumen and thus is saved from the torments of doubt like him. Som’s sarcastic disposition is as much the result of his immense egoism and he ensures success in all his endeavours to feed his ego and hence cannot tolerate failures. In business indeed he has tasted complete success but failure to have Anuradha all for himself is something he cannot digest and to have her he follows all sorts of Machiavellian strategies which makes Leila remark “You are much too high strung, without a reason. You are a neurotic. A compulsive fornicator” (48).

Som for the first time had encountered Anuradha; bewitching beauty with magnetic capacity to attract, at a party hosted by Aftab Rai for the Plastic Manufacturer’s association. Som is infatuated by her antique beauty and with the strong desire of having her, pursues her to Lal Haveli in Benares. There he comes to know of her relationship with Aftab that they though were unmarried, lived like husband and wife and had profound love for each other. An information of the kind is sufficient enough to stop any sane person but Som being “…a neurotic. A compulsive fornicator” (48), is not to be stopped so easily. He pursues her ignoring the inconveniences he caused her. Som’s desire of having Anuradha is partially fulfilled when in one of his many efforts to have her is reciprocated by her; “he had the nourishment of the shades thrown by her naked body under the chromatic shower” (96). This response is an indication that Anuradha is impressed by Som. But Som is greedy, he is satisfied only by having her all to himself and forever, for this he wants her to end her relation with Aftab. His obsession instigates Anuradha to literally disappear, living no clue as to her whereabouts. Aftab too loves her but is free from excesses like that of Som. Som’s claim over Anuradha has a touch of
abnormality and implies something more than mere attraction of a man for a woman. A comparison of Som with Aftab and Anuradha and the difference between them authenticates the extremity of Som’s identity dilemma. They are antithetical to his mental disposition. They identify with particular traits and are at peace with the self. Aftab is profoundly rooted in Oriental culture and his Lal Haveli is symbolic of this. Though he is in ‘living together’ relationship with Anuradha, he does have utmost respect for her and is not obsessive of her to the extent of curtailing her freedom like Som. Like Som he is good at business yet is not ready to stoop to gross behaviour to meet his ends. The respectable and honourable life Anuradha leads, she owes much to the protection extended by Aftab. Anuradha and Aftab’s faith in their respective personal identities is absolute without any inkling of doubt and such singularity of approach is what Som is really incapable of.

Anuradha’s life is a great saga of suffering; orphaned at a very young age (her mother was a musician and was killed by one of her customer) she had undergone harrowing experiences as she grew up; is sexually abused as a child, is seduced by a producer when she joins film, until Aftab comes to her rescue. Aftab had sheltered her and had given her a respectable place in his Lal Haveli. Even Anuradha has little qualms about her life and has little regrets of her indistinct relation with Aftab though Som feels sorry that Anuradha is no body’s wife. Her personal faith in the matter is very stable and the same is expressed to Som thus: “It is better not to be any body’s wife…You can’t marry everyone you love. So why marry anyone at all” (43). Her capacity for individualising to resolve identity conflict if any is proved in the above lines. She has very little qualms about living together relationship with Aftab and for flouting the norm of the society in this matter. She rationalises her life with Aftab thus: “I can imagine I am married to
Aftab. I can imagine I am married to you. My mother used to imagine she was married to Krishna” (128). Anuradha here is hinting at the need for personalising, as a way out of identity conflicts, which Som fails to grasp. She is propounding the value of faith and its healing capacity but Som fails to understand as he is overshadowed by pride and narcissist attitude.

Even after having a massive heart attack he is little deterred from his desire for Anuradha. When his pursuit is hindered and his desire unfulfilled by her sudden disappearance he turns all the more demonic or Machiavellian in his ways. He is so infuriated by her rejection that he determines to take revenge on her and Aftab by ruining the latter’s business. He starts secretly buying all allocated shares of Aftab and Anuradha of their plastic industry. In his endeavour to meet her he even climbs a high mountain (with the doctor by his side); a risky act in the light of the heart attack he had. On the high mountain he meets Gargi in a Krishna temple. Gargi is an ascetic woman imbued with supernormal powers. She is deaf and mute and communicates by writing on a pad. While Anuradha and Aftab had immense faith in her mystical and superhuman power Som Bhaskar is only confounded by her. Som disbelieves of her supernatural capacities and is not at all convinced by Anuradha and Aftab’s faith in her. In his desperateness to have Anuradha he seeks Gargi’s blessings on the high mountain. In his desperateness he proves a sham, acting contrary to his faith. The incident is also a proof of the kind of opportunist Som is and to maintain the much cherished image of a successful man is all that matters to him. From Gargi he comes know of a gesture of good will Anuradha had shown when he had, had heart attack. Anuradha had come all the way to meet Gargi to seek her blessing for the quick recovery of Som from his ailment. She had confessed of her love for Som by willing to poison herself if Gargi would not try to save him.
This earnest and honest love of Anuradha had ultimately moved Gargi and she had agreed to perform the miracle but under the condition that Anuradha should give up Som forever; an act that signified sacrifice. Anuradha had accepted the condition as if nothing really mattered than Som’s life to her. Even Dr. Kashyap (Som’s personal physician) who had accompanied Som to the mountain authenticates Gargi’s words by saying that his survival from the massive heart attack had been a miracle even to the medical fraternity. But Som is such a sceptic and a cynic of the person that neither the words of the doctor nor the words of Gargi convince him of the reality of a miracle. The loss of Anuradha and his sense of defeat underlying it so much overwhelms him that he reasserts his decision to settle score with Anuradha, for refusing to be his. Her goodwill gesture and her capacity to sacrifice have no impact on him. He swears and plans to push Aftab and Anuradha to the verge of bankruptcy by buying their shares of the plastic industry. His desire to take revenge on the very person whom he loves most is a proof of his inability to live the virtues of love and sacrifice. To fulfil his desire and feed his ego is all that matters for him. Feelings of revenge and desire to settle score with her for her act of deserting wells up in him and he tells Gargi, “I want to take not only the shares but also Anuradha. It scares me but I have no choice” (213). Gargi knows such claims in Som is indicative of his vanity and tries to change him by such words, “Man’s vanity (ahankar) brings him revenge enough” (214) and even warns him of the ways of God thus: “God does not work in the simple manner. God does not seek revenge” (222). Even Aftab warns Som thus:

You don’t understand us. You work by logic. By your brain. You are proud of your education or what you consider education. There is an understanding
that only suffering and humiliation bring. Anuradha has that. Even I have a bit of it. You are empty of that understanding (217).

On coming to know of Aftab’s anger and desire to take revenge Som choses to move around with a revolver to protect himself but is not deterred from his aim of getting Anuradha. Even while engrossed in his pursuit of what he wants Som is not free of worries. He is not in peace with himself. While trying to fulfil his material greed and carnal pleasures (signified in his want for Anuradha) he is acutely conscious of the possibilities of a life without them. His agony lies in his lack of absolute faith in the feasibility of the life of an outright virtuous existence; a life closer to God. He wants a tangible experience of God of which he expects staunch believers like Anuradha, Gargi and Aftab to provide. His inability to accept things unquestioningly and to have unwavering faith without evidence is the pitfall of his character. Aftab understands this face of Som and hence tries to convince him that neither is it possible to rationalise everything nor have a tangible experience of everything. Aftab, Anuradha and Gargi are transcendentalists; who have an intuitive understanding in certain experiences and values of life. Aftab explains his transcendental faith thus: “There is an understanding that only suffering and humiliation brings” (217). He accounts Som hedonism to his lack of suffering and assured successes of his life in all walks of life; family, business, education and wealth. He never had borne suffering and this in turn had stifled his capacity for empathising. Neither had Som ever cried in earnestness for God’s help nor had things ever gone out of control to beg the mercy of God, curtailing his transcendental capacities. Som’s plight is similar to the plight of the Victorians represented by Arnold in *Dover Beach*. He is a man caught between the empirical world of material gains and the mystical lore advocated by the traditional thinking
and his agony lies in his inability to amalgamate them. In other words, he is incapable of transcendental experience to cognize the mystical notions of God, religion, soul, spirit etc. In this tendency Som represents the lost generation, Eliot had tried to present in his Wasteland. He is the modern Everyman equipped with the weapons of science and reason tries to grasp everything about life. Som who so much believes in the voice of reason ironically is unable to rationalise his irrational and limitless greed for wants; metaphorically symbolised in Anuradha. The sensitive conscience hints at his duality and he has no peace of mind unable to resolve it. In moments of intense frenzy, he calls out to the disappeared Anuradha to convince the reality of God thus:

Anuradha, listen. Listen to me wherever you are. Is there a God where you are? Have you met Him? Does He have a face? Does He speak? Does He hear? Does He understand the language that we speak? (222-223)

In this pathetic condition Som according to Dr. H. M. Prasad is an “a modern anti-hero embodying chaos and uncertainty…torn by doubts he walks … between life and death, illusion and reality, body and spirit” (28). Som has respectable inheritance the world respects like good education and high accomplishments. At the age of twenty-five he is a millionaire, married to an ideal wife, true to him in every respect. Successes of life have made him ego-centric and he is engrossed always in tending the wants and hungers of the self. He had very little chastising experiences to subdue him to humility. But he is haunted by the meaning of life, love, God and death; all different labyrinths of meaning attached to life. Thus the novel in a way becomes an attempt to unravel the still unresolved mysteries of life and death through different characters of the novel. His boredom is
something born of his affluence and his purposelessness in life give him the feeling of being worn out and weary. He confides to Anuradha “There is something in front of me and I cannot see it” (107). All wise sayings of the world speak of the unsatiating capacity in humans for material greed and Som is a fine paradigm of it. He is a successful accomplisher but still feels the roaring hollowness within; orchestras of discontent inside his soul. His sense of spiritual hollowness which flowed as a low web picks up strength and volume while in Benares. Thus Benares that epitomises spiritual ethos of India sensitises him to the spiritual lacuna within. Bombay where Som’s business flourished has little to offer in the form of mystical meanings and that is why Benares the spiritual and religious centre since time immemorial is where other meanings of life gets foregrounded in Som. Gargi, Aftab and Anuradha who had all appealed to him as embodying different layers of meaning had belonged to Benares. That is why Som had felt that the intricate allies of the bylanes of Benares along with the labyrinthine Lal Haveli had mocked him and his achievements. The burning ghats of Benares also had communicated a profound meaning of void in him. But Som is too obstinate enough to change, though is sensitive enough to understand the difference between his life and the meaning Benares and Lal Haveli conveyed. But these layers or labyrinths of life he wants a tangible experience of and hence he says challengingly to Gargi while taking away Anuradha’s shares thus: “If God existed, if a miracle had taken place, and if I now walked off with the shares-and with Anuradha—I should perhaps die” (212). Som wants as an immediate experience of God, to become a believer. Gargi had sensed the doubt in Som and had tried to clarify him when she had said, “God does not work in simple manner”.
Som is an egotist and he nourishes his ego unconsciously and always stifles the voices that don’t nourish his ego. When in Benares he is too acutely conscious of the voices that don’t tend his ego but he subdues it and prepares to wreak havoc in the life of Anuradha and Aftab. When Anuradha disappears from his life; he frantically blabbers his signature cry, “have a score to settle. Forget nothing, forgive no one” (38). Prasad’s words serve befitting summation of Som’s anguish thus:

A modern anti-hero embodying chaos and uncertainty. He possesses a Pascalian passion to know, and perhaps to believe, but he cannot believe, and torn by doubts he walks tight-rope between life and death, illusion and reality, body and spirit. He suffers from an undefinable hunger, restlessness, a Helmet-like incertitude, an inherent sickness (Prasad 28).

Som’s rootedness in material pursuits is so deep that he is unable to come out of the maze easily. In his prioritising of material success; money, personal relationship, fame and position Som is after worldly success than ‘other worldly success’; spiritual achievement. To pursue the other worldly for Som is to get branded a social misfit. His image of a successful achiever in the parlance of the modern society; to have name, fame and wealth has given him a big ego. His acute awareness of his own empowered identity is a case of megalomania; delusions of grandeur of one’s own importance. Ego in the context of Som Bhaskar means not ‘your consciousness of your own identity but in the sense of an inflated feeling of pride in your superiority to others’. But the problem in him is that his joy of personal achievements is cancelled by the opposing feeling of meaninglessness generating a kind of hollowness within. He fails to relate this hollowness to the spiritual or mystical dearth in him because of his lack of faith in the otherworldly
aspects. His affluence which the modern world so much respected inspired personally only boredom and discontentment in him. He is conscious of the other world but fails to concretise it. He means it when he utters, “I am dislocated. My mind is out of focus. There is something right in front of me and I cannot see it” (107).

Not only are individuals like Anuradha, Aftab and Gargi are treated metaphorically in the novel but places; Bombay, Benares and Lal Haveli, are portrayed in a representational way. Som objectifies his confusion as to the different layers of life to a complicated maze; a labyrinth within a labyrinth. The problem with Som is that he is too confined to the layer of materialism and at the same time conscious of the existence of the other layers as well which he is unable to concretise. That is Som is acutely sensitive to the different labyrinths of life, hence while hundreds and thousands are quite at home in the mire of materiality; Som fails to maintain tranquillity. Even as a student he had been pestered by such thoughts and his question to his headmaster’s wife seeking explanation for ‘the meaning of it all’ is suggestive of his delicate sensibility. Such thoughts had only intensified as he grew up and made him to utter “It is the voids of the world, more than its objects, which bother me” (60). The burning ghats of Benares also communicate to him the sense of void. After visiting Lal Haveli, Benares and meeting Aftab and Anuradha; inmates of Lal Haveli and Gargi and scrutinising their identity his impression of life as a labyrinth intensifies. He notices they all have chosen one of the many labyrinths and live it with complete faith unlike him who feel not at home in his chosen labyrinth. Their personal faith in their identity is such that Anuradha can feel happy in her relation with Aftab; marriage or no marriage little affects her. Thus Anuradha can remain composed and be self-surrendering to her meaning of life and maintains
equanimity. Even later when she surrenders to Som, the same sense of sacrifice and respect she feels of her relationship with him and expects nothing from Som other than respect and love. She can unconditionally love Som and think of her own death if Som would die (when he suffers massive heart attack). Even Aftab has lots of love and respect for Anuradha and has no qualms in the nature of their relationship. He lives satisfied in the glory of traditional heritage, the Lal Haveli symbolises for him. Though a businessman like Som he has not given away himself to material luxuries and he is capable to transcend material greed. The way he has maintained Lal Haveli intact as a symbol of tradition and the love he has for it are signs of his difference with Som. They have complete faith in their ideologies and live it without any confusion. In the title *The Last Labyrinth* the adjective ‘The Last’ refers to the last of the labyrinth, which is death. The Lal Haveli concretises the last labyrinth; death, and its location in Benares is symbolic of the same. Benares in a Hindu’s consciousness is a gateway to heaven, the abode of God. Hindus once before death or in their lifetime make it a point to visit Benares as it is significant of ‘Punya’ (accruing God’s grace) and even think it a great blessing to die in Benares and get cremated there to attain ‘Moksha’; thus put an end to the cycle of birth. Hence in Benares Som is deterred while he is confident and all controlling in Bombay. Especially Anuradha affects the readers as more a symbol of virtues than a real person of flesh and blood. Joshi uses spatial image to describe her. She is likened to a city and talked of thus: “Anuradha was a city without a name, a city set in an oasis, plundered a thousand times and waiting to be plundered again” (53), by men like Som and Aftab. Even Gargi assures help to the suffering Som in an abstract way implying Anuradha thus: “God will send you someone to help . . . someone who has known suffering” and she means Anuradha. She advises him not to quarrel
with Anuradha because “she is your Shakti” Even Som feels his life is indispensable without Anuradha and hence he thinks “that (death/punishment for sin) was a hell of a thought to be burdened with but I didn’t think I had a choice. All I knew was that I wasn’t prepared to give up Anuradha on these grounds”.

Som’s problem is not any kind of physical ailment which doctors like Dr. Kashyap can give treatment. He is torn between belief and non-belief, even Gargi fails to convince him of the existence of divinity and miracles. All she can say is “there is no harm in believing that God exists” (104). But for Som, “It is easier to believe that He does not exist. It is more convenient that way” (104). To strike a compromise between faith and reason, between the mystical and the concrete and to make both the twain meet is the crux of the problem for Som. As a modern man of science and technology where proof, evidence supported by reason alone matters, Som struggles to identify with mystical knowledge. Life as interpreted by Pascal, Krishna, Yajnavalkya, Darwin and Descartes etc., all, Som is aware of but are of little use in inspiring faith in him. Som is a representative of the modern man in whom mystical meaning of life passed on from tradition coexist simultaneously with the rational scientific temperament of modernity and he is bothered by their paradoxical relationship. Anuradha attributes Som’s confusion to his lack of self-knowledge. She tells, “You are wrong even of yourself. You think you know a lot, when, infact, you don’t” (43). Aftab thinks that Som is empty of the understanding that only suffering and humiliation can invoke. He feels Anuradha has this kind of understanding better as she had to pass through harrowing tales of lost childhood, suffering and humiliation. She epitomises in a way what Khalil Gibran has said of suffering and its impact on a human being. He said, “Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars”. Even Hellen
Keller meant the same when she said, “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved”. Anuradha is a strong soul that has come out unscathed out of the fire of suffering, whereas Som is one who had a very little taste of suffering and that is the main reason why pride, egotism overrides his character. His strong yearning to permanently unite with Anuradha is symbolic of his desire to be united successfully with the values she represents. Som’s search signifies a frantic effort to come out of the maze of meanings or labyrinths of life and death. His journey through the labyrinths takes him to the “last labyrinth” and even here his confusion is not overcome but becomes all the more intense as he is unable to surrender his egoistic identity even in the face of death; the last of the labyrinth. Som symbolises the plight of men who are fated to live paradoxical values for ever.

Som’s plight is the plight of the men of contemporary times in whom faith in reason and science vie with traditional mystical modes of thinking that evades evidence forever. The feeling of meaninglessness of all his endeavours keep surfacing and unable to supress it Som suffers from acute sense of depression. Som fails to resolve the conflicts well in time to evade crisis and is pushed to the brink of suicide. Mani Meiti in “Indian Ethos in Arun Joshi’s The Last Labyrinth” says,

*The Last labyrinth* is unparalleled in the treatment of a subtle Indian theme based on the import of Hindu religious philosophy as advocated in the holy scripture like the *Gita* and the *Upanishads*. The book is about man confronted by the four paths of life: dharma (duty), artha (wealth), kama (desire) and moksha (liberation). It is based on the karma yoga, the
attainment of liberty by the soul by abandoning kama (desire), krodh (anger), lobha (greed), moha (allurement), mada (lust) and macharya (pride), the six enemies of man. The book is so deeply influenced by the Hindu religious scriptures that all that happens in the book are guided by the principles of Hindu Sastras and thoughts (90).

The novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* was written in the year 1973 and the hero of the novel is Billy Biswas and his struggles of identity conflict and the related crisis is narrated through Romesh Sahai (nick named Romy), and Tula Lindgren. Billy is no ordinary a being and is someone difficult to understand and Romy knows this and so is never judgemental. Romy’s impression of Billy as a man of extraordinary obsessions towards whom he felt “a deep and unrelieved sense of wonder” (5) only proves the intricacy of his character. Billy is more an alter-ego of other characters namely Som Bhaskar and Sindhi Oberoi of *The Last Labyrinth* and *The Foreigner* respectively and his problems are not too distinct from theirs. Together they are all smart guys of contemporary society; highly qualified, technological giants, rich, worldly experienced and cosmopolitan yet not happy but confused. Interestingly there are two worlds’, poles apart, between which Billy vacillates; the one which he inhabits by birth and upbringing and the other, he opts by choice. The world of his upbringing is the civilized world of India and later U.S.A and the one he opts is the primitive world of a tribe. There is a distinct difference between these two worlds and to know of this is to know the problem of Billy better. The ambience of America signifies civilisation with its ideologies of progress and development and quite contrary to this is the tribal life; primitive and archaic oblivious to the ways of the civilized world. Throughout the novel Billy is strongly ordained to hate the civilised world for its sham and smugness.
Criticism of civilisation especially after world war one and two is widespread and in literature there are many writers who don’t believe in any virtuous ideologies ever being accomplished by the so called civilized societies. Writers like D. H. Lawrence, Henry James and Joseph Conrad always parodied civilisation’ claim of progress, development and enlightenment. Joshi too through the character of Billy is expressing his disappointment at the achievements of the civilized society. Or in other words Joshi makes Billy Biswas his mouthpiece to criticise the high claims of civilization. Two different time coalesce in the novel in the image of America and the tribe of Mikala hills of Orissa; the last quarter of 20th century and the ancient times when the “spirit was a much, much older force, older than the time when man first learned to build temples” (8) or even much earlier. These two extremities of time symbolise two ways of life; civilisation and antiquity (savagery). Attainment of civilization has always been the dream of humanity and has been the end aim of the various cultures of the world eventually aiming to attain universalism with all barriers obliterated. But civilization as we see it today has achieved nothing of the sort. For the same reason many serious thinkers often are highly critical of humanity’s civilization mission and do see more disadvantages than advantages in it. In fact, the birth of civilization, Freud says, is rooted in – “each of us striving in an often hostile world, to create, the greatest amount of personal happiness and avoid pain as best we can”. Civilization today has become synonymous with material progress and commercialisation and the fundamental virtues; of harmony, tolerance, equality etc. have been not attained at all. Development in such parlance is what the novel aims to condemn through Billy Biswas. USA especially as an epitome of civilizational achievement is subjected to serious scrutiny and evaluation in the consciousness of Billy.
First sign of Billy’s indwelling conflict is expressed in his decision to pursue the study of Anthropology against his parent’s wish to study engineering in America. This choice is symbolic of the rejection of technology and technocracy, the knowledge privileged in civilization at the cost of others. Anthropology is the study of humans, past and present and study of human culture the world over since the ancient times to the present. A study of the same reveals to Billy the journey of humans from antiquity to modernity and also provides a comparative perspective of man in the past and present. Interestingly Billy finds the primitive man with basic virtues still intact more alluring than the so called people of the developed times. His study of anthropology has opened up to Billy the charm, strength and virtues of the savage man. Roseau in his image of a “noble savage” also had typified similar virtues which modern man had lost touch with. On reading the life of the aboriginals in texts of anthropology Billy tells Romy, “All I want to do in life is to visit the places they describe, meet the people who live there, find out about the aboriginals of the world” (129). Not only is Billy charmed by the ancients but also is profoundly discontented at the things prioritised in civilised nations represented by America in the novel. Personally he identifies with the past but has to live in the present accepting its ways and this dichotomy bothers him a lot. The duality of his life torments him a lot and he suffers from acute unhappiness. He notices how racism was still a part of USA in spite of its high claims of individual freedom and human rights. In protest against the racist practices prevailing in America he takes certain extreme decisions that look shocking. Billy changes his residence from the posh residential extension where white people lived to New York’s Harlem area, a black ghetto of America; a paradigm of violation of human dignity and rights. His choice to live in Harlem is suggestive of his desire to be away from the proximity of the
whites; the cultured citizens of the main stream society given to apartheid practises. Thus he registers his protest against the prevalence of discrimination against the blacks and also recognises the failure of the ideology of equality in America. In a music party in George’s apartment at a black ghetto in Harlem he is mainly attracted to a pair of Banjo drums rather than to any of the modern musical instrument. Banjo with its classic twang is associated with country, folk and traditional music in the African American music culture and Billy’s instant liking for it is symbolic of his love for primitive. Thus his decision to live in Blacks’ Ghetto signifies his sympathy for the oppressed and the discriminated and his love for the Banjo instrument mean his strong liking for the primitive and the impulsive. Tuula, friend and Swedish researcher, also an anthropologist attributes Billy’s urges to a great dormant force lying suppressed within him. Hence her assessment of Billy’s character runs thus: “A great force, urkraft…a…a primitive force. He is afraid of it and tries to suppress it…. But it is very strong in him, much stronger than you or me. It can explode any moment” (23). It is the primitive Force Tuula speaks of, that is the source of Billy’s capacity for forthrightness and honesty, capacities badly missing in the civilized world of contemporary times. To Tuula words Naicker reacts thus:

What she is referring to is primitivism, a paradoxical product of civilization, traceable to the interplay of the impulses of the civilized self and the urge to reject or transform it which can produce a positive reaction as in the case of Lydia Lensky in D.H. Lawrence’s The Rainbow whose communion with nature helps achieve emotional fulfillment or a negative reaction as in that of Kurtz in Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness whose journey into Congo ends in his condemnation of contemporary civilization as a horror on account of its moral hollowness (63).
Billy’s love of past again is authenticated in his attraction for the sculptures of Konark into which he sees deeper meaning than tourists usually grasp. He is immensely impressed by the sculpture of Konark neither for their beauty nor for their exoticness but for the effect they had on him. While looking at them he had been transformed imaginatively into the time and society when they had been sculpted and even before. Billy believes that the vitality of the ancient man was still intact in human beings at the time of the creation of the erotic sculptures of Konark. He even fantasies a link between the sculptures and the Adivasi’s whom he adored most and conveys the same to Romy thus:

No, what appealed to me was the shades of the same spirit that I spoke of although I knew them, as I know now, that the spirit was a much, much older force, older than the time when man first learned to build temples. If anyone had a clue to it, it was only the Adivasis who carried about their knowledge in silence, locked behind their dark inscrutable faces (23-24).

Billy feels that it is the tribes who still had intact the human spirit and vitality that was represented in the erotic sculptures of Konark. In their uninhibited life Billy had sensed “a much older force, older than the time when man first learned to build temples” (8). Billy also feels that the sexual vitality nature has endowed humans with had been represented in the frank and explicit erotic sculptures of Konark. He has the impression that the same vitality has been preserved intact in the tribes but has been eroded in the modern civilised man with his inability for forthrightness. The frankness with which eroticism is encoded in the sculptures of Konark is indicative of the acceptance of the naturalness of human sexuality, of which the civilised society has tried to repress by norms of control. Such
domestication of primitive force signified a journey away from nature and is regretted even by D. H. Lawrence in his novels.

Tuula’s premonition of Billy’s vulnerability to “explode any moment” (23) due to his suppressed “great force, urkraft…a…a primitive force” (23) proves true when Billy retreats into the world of tribes forever giving up the modern contemporaneous world. This indeed looks a perverted decision by a perverted mind as per the parlance of the norms of the modern society. K. R. S. Iyengar interprets the extreme decision of Billy to retreat from the civilised world to the savage\primitive life as expressive of “exploration of the consciousness of hapless, rootless people a stage further and has revealed to our gaze new gas-chambers of self-forged misery” (21). Billy deserts the civilized world, the members of his family including his wife and son and even abandons his teaching assignment at the Department of Anthropology at Delhi University for a life with Adivasis. Instead of merely adoring the tribal life from afar, seeks union with it. The journey which had begun with the choice of the study of anthropology, to his living in black Ghetto and love of Banjo, to his appreciation of the Konark sculptures culminates in his union with the tribes. Billy’s retreat into the world of tribes has lot of significations. It’s an expression of his revulsion at the achievements of civilization and his respect for intuition and natural impulses and ultimately is symbolic of return to nature. It’s a protest against the counterfeit world of his class, society with all their life of sham, hypocrisy and smugness. Like all other Joshi’s heroes, Billy too perceives modern society to nothing more than “the making and spending of the money” (96) and completely lacking in vibrancy or spontaneity. A life of the kind inspires boredom in Billy and causes existential angst and he means it in his confession to Romy. Billy’s sense of disharmonious living is expressed to Tuula thus: “We are swiftly losing
what is known as one’s grip on life” (78). All sensitive beings many a times in their life do feel really like Billy though not as consistently as him. May be Billy is grittier in pursuing his will than the others. Joshi describes Billy’s desperate act as “pursued (ing) the tenuous thread of existence to its bitter end” (290). Iyengar’s interpretation of Billy as a victim of “self–forged misery” (20) though is not untrue yet Joshi’s purpose in creating a character of the kind entails his aversion to the achievements of modern society. Instances of the kind are not unknown to us. There are few, who have made serious retreats into the life of a recluse away from the humbug of pretentious life. Human history has indeed instances of this kind in Gautama Buddha, Bahubali and Ashoka and many who have retired to Himalayas to meditate and become yogis and sage. They all had retreated from normal life and like Billy did not think of “what trails of glory or shattered hearts he left behind in his turbulent wake.” Further Billy’s love and respect for permittivity echoes the decision and desires of many wise men. Simple life, free of all smugness, where the essentials alone are prioritised, have always been advocated by great men like Gandhi to Thoreau and in art and philosophical movements of transcendentalism and romanticism. Revived interest in Pastoral poetry had meant the same. Wordsworth also had lamented the artificiality of the high society and his protest against the same had ensued in conception of new kind of poetry writing that glorified nature, the simple and integrated life of the poor and the rustics who lived in close proximity with nature, away from the tantrums of city life. Through Billy and his other protagonists Joshi expresses his Wordsworthian desire for a life of less artificiality. During the Enlightened era, arguments about the supposed superiority of indigenous peoples were chiefly used as rhetoric to criticize the civilized aspects of European society. In the realm of aesthetics, the eccentric Italian philosopher,
historian and jurist Giambattista Vico (1688–1744) argued that primitive man was closer to the sources of poetry and artistic inspiration than civilized or modern man.

The disparagement is directed at certain of the developments in modern life like value debasement, superficial and imitative life of the upper classes in metropolitan cities and complete indifference towards everything traditional. The stifling of the instinctual forces in civilized society makes Billy suffer from alienation. The class which Billy represented; the upper crust of the society has power, status, pleasure that money and privilege can fetch but Billy hates them as they signify pseudo powers for him. He speaks of the Delhi society getting on his nerves, and all other societies are a prototype of it. Dislike for the ways elite society is too felt by Joshi M.G. Hegde in “Short Stories of Arun Joshi” points out that “like his novels Arun Joshi’s short stories too satirize the glittering flimsiness of the Indian affluent society” (202). Hence Billy never contemplates escape from Delhi to elsewhere, for everywhere it is the same. His disparagement of Delhi upper class society runs thus:

What got me was the superficiality, the sense of values. I don’t think all city societies are as shallow as ours. I am, of course, talking mainly of the so called classes. I didn’t really get to know the others. I don’t think I have ever met a more pompous, a more mixed up lot of people. Artistically, they were dry as dust. Intellectually, they could do no better than mechanically mouth ideas that the West abandoned a generation ago. Their idea of romance was to go and see an American movie or to go to one of those wretched restaurants and dance with their wives to a thirty-year tune. Nobody remembered the old songs, or the meaning of the festivals. All the sensuality
was gone. So was the poetry. All that was left was loud mouthed women and men in three-piece suits dreaming their little adulteries (178-179).

The return to uncivilised life to Billy is a return to forthrightness, honesty and integrity something disregarded in the modern civilised world given to pursuit of false values which Mathew Arnold had branded as “Mammon worship”. To such condition of total decay and debasement with “all the sensuality … gone”, Billy prefers the life of tribes in whom impulses and instincts remained intact. Billy tirade against the civilized society runs thus:

I sometimes wonder whether civilization is anything more than the making and spending of money. What else does the civilized man do? And if there are those who are not busy earning and spending—the so called thinkers and philosophers and men like that—they are merely hired to find solution, throw light, as they say on complications caused by this making and spending of money. What need would be there of psychiatrists, research foundations, learned societies, great scholars, scientists, ministerial advisors, generals, had the world not initially been hung on this peg of money (96-97).

What Joshi intends to preserve or what Joshi laments as a loss in modern man to some extent is significantly reflective of what D.H. Lawrence had valued most. The novella St. Mawr for instance embodies Lawrence’s regret of the loss of primitive vitality in modern man. In the novella a splendid stallion is portrayed as symbolically endowed with the natural vitality and for the same reason is at odd with the world lacking this vitality. St. Mawr is an antithesis of the modern man. The features of St. Mawr are more properly aspects of male principles such as life-power, energy, and courage. It is quite clear that St. Mawr conveys the lament for
the loss of maleness, which Lawrence attributes to the modern, mechanistic, money grubbing world. Lou, the heroine of the novel is restless even as she senses the absence of the natural vitality missing in people especially men around her. This realisation makes Lou sense the emptiness of her married life as well. As a protest she retreats from the civilised world to live on a ranch in Mexico all alone alike Billy. She prefers to stay alone and start new life in close proximity with nature as if trying to renew the primitive force within her, the absence of which had stifled her soul and sexuality. So also Billy like Lou is disappointed in the achievements of civilisation which had been significant of artificiality and nothing worthwhile. Even Joseph Conrad in his novel *The Heart of Darkness* celebrates the primitive force intact in the black natives of Africa due to which they are capable of greater frankness, honesty and integrity against the corrupt dispositions of the white men and their project of imperialism.

Impulses of love and natural attraction between man and woman are indeed infested by the calculating tendencies of modern man. What happens in Billy’s life is a fine example of this. Billy is in love with Reema Kaur but is not allowed to marry her. Instead he is made to marry a girl of his parent’s choice called Meena. His parents in choosing her as the prospective bride for Billy had given more importance to the creed of caste and status and not his personal emotions. Billy irrespective of his marriage with Meena continues his adulterous relationship with Rima; again a life of duality which Billy hated most. In contrast to what Billy had wished in the life partner of his life, his parents had sought caste and class compatibilities. The enforced marriage of Billy thus was more a matter of prudence and Joshi describes it as a combination of the western and eastern reasons that culminated in the institution of marriage thus: “the usual amalgam of the western
pragmatism (a wife is so necessary, socially, sexually for a fuller life) and Hindu dharma (man’s duty to marry and reproduce: there is time for everything) that is the conventional wisdom of the Indian middle class” (85). In the course the most essential that had to be the governing force of man-woman relation; reciprocation of love and other natural impulses had been neglected. Thus marriage to Billy becomes one more cause of the life of duality and his marriage doesn’t take much time to dwindle. Ganshyam in “Arun Joshi’s The Strange Case of Billy Biswas: The Metamorphosis of a Larva into Butterfly” says, “In the retreat of Billy Biswas from the modern Wasteland of Delhi to the ancient garden of Eden in Mikala Jungle, from the smothering clutch of Meena, who symbolises Western culture of the West in India, to the primeval possessiveness of Bilasia the process of deculturation is fictively embodied” (99).

Billy’s marriage with a girl of his parent’s choice also brings out the ugly side of Indian mode of assertive Parenting. It is suggestive of parental control and interference in the life of children widespread in Indian culture but to Billy it means stifling of individual freedom. Billy had always hated dualities that generated identity conflicts in his personal life and hence has little scruples while abandoning his wife and son to disappear into the Mikala hills. His expedition to Mikala hills in the forest area of Orissa thus symbolises escape from a life of dualities in search for a life of integrity. The life of tribes he had read about had signified the dream life he had desired for and he escapes to be united with the tribes. Anna Latha Devi in “Quest for Spiritual Tranquility in Arun Joshi’s The Strange Case of Billy Biswas” says, “through the strange case of Billy Biswas, Arun Joshi satirizes the unsupportable suffocation caused by the modern materialistic society” (34). Only after the death of Billy, it is realized that “Billy was one of the numerous man-gods
of the primitive pantheon for whom the civilized world had no equivalent” (236). Billy’s feeling of disillusionment with the civilised society and the hassles of his personal life inspires him to retreat and to surrender completely to the glory of the past typified in the tribe of the Mikala hills. Considering Billy’s case O. P. Bhatnagar in “The Art and Vision of Arun Joshi” says: “He (Billy) renounced this materialistic society and civilization not to be an ascetic but to fulfil all the demands of his self to a perfection of participated joy” (225).

The tribe symbolise the primitive culture with the untapped subterranean resources of energy. The difference between the life he lived and the life he desired to live, precipitates inner crisis in Billy and hunts him at times with existential questions – “Who was I? Where had I come from? Where was I going?” (97) In the kind of life he lived in the modern metropolitan society, Billy felt his soul had got stifled. So his retreat into the depths of nature and union with the tribe he felt had arrested the further cheapening of his soul. Billy reversing of his hitherto lived life doesn’t end with his union with the tribe, it continues and culminates in his marrying of Bilasia, a tribal girl. Billy’s union with Bilasia is the most ceremonious event with lots of meaning imbibed in the novel. The wholesomeness of Primitive life is typified in the persona of Bilasia and hence Billy’s union with her implies union with the same. Certain miraculous things happen as if prophesying the auspiciousness of the union. The Chandtola peak of Mikala hill ranges starts glowing after the gap of many years. The tribal people in the sudden glow of the Chandtola peak recognise the blessed nature of Billy’s union with Bilasia. They now consider Billy and Bilasia as the reincarnation of their long dead King and queen and also believe that Billy had capacity for performing miracles like reviving the dead and turning the ferocious tiger away. A long drawn comparison can be worked
out between Bilasia and the horse St Mawr in D.H. Lawrence’s novel of the same name. The stallion named St. Mawr had epitomised primitive force like Joshi’s Bilasia. Both Joshi and Lawrence show lot of similarities in the way they describe them respectively. Bilasia is described as having enormous eyes that “poured out a sexuality that was nearly as primeval as the forest that surrounded them” (189). St. Mawr too is portrayed as symbolic of phallic power, which the modern civilised man had failed to retain intact. This loss of maleness, Lawrence attributes to the modern, mechanistic, money grubbing world. The union of Billy with Bilasia is also described as symbolic of the union of ‘purusha’ and ‘prakruthi’ as per the Sankhya school of Indian philosophy by R. S. Pathak. This school interprets Matter (Prakriti) not an illusionary appearance but as something real which need to work in close co-ordination with the Soul (Purusha) to the positive evolution of the universe. But the modern civilisation nourishes matter at the cost of the soul and this divorce between prakriti and purusha is disastrous. Billy has sensed the importance of such unity and hence says “I had greater responsibilities towards my soul in uniting it with nature” (189). The main difference between Billy and Som is that Som is the victim of his dualities while Billy out grows it and tries to end his travails. In recognition of this difference Naicker makes the following observation: “He does not like others stumble and ends up as an isolated fragment of the ruins of humanity since he successfully face the agonizing travails of his consciousness in its struggle for liberation from the corrupting force of the contemporary civilization” (125).

The redeeming feature of Billy’s act; union with nature and primitivity is celebrated variously. He literally is worshiped as a hero by the tribe. He imbibes the healing power of nature and learns skills of curing through the use of herbs. For instance, he cures Romy’s wife of migraine headache by a wild herb, for which there
is said to be no definite cure in modern medicine. Though Billy wishes and tries very hard to keep his disappearance a secret, his accidental meeting with Romy in the Mikala forest gives away the hideout. A search party sent by the administrative machinery on complaint by Billy’s family finds him out and one of the constables’ accidently shoots Billy dead. Killing of Billy is symbolic of the indifference and intolerance of the present towards past and the chasm that exists between them. Thus the strange life of Billy Biswas which had lot of propensity to reveal the essentials of life in contention with modern materialism is met with a tragic end. Critics like Professor O. P. Mathur and Professor G. Rai’s description of the novel as representative of the universal myth of the primitive in the heart of man ever alienating him from the superficial and polished banalities of modern civilization signifies the same. The triumph of this union is suggested in Billy’s newly gained capacity to cure migraine. The search party signifies civilisation and their killing of Billy signifies civilizations onslaught on the primitive and nature and stifling of the soul by the body. Billy himself had interpreted his act of retreat as an attempt to fulfil his “I had greater responsibilities towards my soul” (189) and this claim resists the criticism of Billy as an escapist. He describes the torments he always felt for neglecting the needs of the soul thus:

| It gradually dawned on me that a tremendous corrupting force was working on me. It was as though my soul were taking revenge on me for having denied it for so long that other thing that it had been clamouring for. Here, you swine, if you haven’t the guts to break away from this filth, well then, I am going to wallow in it until it makes you sick (189). |
To escape from corruption was for Billy an attempt to save his soul. Further Billy’s description of his retreat into primitivity as the “first step, only a means to an end” (189) is also highly suggestive. He means that his return is only a beginning; expressive of the desire to rebuild the civilization anew. Jasbir Jain has described that his search is for “a world of meaningful relatedness” or “emotional fullness”. Billy suffers from what Jiddu Krishnamurthy had called the “crisis in consciousness” – a suffering consciousness on realising that the world is infested by all the misery, conflict, destructive brutality, aggression, and so on. All talks of having reached the pinnacle of progress is only an illusion or a non-reality.

To Billy’s dislike of the ways of the modern civilised society is added his own personal disposition for existential feeling. He also suffers from intense feeling of existential angst of meaninglessness and purposelessness. The way the world is moving ahead with its false notion of progress and development intensifies Billy’s existential angst. This is expressed in the way he is quite often tormented by questions like “Who am I? Who are my parents? My wife? My child? At times I look at them, sitting at the dinner table, and for a Passing moment I cannot decide who they are or what accident of creation has brought us together” (97). Billy union with the primitive spirit doesn’t mark the end of his journey for he says “becoming a primitive was only a first step, a means to an end” (189). The end here is to refurbish civilisation with better meaning than its present meaning of material and technological progress. Thus Billy is an ambassador for the commingling of primeval spirit with the spirit of modernity; as the true essence of civilisation. Billy had to disappear in recourse of his mission because the dream he had is incomprehensive to the majority and he knew he was all alone in his concern. Billy’s sense of freedom is as much interpreted as tendencies of an anarchist who
dared to reject identity ascription by others. Thus the dualities that tormented Billy intensifies and duress of living a disharmonious false life intensifies his existential angst. He hates to live a life of pretention and all his restlessness proceeds from his impression of himself as an imposter. Joshi’s description of Billy thus: “he was one of those rare men who have poise without pose” (11) mean it. This difference creates a wide gap between Billy on one side and the big wide world on the other side. In this sense Billy’s struggles signify an attempt to attaining an ‘integrated self” and this he feels he will attain by union with someone who are capable of integrity. This is one of the reasons why he joins the tribes and starts living with them. All the time while living in the civilised world where people led the life of ‘pose’ than ‘poise’ Billy was in a state of crisis.

The novel *The Apprentice* was written in the year 1974. British rule and its impact on India are essential to understand this novel. Tremendous changes were witnessed in India under British administration. Of the many impacts, the most important one is the rise of Indian nationalism. Along with the dream of evolving India as a Nation there was also the dream of evolving a ‘Ramarajya’- a literal utopia. The whole of India had united and strived to end the British rule and make India a free democratic nation. The end of colonialism led to the euphoria of becoming independent nation state wherein the democratic ideals of equality and fraternity is fully realised. But when even in the free nation fetishisation of differences and the politics related to it continued, utter disappointment was felt everywhere. With this the exhilaration of freedom came to an end and was followed by post-independence disappointments. That is, in the Independent nation states one’s own people in power enacted hectic politics of machinations and exploitations dashing all hopes of an ideal nationhood. The elite empowered with socio-
economical, cultural and political edge of information and money colonised their own people resulting in neo-colonialism. Or in other words the chauvinistic educated elite separated from the bulk of the people by education, class, power and privilege did damage the fortunes of the independent nation. Discourses of Marxism and Nationalism which had rendered so much of hope and courage to fight the colonisers failed to serve as opposing forces against neo-colonialism in the post-independent contexts. The hectic politics of machinations by the power greedy and their exploitative politics generated an ambience of hopelessness and frustration. The post-independent disappointments proved the difficulty of practically living idealism. People confronted the hollowness within the political and social contexts of the country resulting in what is described as post-independent disappointment. The ambience was sufficient to cause chaotic feeling and identity conflicts in sensitive individuals and the novel *The Apprentice* explores the same. Thus the novel along with concentrating on the issues of identity crisis in a character called Ratan Rathor also aims to expose the hollowness of the Indian political and social systems. Mr H. M. Prasad’s words “the novel is both a social document and threnody of a tormented soul” (65), implies the same. In the novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* it is the hollowness of the civilization and it’s so called progressive accomplishments that are ridiculed. In *The Foreigner* we have a character who suffers from acute sense of alienation or feels a foreigner everywhere both for personal and social reasons. In *The Last Labyrinth* it is the suffering of Som Bhaskar, an acute cynic, incorrigible and hence unable to grasp gestures of goodwill from others. Thus in all novels an individual’s plight is enacted for both the reasons of personal idiosyncrasies and also because of the nuances of the societal anomalies.
The immediate pre-independent generation until 1940s was inspired by the leaders of the stature of Gandhi with a cause to fetch freedom from the colonial yoke. They were driven by idealism or altruism and naively believed that once India gained independence from British Raj, all her ills will be cured immediately and automatically. But by 1960s people were totally disillusioned as they witnessed the prevalence of poverty and rampant corruption everywhere in the free India. These developments often made many people sceptical and cynical and many felt alienated from the society. It is against this ambience that the identity torments of Ratan take its meaning and impression. The main thrust of the novel is also to show the contrast between pre independence idealism preached by Mahatma Gandhi, a man of suffering and post-Independence disillusionment. Democracy and election was reduced to a mere mockery in India defeating the dream of Gandhi who preached the value of non-violence and justice. Or in other words democracy in India had been reduced to a “five-yearly farce of the ballot-box”.

Ratan is the son of an ardent freedom fighter who gave away his lucrative practise as a lawyer to participate in the independence struggle. He had donated his personal income and property to the national cause and later had been shot dead while leading a procession of protest against the British. Ratan had been an eye witness to his father’s death in the procession. Ratan’s mother suffered from tuberculosis and still didn’t think of getting medical treatment due to the poverty ridden condition at home. Her husband had given up active practising of his lawyer’s profession due to his engrossment in freedom struggle. Physically and economically exhausted she had been utterly disappointed by her husband and also had lost hope and had become cynical of great causes. Quite against her husband for whom India’s freedom alone mattered she had a very high opinion as to the value of
money and material progress. In this matter her faith was quite opposite to the faith of her husband. Ratan’s childhood thus was caught between two different viewpoints; that of his father’s idealism and mother’s pragmatism. Whilst his father cared little for money and material comforts, mother advised that money was the heart and soul of happiness in life. Torn between two different values that of his father and mother Ratan also had a first-hand experience of what real life was like while he strived to earn his daily bread. He had noticed very little of his father’s idealism prevailed in independent India and what his mother said of money and power was very much true. He had realised that trying to achieve anything by idealistic means was thwarted by the exploitative forces of the society. The reins of free India now were in the hands of Indian politicians and they proved themselves the worst substitutes for the ruling British and made Ratan ponder- “could it be that the Englishmen had been merely replaced? And many times over? Could it be that nothing else but this has happened?” (63) It is in the ambience of this kind that Ratan had to strive and moral chaos of the situation induces lot of identity conflict in Ratan.

The social context of the novel *The Apprentice* is the immediate post-independent India. Ratan is the hero of the novel and also the central consciousness that provides a perspective of things happening around. He is the one who suffers intense moments of identity conflict and the resultant identity crisis. The main cause of the identity conflict in Ratan are the ambiguities he interiorises by the suggestions and ways of his parents while growing up and the struggles he personally experiences to stabilise his life. His parents represent two different approaches to life that creates an ambience of dualities at home for Ratan. He grows up listening to his father’s rhetoric on the value of ideal life and sacrifices. His father’s life is the
living paradigm of literally living ideals of unselfishness and sacrifice. He had literally sacrificed the joys and securities of his personal life for the independence and social wellbeing of the country. His mother had no faith in such impersonal goals and ideals and believed in personal wellbeing and security. Ratan grew up watching the clash of different worldviews and thus dualities had become the part of his consciousness and had caused lot of torments in the different stages of his life. His personal experience of the real world did match well with his mother’s opinion but life of his father and other volunteers of freedom struggle signified the possibility of living a life of goodwill and sacrifice. His experience had proved that the majority of the humanity is selfish and power greedy authenticating his mother’s assessment of the world. But his father’s life had vouchsafed a different ideal reality and the feasibility of living it. *The Apprentice* attacks materialistic values through the character of Ratan who wades through corruption to arrive at an understanding of life. O. P. Mathur in “Survival and Affirmation in Arun Joshi’s Novels” states:

The novel is cast in a series of Browning-like monologues addressed to a boy to whom Rathor lays bare the motives, aspirations, dilemmas, and frustration of his past - a past he cannot view with prismatic vision, a combination of amusement, irony, derision, and outright condemnation, with a ‘stream of conscience running parallel to the stream of recapitulative consciousness’ (426).

As a student Ratan too had tried following the footsteps of his father to that of his mother. He too had high ideals and hoped that India once free will be transformed into a utopia; a literal paradise of virtues. He even had been the part of freedom struggle marches or processions impressed by the patriotic zeal of his
father. His mother scared that Ratan was becoming like his father, had consistently
brainwashed him as to the importance of money and power in life. She repeatedly
told him “Man without money was a man without worth. Many things were great in
life, but the greatest of them all was money” (20). She had described his father’s
ideas as crazy and non-pragmatic thus:

It was not Patriotism but money, she said, that brought respect and brought
security. Money made friends. Money succeeded where all else failed. There
were many laws, she said, but money was law unto itself (20).

Later when Ratan goes to Delhi to earn his livelihood independently he has a
first-hand experience of real life. Everywhere he notices that what his mother said
was very much true to the core. Corruption and malpractices were too rampant in
the society and on many occasions he himself becomes a victim of it. From the top
level bureaucratic officials and politicians to lower level of them, Ratan notices
duplicity. The freedom that has been achieved at the cost of great sacrifice is no
more than a word and a new mode of slavery persisted which Ratan describes thus:
“Yes, a new slavery with the new masters: politicians, officials. The rich, old and
new. Swindlers in fancy cars…” (63).

Deep within his consciousness is the memory of his father and his ideal life
and his advices as to the importance of living for impersonal causes though he
followed the words of his mother. These dual voices and contexts generate intense
moments of conflict in him. It problematizes identification for him; weather to go by
the values taught by his father or that by his mother. Then the struggles in his own
life finally prepare him to compromise and take a definite stance. His hunt for a job
introduces him to all sorts of malpractices prevalent in post independent Indian
society. He realises more than vocational skills and talents it is money and power that fetched a job easily. He understands that all job advertisements and interviews were mere eyewash as the prospective would-be employee is confirmed well in advance as per his/her capacity to pay money and bring in influence. Finally, he gets a job as an apprentice clerk in a government office, dealing with war purchases on condition that he would marry the superintendent’s niece after the confirmation of the job. The irony is that his search for job had landed him in a department where corruption was too rampant. His father who knew of this had lot of aversion for the sector and had described it as “bourgeois filth”. After six months of his selection his job is confirmed and with this his journey uphill begins non-stop and finally is promoted to become the superintendent. Ratan now has every comfort in life; money, status, security, denied to his parents. But all these comforts are earned less by virtue and more by corrupt practises. Ratan realises that the most important skill required for success in modern life is to enter deals (illegal contracts). He says “It is not the atom or God or sex that lies at the heart of the universe; it is deals. DEALS” (51). Contracts of all sorts, illegal, are master planned and the whole world is involved in the rat race for making money and Ratan is not exaggerating when he says “Deals, deals, my friend, that is what the world runs on, what is all about. If men forget how to make deals, the world would come to stop” (53). Ratan’s experiences in life very well match his mother’s prophecy on money. Ratan involves himself in all sorts of deals to make money. The most heinous of the deal endorsed by Ratan to earn money involves misusing the adversity that befell the nation. He signs a deal related to purchasing war materials for the country. The war materials sold by Sheik Himmat Singh in fact are of substandard kind and inspite of knowing it Ratan passes the bill for the sake of the commission he gets. This act of Ratan is
very ironical and morally outrageous for the son of the freedom fighter here worked against the nation’s interest. But the real problem of Ratan is his ever alert nagging conscience that denies him respite in spite of all his material progress. It is both the redeeming feature in Ratan and also the source of his acute conflicts. The real problem is his inability to confine to any one of the duality and attain identity stability. On the one hand he strives at material gains and on the other he suffers from pangs of regret. He undergoes lot of stress handling the dualities of opposing kinds. His happiness thus is always tainted by a strong undercurrent of sadness and there are times when he even contemplates death. The nature of his dilemma is best exemplified in the essay he writes. It is entitled as “comic document” (58) though there is nothing humorous in the content of the essay. The incongruity between the content and the title of the essay is a fine proof of Ratan’s sense of conflict or is an objective correlative of his inner turmoil. The title of the essay is a consciously worked out misnomer to suggest discrepancy between the title and the content discussed in the essay. The matter comparatively juxtaposes the historical past of India with the contemporary history with the purpose of adjudging the difference. The past is idyllically conceived and as a proof of the same quotations from Mahatma Gandhi and *Bhagavad Gita* are given and references are also made to the great civilizations of India namely Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. Even allusions to the conquests of Kalinga by Asoka and his rule of dharma and truth are given. For an essay that elaborates on the wisdom and greatness that once prevailed in India, the title “comic document” (58) prepares the readers to catch the strong undercurrent of irony and cynicism. The authorial purpose is to relate the great glorious heritage of India of the past with the present disintegration to sensitise the readers’ conscience as to the difference and thereby invoke regret in the readers.
dramatic irony in the event is that writer of the essay (Ratan) who involves in rhetorical display of the ideal follows very little of them personally. Like Kurtz of Conrad’s The Heart of Darkness Joshi’s Ratan is as well a hypocrite. Kurtz had made a pompous description as to the ideologies of the phenomenon of imperialism but literally followed none of them as a colonizer in Africa.

Ratan parodies the post–Indian independence achievements in relation to the achievements of the past. The present modern society of India is parodied in relation to the glorious past of India. The essay therefore refers to the remote past of India; the time when the Dharma Shastra had been conceived of, by the enlightened souls to ward of the dark ages of the country. There is also a reference to the dark night that befell likened to the inauspicious dark nights of “amavas” (59) believed in Hindu culture. The darkness implies the time of slavery mainly the British colonisation period and the hope that could dispel the darkness of “amavas of slavery” (59) is the freedom struggle. But the worst context of the Indian history is post–independent context which characteristically is disastrous in nature with its neo-colonial tendencies mocking the glorious history of the past. Arun Joshi is highly cynical of post-independent ambience when in the Independent nation state, one’s own people in power enacted hectic politics of machinations and exploitations dashing all hopes of an ideal egalitarian nationhood. It is in preview of this atmosphere that the post-independence context is described by Joshi as “a display of greed before which the plundering of Ghaznavi paled” (59). Ratan echoes Joshi’s angst and disappointment at the failure of the hard won freedom as the most hope shattering experience. He speaks in the monologue thus: “Freedom. Freedom. What is freedom but a word, my friend? Freedom of men, of nation. No more than a word. We thought we were free. What we had, in fact, was new slavery. Yes, a New
Slavery with new masters . . .” (63). T. S. Eliot too had said “Anarchy is what contemporary history is” and in the potential image of the ‘Waste Land’ had conveyed his impression of the modern society. Ratan too has a parallel image to describe the anarchy in modern society when he identifies the planet Earth by the name of an “abandoned Planet”. His impression of the world runs thus: “a place without a law, a planet turning in the darkness, going heaven knew where” (77). Ratan concludes the essay with the idea that the freedom did not bring the elevation of the spirit that the great leaders hoped for. Ratan’s intense sensitivity and acute uneasiness about the corruption rampant in India fetches him the title Mr. Crisis.

Ratan himself is an epitome of corruption and material greed. His defence of his acts is symbolic of the perverted logic corrupt people use to justify themselves. For instance, his crime of passing the bill of purchase of defective war materials and his justification of the same proves his perversity. Ratan describes his act of taking an enormous bribe. “No more, no less…for some obscure reasons” (60). The word “obscure” (60) is consciously used by Ratan to parody the reasons often given by greedy people. For it is too clear for everyone involved in illegal gulping up enormous money that they behave so out of sheer greed and to satisfy the hoarding impulse that can never be called a necessity. So the use of the term “obscure” only helps the illegal hoarders to hide the real shame in their acts. The novel proposes that the corruption prevails because of the vulnerable rulers who are “phoney” (84), good at giving speeches and the equally vulnerable are the ruled that are “brainless” (84). The failures of political leaders to act their ideologically conceived manifestos in post-independent India is commented upon thus:

Words, words, words. Speeches, editorials, resolutions, handouts, slogans, posters, banners, proceedings of the numerous assemblies, exchanges with
foreign countries, memoranda of the chambers of commerce, manifestos of trade unions, draft five year plans, books extolling our past. An endless barrage of words, very few of which, I soon realised, meant anything, just as they mean nothing today (64).

The exact source of Ratan’s identity conflicts are his dualities. At times he feels the conflict acutely and those are the time when he contemplates death suggestive of identity crisis. He takes bribe and at the same time regrets it. He perpetrates corruption but simultaneously thinks of deliverance from sin through death and even existential angst of meaningless perturbs him. Ratan commits acts that are paradoxical in nature; takes bribes and at the same time donates freely to charitable funds; writes patriotic letters to editors of papers, donates blood to Red Cross for the national cause, makes patriotic speeches to inspire but at the same time involves in anti–national act of purchasing defective war materials for the country; writes an essay on the disastrous consequences of corruption and names it “comic document” (58); The most ironical moment is and to express his own love for the nation. The dualities afflict Ratan with identity conflicts. Ratan’s behavioural nuance is indeed observable in many people. We often see many people behaving similarly; committing crimes and atoning for the same by involving in charity and religious ceremonies. But the difference of Ratan with them is that he has an alert, ever nagging conscience.

Ratan in the parlance of psychologists lacks unified identity or stable identity where inner thoughts and outer acts are concurrent. Psychologists always stress the importance of individuals with unified self or stable identity for the society. Unified self is of great service to the society for it symbolises positive self with feelings of
his/her own personal value or worth. Unified identity thus in an individual is the pivotal consideration that his whole moral life rests upon. An individual without a positive image of himself, will neither be able to give his life a good form nor imbue moral values in his action towards others. Axel Honneth as sourced in Emmanuel Renault (109) speaking on the value of - “the positive relation with the self” has described it as the very basis of any ethical and moral normalcy. Honneth (109) further claims that it is only through successful socialization that an individual can manage to construct a positive self-image (or stable identity) and overcome the sense of importance of his own existence. He further describes the way the positive self-image can be established in three kinds of positive relation with the self; “self-confidence, based on relationships connected with amicable family and affectionate relationships with others; self-respect, based on legally and morally regulated relationships with others; and self-esteem, which consists of the perception of our existence in so far as it is endowed with a social value, or it contributes in deed for the good of all” (Renault 109). On applying Honneth’s (Renault 109) claim that successful socialization produces the background ethical knowledge and guarantees personal integrity to Ratan we realise the reasons for identity conflict in him better. Ratan during his growing up age is fed by dichotomous values. The values upheld by his father strongly contradicted his mother’s meaning of life. Thus Ratan in the course of his socialization lacks clarity as to the definite stance he needs to take as an adult. His father’s words had prioritised community wellbeing as more important while his mother had advised to go after personal gratifications. The conflict between personal and impersonal raging within Ratan expresses itself in the form of his contradictory acts; accruing wealth by illegal means and involving in activities of charity and patriotism. The ideal and the corrupt juxtaposed in his essay “the comic
Ratan is puzzled at his own tendency; taking bribe even when he did not need the money and so on. Ratan is amazed to see duplicity of his own kind all around; everyone in a way or other was master fakers. In the face of the rampant presence of corruption Ratan defend his faults thus: “a little slip-up, the sky was not going to fall” (103). Ratan’s eloquence on the widespread corruption in independent India is as follows,

If I had taken a bribe, I belonged rather to the rule than the exception. Peons were frequently taking bribes. So were government officials and traffic policemen and railway conductors. A bribe could get you a bed in the hospital, a place to burn your dead. Doctors had a fee to give false certificates, magistrates for false judgements. For a sum of money politicians changed sides. For a larger sum they declared wars. Bribery was accepted by factory inspectors, bank agents and college professors; by nurses, priests, and charted accountants; by all those who acted in the public interest. Men took the bribe to facilitate the seduction of their wives; women for seduction of other women. All this I knew and had known for twenty years. And now if I had happened to have accidently indulged in a little slip-up, the sky was not going to fall (112).

As wealth increases Ratan also involves in other vices of debauchery like woman and wine. But even as Ratan is engrossed in revelry he is conscious of simple life led in villages. The poles apart difference that existed between life in villages and the life in Bombay; a continuous jostling of commerce, business and
bargains and deals, co-exist in Ratan’s consciousness. Ratan’s awareness of the role of personal responsibility in minimising dualities intensifies his angst. It’s an indication that he cannot blame external agencies (his parents or the society) for influencing him. Ratan’s sense of crisis is because he recognises his personal agency in misdeeds committed. While involved in acts of personal gratification he is alert to the parallel acts of impersonal. As per the advice of his mother and his experience of the privileges money can fetch he had immersed himself completely in quagmire of debauchery. When he had begun the journey of earning his livelihood his morale had been cowed down by the corruption around. Unemployment he says is his biggest dread but once he gets employed he shows no urge to follow integrity and righteousness. He engrosses in defending his nefarious activities with such adage phrases; “indulged in a little slip up, the sky was not going to fall” (112) or as “little adulteries of the soul that did not count” (112) and so on.

Innocent victimisation of his childhood friend and classmate by one of his nefarious act ultimately makes Ratan to seriously introspect. He had been a Brigadier in Indian army in the North-Eastern front and Ratan had lots of regard for him. He had been his childhood close friend and while in school had rushed to his aid when being thrashed by hooligans. So Ratan had always held him as a saviour in his memory. This friend is blamed as responsible for the nation’s debacle (losing a war) at the hands of the Chinese army. The charge against him is that he had entered into a nexus and had purchased defective ammunitions for the security of the country. Thus during the Indo-china war the defective ammunition either didn’t fire or misfired when needed most and thus the country had lost the battle. The real culprits in the whole illegal affair are the Minister and his secretary along with Ratan who had passed the bill of purchase of faulty ammunition. The superintendent of
police conducting the enquiry though had information regarding the shady deals yet has no substantial papers to prove it. The Brigadier is falsely accused and made the scapegoat and the shame leads to the nervous breakdown and he commits suicide. The victimisation of his close friend and childhood saviour and an innocent soul haunts Ratan. He suffers from acute pangs of guilt that push him to the brink of confession. He thinks of writing a confession letter when he is kept imprisoned under police enquiry but withholds the decision and later is freed due to absence of documentary evidence. As he fails to muster courage to confess he follows other modes to ease his conscience. He decides to go to temple and confess his sin before God and beg him for mercy and grace to cleanse his tainted soul. When he goes there he observes that even the abode of God is tainted by corruption. That is when Ratan rejects the social convention often followed in such matters. He rejects religious dictates in the matter; the modalities of expiation of sin laid down by the institution of religion. He does not enter the temple to worship instead he chooses to sit outside the temple on its stairs and wipe the shoes of devotees either in the morning or evening while going to or coming from office, even as his expensive car is parked outside. Ratan’s case is a fine study in the way one’s own conscience can prove a taskmaster for moral elevation when all social institutions and the very way of life in post independent India has become nefarious and corrupt. Thus the death of the innocent Brigadier friend and his suicide affects Ratan seriously and the ebb of guilt hitherto inconspicuous surfaces goading Ratan to take a definite stance. The intensity of Ratan’s anguish is clear in the following lines,

And all these years this terrible loneliness, something that you may not suspect by looking at me, something that none has ever suspected. How, all these years, I have been alone, so horribly alone in my failures, carrying
them in secret, like a thief, close to my heart, until their blazes have turned upon me and turned me to ashes. Believe me, I have seen it happen. I have seen my soul turn to ashes (74-75).

The above words of Ratan prove that he suffered not just the guilt but is a victim of existential crisis. The disastrous effect of his immoral act on his friend had invoked a fresh bout of suffering in him during which he realises the intricacies of his anguish and torments. The dualities (that his parents’ represented and that within him) and his sense of guilt along with his existential impression of life had conjoined to cause torments. One of the critic by name Thakur Guruprasad notices that Ratan’s behaviour conforms to the “meaning of the “existential”; the doctrine that man forms his own quintessence in the course of his life by the kind of choices he makes.” Ratan works out his expiation from sin in an individualistic way. He is guided by the logic of his conscience and doesn’t follow the hackneyed ways the religious institutions suggested. He realises that it’s not just the body that he had gambled with but the soul that was in real jeopardy. His torment in this sense is very much like that of Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus. Ratan is no doubt in the wrong as per the ethics of religion or that of society but he alone is accountable for stifling of the needs of his soul. Though Dr. Faustus’ conception of soul falls within the ambit of Christianity Ratan is not controlled by the dictates of the institution of religion and hence he least bothers to follow the readymade packages of expiation instead works out his own modus operandi to save his soul. While Faustus is given to complete desperation that fails him to recognise the hope underlying the words of good angel and the old man to save his soul, Ratan grasps the hints to save his soul in the words of the one Sheikh. He is the one with whom Ratan had the deal of passing the bill for buying faulty ammunition for the country. Aware of Ratan’s plight he advices
thus: “My soul was killed, you put your’s to Pawn. But souls that were pawned could perhaps be retrieved....” (107). What Sheikh means here is that Ratan had kept alert his conscience throughout and by feeling intense moments of unhappiness and suffering he had only pawned his soul and had not lost it completely. Ratan’s tendency is very much similar to the ways of Arthur Dimmesdale in the novel The Scarlet Letter who though had not confessed his guilt openly to the public yet his proactive conscience had caused him severe torments etching the letter–A into his very skin. Just because the symbol ‘A’ (indicating his sin of adultery) was not seen by the world didn’t mean he was oblivious of his guilt. More than the outward expression of expiations and confessions, the inner pangs of conscience do bring real reformation in a person and Ratan is a paradigm of this. It’s his alert conscience that kept him unhappy all the while even amidst the thick of revelries of life and thus had saved Ratan. Sheikh had said “…may be souls are like muscles, Ratan Rathor. May be to develop them one has to first put them to use.” and Ratan had done the same. Sure, Ratan had kept it proactive and had fed it by pangs of regret and had saved it from complete obliteration. Some of Ratan’s deeds are indeed activities that nourish the soul; his charities, blood donation, his patriotic speech etc. Earlier when Ratan did them along with his contrary acts of illegal deals he had impressed us as a hypocrite caught in the thick of identity dilemmas. And after the death of his saviour friend his realisation that it was the combined force of existential pangs and guilt that had always bothered him that had controlled his activities make us judge him differently.

It is Ratan’s capacity for introspection that keeps the door of retrieval for his soul open. Harsh realities of life though instigate him to follow his mother’s words he is never unconsciousness of the idealism his father believed in. He is as much
aware of the discrepancy between world of realism and that of idealism; two experiences his father and mother symbolised respectively. It is this awareness that keeps his capacity to confess open and Ratan is commendable for the same. His restlessness within, “Upon me. Inside me. Like a boil. Like leprosy” paves way for individuation to stabilize his identity dilemmas. All the while even amidst the comforts of graces of materiality he suffers sleepless nights. He admits, “To sleep is a privilege not given to all. As long as you can sleep, all is well”. His sleeplessness is an “objective correlative” of his inner turmoil. After a great deal of self-deliberations and trials of different kind he decides on his own to work out his path of salvation and that is when he chooses to wipe the shoes at the temple gate at religious congregations. It is interesting to note that he rejects all modes of salvation institutionalised religion proposed as expiations for sin. Thus the choice at the critical stage of his life is his own responsibility. Further amidst the category prone to corruption he can be singled out for his intact capacity for keeping his conscience alert that ultimately leads to expiation. His decision to wipe the shoes of people who went in and out of the temple is significant of humility; a sign of his subdued ego; a suppression of self-aggrandisement. He realises the virtue of his father’s way only after burning in the hell of unhappiness. He individualises and follows the dictates of his inner voice thus he prefers alienation from the society to alienation from the self. He realises that to merely eke out a living in the corrupt society in the corrupt way is to suffer alienation from one’s own self. The ‘self’ of Ratan had kept his father’s advice alive and hence is able to foreground when the need arises. The dual voice with in him he ultimately is able to streamline and choose one instead of allowing both to co-exist. That is, he is able to sort out the difference between the layers of labyrinth and recognise the most virtuous and the essential. Every hero of Joshi’s
novel gradually outgrows their rootedness in the labyrinths of the social world (also the cause of identity conflicts) and ultimately recognises the last labyrinth of existential meaning of life. The recognition of this meaning ultimately purges them of their identity confusions to take a definite stance. C. N. Srinath aptly makes the distinction between the layers of wants that confuses Joshi’s modern men when he passed the following comment on *The Apprentice* thus:

Tale of conscience-torn man, with a curious mixture of idealism and docility, a vague sense of values, a helpless self-deceptive effort to flout them for the sake of a career-in short with a deep awareness of the conflict between life and living (55).

The title ‘The Apprentice’ also recognises Ratan as a novice \a learner and it is the travails of his learning that is more important and noteworthy than the end achievement. Ratan’s comparison of the plight of man as the one caught between too many choices “reduced . . . to the status of those leaves of autumn that are blown here and there, at the mercy of the wind”, signifies the same (73). When Ratan feels ashamed of his misdeeds and expiates for it, he upholds honour. Ratan’s confessions are indicative of his willingness to learn from his follies. It is indicative that he is not lost forever like many men. Though he had found the advices of his mother alluring and practically had experienced the worth of it the world gone wrong and had recognised the difficulty of living life his father’s way, he had kept the lamp of ideal life burning deep within, though very inconspicuously through his sensitivity of it. So when he experiences a profound sense of regret about his way of life he hates the duplicity of it all. His apprenticeship results in learning that all men are the “frustrated men sailing about in a confused society, a society without norms, without
direction, without even, perhaps, a purpose” (118). Interestingly almost all characters in Joshi’s novels suffer from depression for varied reasons and seek solutions as per the dictates of their individual conscience at the cost of being branded as eccentric, probably by the norms of the society. The inner preferences of the characters are always in conflict with the ways of the society resulting in alienation.

The novel *The City and the River* discusses through a fantastic story the human vulnerability for power and the privileges that go with it. T. J. Abraham in “The Fluvial Almighty as Tutor: A Study of Arun Joshi’s *The City and the River*” finds that the novel *The City* bears close resemblance not only to *The Heart of Darkness* but also to Hermann Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, Shakespeare *Macbeth*, Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* and T.S. Eliot’s “Dry Salvages” (11-16). The most heinous of the crimes are committed by the power and position greedy men. Varied modes of oppressions and suppressions are perpetrated by the powerful on the weak. The novel explicates the same signifying the difficulty of realising the egalitarian ideals. As a political novel though it seems to reflect upon the political reality of India of post-colonial times it mainly aims to capture a historical reality of all times and all nations. The terms post-independent and pre-independent, and phrases like post-colonial and neo-colonial pale into insignificance and the distinct experiences of exploitative politics is presented as a perennial reality of human society of all times. Hence one of the characters in The City describes human history as a “cyclic repetition of periodic power gain and disintegration, an endless repetition”. The story of the novel is about the history of “the psychic march of humanity” (24), which is in cyclic motion; “a new city is reborn like the phoenix on the ruins of the old” (24). Hence Usha Bande says, “the story ends where it begins and begins where
The message of the kind ultimately prophesies of the incapacity of the humanity for sustained nobility of whatsoever kind. Ratan of the novel *The Apprentice* had expressed similar disappointment when he had described the journey from colonialism to independent India as a journey from “slavery of a kind to slavery of another kind” (53). Ratan’s words echoes the historical reality of all colonised countries; the shift is not from colonialism to independence but from colonialism to neo-colonialism and Ratan’s words mean the same “‘Yes, a new slavery with new masters; politicians, officials, the rich, the old and the new. Swindlers in fancy cars…” (53). Many Indian writers of English fiction have expressed such post-independent disappointments in their novels. For instance, Bhabani Bhattacharya who portrays the throttling of democracy in India in his novel *A Goddess Named Gold* writes thus: “Free India will die a hundred deaths. Beware, lest one such death takes place at the polling booth of this village” (94).

The novel *The City and the River* combines fantasy and satire to show human vulnerabilities for power and the related manipulations. Two important locales namely the City and the River are the centres of action in the novel. They don’t refer to any specific city or river for no names are given to them. Lack of exact identity or anonymity gives a universal sweep to the events in the novel. The anonymity also makes the locales; the city and the river a symbol signifying two ways of life; culture and nature respectively and the city is all cities or any city for that matter and the river signifies nature in totality. The people in the city and their behavioural tendencies entail the general human behaviour everywhere. The city is situated on the banks of the river and therefore the river is a mute witness to the human actions and the power politics portrayed in the novel. Conrad in the novel *The Heart of Darkness* conceives of a similar context - the dense forest and the river
Congo is conceived of as an inscrutable presence; a mute witness, to the ugly drama of the colonisation. The African jungle and the river are imbued with the mind of their own, waiting for the right moment to strike back at the evil ways of the colonizers. Similarly, Joshi gives the river in the novel decisive role to play but not until the human propensity for evil reaches its full cycle. Until then the river is portrayed as a mute observer of the ways of the Grand master and also serves as the source of survival for the community of the mud people. But Joshi attributes lot of equanimity and grand composure to the river, unlike Conrad who conceive nature as an inscrutable force; dark, frightening, silently observing, waiting for the right moment to prove the fraudulence of civilising mission spearheaded by the Europeans. E. M. Forster too has evinced the panoramic existence of nature, older or ancient than all humanity in the form of Marabar caves, as a mute witness to the human drama of exploitation and differences in the novel A Passage to India. Similarly, Joshi envisions a background which is as well the mute witness to the actions of the inhabitants in the City. The lines “Beyond the palace, on still higher ground, lost in the haze, stand the pyramids and beyond everything else, in the far distance, high up in the blue sky looms the mountain, its snow covered peaks forever brooding over this panorama of brown and pink and white” (12-13). The river symbolic of nature serve as a character in its own right with the will of its own and for the same reason impresses the readers as mysterious. Through the flood it invokes havoc and that prove hostile to the perpetrators of cruelty. But at the same time it is the saviour of a single progeny ‘the nameless one’ rescued to perpetrate the race of humanity. The city is a departure from the existing devise of Joshi. Siddhartha Sharma in “Arun Joshi’s The City and The River: A Portable of Time” says: “It’s about an anguished man’s quest for survival and (...) for a variable
alternative amidst materialism, corruption, cynicism, alienation and divining spiritual faith” (81).

The society of *The City* is hierarchy ridden and resembles the class structure of any real society with the indwelling categories of upper (elite), middle and the lower classes. Or in other words *The City* of the novel is a replica of any modern city in its social structure; has three communities of people, representing the three major classes in any city. Interestingly the very topography of the city is portrayed by Joshi as spatially embodying the hierarchy ridden pattern of the city. E. M. Forster too had envisioned the topography of Chandrapore (the centre of action) in the novel *A Passage to India* as embodying the hierarchical relation between the Indians and the British. The difference between the rulers, The English, and the ruled, namely the Indians was spatially suggested in the landscape of Chandrapore. Even the landscape of the city suggests the hierarchical nature of people in the city.

First comes the narrow brown band of the mud huts, running from end to end . . .. Next, offset a little to the right, on a higher ground, lies the neat rosy pink oval of the brick colonies . . .. Beyond the brick colonies stand the famous Seven Hills…. The hills vary in altitude and are now the seat of the Grandmaster’s government. On the tallest stands the palace: it is easily recognised by the delicacy of the dome which is said to be a marvel of modern architecture. The next tallest hill, for some reason, has been left vacant (12-13).

In the above quote we notice that Joshi purposefully draws correspondence between the height of the hills and the hierarchy followed within the administrative branches of the city. The tallest of the hill accommodates the most important of the
administration block like the Grand Masters palace and the one smaller accommodates the houses of his cabinet members and the hills less tall accommodate the different offices. Thus the city expresses an obsession with hierarchy in its social structure and the image of the landscape with different height gradation suggests the same.

The social stratification of the city is signified by the altitude at which the different classes live. The Grand Master, the Ministers whose social superiority is matched by the geographical height, live and administer the city from the Seven Hills varying in height according to the status of the Ministers, with the Grand Master living on the highest hill. The middle class people live on a comparatively lower ground in pink brick buildings. The lowly people, including the boatmen, inhabit the area along the river bank which is the lowest in altitude. The level of authenticity varies in inverse proportion to the social position of the different categories of inhabitants.

The middle class are identified by an imaginary name called the ‘Brick’ people and the lower class are called the ‘Mud’ people. The City symbolises any modern civilised towns and is ruled by the Grandmaster and his council of Ministers. The Grandmaster and his cabinet colleagues who live in the mansions are power hungry. The nature of his rule is similar to a totalitarian regime where absolute power lies in the hands of the few and these few rule with an iron hand. Totalitarian regimes are always notorious for perpetrating atrocities on vulnerable citizens as proved in the history of many countries. The bureaucratic officialdom and the other well to do people called as the Brick people live in “the neat rosy pink, oval of the brick colonies” (12). The boatmen live in mud-houses that lie scattered
The rulers of the city though declare their love for the citizens, yet their sympathies are more with the haves than with the have-nots. The negligence or lack of recognition of the lowly people [have-nots] by the ruling class is symbolically suggested by Joshi in naming them as the “the Nameless-One- because outside their home habitations no one knows their name” (13). Joshi means to say that power and money give both social security and social identity and without them people are...
reduced to namelessness or nonentity. Interestingly Arun Joshi portrays have-nots as
deriving their identity differently; untainted by insincerity, shallowness, greed and
selfishness, they having inherent capacity or strength for forthrightness. For
instance, while the brick people had been numb about the three beatitudes it is the
head Boatman a woman leader of the boatmen community who opposes it
vehemently. She senses the nature of exploitation followed in the land thus:

And it is not a fact that out of the mud-people the city shall always extract
work equal to what it needs feeds them, even as it is done to the animals,
even though that cannot be said of the brick- people or of their children? (20)

Their identities of forthrightness and sincerity enable them to oppose
injustices and endow them with strength to turn mutinous in the face of unfairness.
While the Machiavellian designs of The Grand Master are very little opposed by the
Brick people, the Mud people show no allegiance to his designs. They believe only
in allegiance to nature for they know that it is their true provider. So when the Grand
master imposes family planning measures on the mud people to curb their
population, it is strongly opposed by the Boatmen. One of their reasons is that they
don’t want tampering of natural paths and also find no purpose in controlling their
number for their faith in nature’s bounty is immense. The Boatmen who are blessed
with fertility rebel against the rule while there is no such opposition from Brick
people. They are capable of retention of uprightness because of their closeness to
Nature than to society aggrandising false values. Wordsworth too believed that only
the rustics who are in hourly contact with nature were capable of virtues and wanted
poetry to dwell more on their life as proposed in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads.
Mud peoples’ simple life in close proximity with nature without any taints of
material greed and considering the river as the only object of allegiance provides them the stability of identity unlike the brick people who have lost their ability to protest due to their greed for material wealth.

Joshi in other of his novels portend individuals with high success in all aspects of life; wealth, education, status as undergoing identity conflicts due to their alert conscience and their awareness of the dualities of life. In this novel the whole of the Brick community is not attributed any redemption for the majority always go as per the set pattern and conscience is only an individual prerogative not attributable to a crowd or mob. Life of close proximity with nature and simple living without greed always imbue positive identities and thus the community of mud people show identity stability. They have immense faith in Nature and it providing abundantly to lead a simple life of self-sufficiency. Neither do they identify with power nor with material comforts, with disposition for simple living they fear nobody and hence are capable of forthrightness. The Brick-people who represent the middle class are suppressed into passivity even in the face of injustices as fear of threat or insecurity controls their action. Money, material comforts and assured sense of security is all that matters for them and beyond which they have very little concern. They are little shown as protesting of the atrocities of the Grand master. The Brick people are alienated from nature and thus have lost faith in nature’s bounty and believe that it is the mercy of the Grandmaster that can sustain them. Depending on the fact whether the allegiance is to God (nature) or man the salvation for individuals from crisis is assured. The ruling class are power hungry and to have it are ready to precipitate any number of irregularities.
Interestingly the novelist introduces a place called as The Grandfather’s Rose Garden which by its ambience stands apart from the rest of the City and is beyond class identity. It is exclusively a locale of exquisite beauty combined with power, antiquity/heritage and nature’s bounty. The inhabitants of the Rose Garden are all idealists and highly virtuous and the Rose Garden itself is idyllic and stands apart amidst the hullaballoo of disorder and tumult in The City. To become an inhabitant of this Rose garden one need to shun all their pretentions of the civilised world and should believe in the practicality of the ideals of justice, beauty, simplicity and harmony. The conception of the Rose Garden as a distinct location that stands apart from the other locales of the city is symbolic. It is taken care of by the Grand Father, a symbol of love, justice and tolerance. His identity is derived completely from his capacities for virtues and hence he owns the ‘The Rose Garden’; a symbol of virtue and beauty. Nature’s support of righteousness is signified in the details that the vegetation in the garden grew luxuriously and rarest of the roses grew here. Whereas nature in and around the city and the palace is described as dismal, symbolic of the destruction of the very life force. The Rose Garden also shelters those who rebelled against the Grand Master and his misrule along with good forces remaining alienated from The City. All those who identify with morality and uprightness take shelter here and plan their protest against the Grand master. But for anybody to be an inmate of the Garden needs to have stable identity without any confusion between inner and outer self. Like the Grandmaster and his supporters, they are never to dawn the dual role. To be virtuous and strong followers of simplicity and uprightness from within and without had to be the way, signifying stable selfhood.

The main purpose of the writer here seems to be chiefly to provide a contrast between the two worlds; one by the Grand Master and the other by The Grand
Father. The attack on the Rose Garden that is symbolic of an ideal city (a utopian condition) in the novel marks the climax of destruction.

The novel along with exemplifying class identities also concentrates on few individuals to portray their identity conflict at times resulting in crisis. That is there are some highly individualised personas that are too conscious of the dualities in life but wrongly identify with wrong values under stress from people in power. But at different stages in their life learn to neglect personal gains and act beyond selfish needs. Characters in this novel can be neatly divided into two groups based on the negative and positive identities they purport; The Professor, Bhumiputra, Dharmavira and the tribe of Boatmen are on one side and at the other extreme are the Grand Master and the set of councillors, supported by the Brick people by their passivity. His Advisory Council which includes the Minister of Trade, the Education Advisor, the Police Commissioner and the Palace Astrologer and the master of rallies are highly supportive of the Grand Master. All the good forces join hands to oppose the atrocities of the ruler by drafting a charter demanding the ruler to uphold fairness and justice in the governance. The individualised personas are Dharmavira, a police officer and his paternal uncle who is an astronomer of repute called by the name Professor. Then there is Bhumiputra or Master Bhoma from the boatmen community who is also the disciple of Professor and is trained as a mathematician. Then the old man by name Patanjali, Bhoma’s neighbour who is too adamantly and obstinately stick to his ideals and values do prove stamina strong enough to oppose The Grand Master.

Dharmavira had served as the police commissioner in the administration of the Grandmaster, but realises the mistake of serving the Grand Master, resigns and
comes to live in the Rose Garden. Here Joshi seems to imply that it is only by giving up the elitist identity, amidst the ordinary one does pursue the struggle for justice better. To be accepted as the natural member of the Rose Garden he had to shed his elitism and this he does by wearing the simple dress of the boatmen that includes nothing else but a loincloth. This act symbolises the need for following the virtue of simplicity to be a part of the ideal garden. Dharmavira’s sudden decision to resign from police commissioner’s post is the result of his identity conflict. The duality of right and wrong had bothered him a lot while serving the government of the Grand master and on seeing the extremes of atrocities perpetrated by the ruler had resigned and joined the people in the Rose Garden.

When orders are passed to arrest Master Bhoma for making fun of the Grand master’s rule, he absconds. To know about his whereabouts his neighbour Patanjali is arrested and tortured in the prison. He is forced to be a witness of Bhoma’s guilt but Patanjali doesn’t do so instead chooses death to uttering falsity. Later when Master Bhoma is arrested and taken for prison, on the way the jeep carrying them hits a lamppost and the opportunity is used by Bhoma to escape and takes shelter in the Rose Garden. Later the professor of Astronomy who always had cherished Bhoma as one among his favourite disciples goes in search of him not knowing his stay in the Rose Garden.

The professor’s journey in search of Master Bhoma is most eye opening kind. As he searches the various offices for the disappeared Bhoma, he has a first-hand experience of the perversities rampant in the administration of the Grandmaster. Intellectual pursuit is the fundamental purpose of Education and the same is displaced by Physical training activities under the Grand masters’
administration. The professor notices how in the Education Advisors Office, the chief officer’s son with tremendous capacity for physical prowess is involved in training a shock brigade of musclemen. The professor is shocked to see scenes of wrestling matches and karate practices—all undertaken under the leadership of the Education Advisor’s son. The most outrageous of the scene is the way the Education Advisors son involves in a killing rampage of his adversaries. The activities within the office of the Minister of Education are the most offensive and derogatory kind suggesting that the world has gone askew dominated by greed for power and material success. Commercialisation of education, the evil of capitation fee and the bribery in education institutions—evils tainting the modern education system are all the part of the education system in The City. Intellectual activity being completely replaced by scenes of physical prowess in education institution is the worst misdemeanour one can think of. Muscle prowess had always been the matter of primacy in savage state and education always was thought of as an antidote to savagery. But in the City the traditional values have all turned topsy turvey. The Education Minister nourishes students mainly to use them as human dynamite for his own selfish ends. The disintegration in the matter is symbolically conveyed by Joshi through the image of nature; the life sustaining force. The professor notices that nature in and around the Palace of the Grand Master is different from the nature in proximity to the river. The professor while roaming around the officialdom centres of The City observes with a sense of wonder thus: “The palace lawns however, leave much to be desired. All brown and yellow. No trees. No Flowers. Not a patch of green” (31). This lack of lush green vegetation; symbol of fertility, in the city invokes sterility. In contrast on the bank of the river nature is in full glory and there are exotic varieties of roses blooming in Grand Father’s Rose Garden.
In the conflict between good and the bad forces, Joshi portrays the latter as more powerful being aided by modern ways of destruction like scientific weaponry with the help of which they play havoc on the virtuous. The Grand Master is so over-drunk with the nectar of power that his only recourse in the face of any objections to his method of rule is, quelling them mercilessly. The opponents are hunted, imprisoned and kept in the official prison named the “Gold Mines” (36). The name Gold Mine is highly ironical or more appropriate a name from the point of view of the rulers; a veritable mine containing their share of gold- that includes the traitors of the land.

The Grandmaster with the help of advanced technical gadgets destroys good forces congregated in the Rose Garden with ease.

The Grand Master is power hungry and he wants to become the King of the City and thus attain absolute power forever. The Grand Master uses the Rallies Master and the Palace Astrologer too well to execute his plans to become the King. The Rallies Master arranges rallies and processions to impress the onlookers as to the support The Grand Master has mustered to fulfil his desire. These rallies also serve to parade the supporters to discourage dissenters of the Grand Master. The Palace astrologer serves to abuse the faith of people in astrology to gather support to the Grand Master’s desire for absolute power. The Astrologer schemes and tries to convince boatmen to accept the Grand Master as their benevolent servant sent by the Gods’ themselves. To appease the people and to win their allegiance to his desire he announces the Three Beatitudes. The declaration has no virtuosity about it but is a cunningly conceived plan to deceive the dissenters into allegiance. After declaration of the Three Beatitude, there is the clamping upon the state a new “Era of Ultimate
Greatness” (23) (reminding the Emergency period in Indian political history). Under the jurisdiction of this Era, the Grand Master declares new rules for the improvement of the state. Disciplining the City and raising the standards of the boatmen’s life are the two specific clauses adjoining this declaration. The concern for the boatmen is only an eye wash to quell any opposition from them which the Grand Master fears most. Immediately after clamping of the “Era of Ultimate Greatness” (23) disciplinary action are initiated against a boatman and a clown for the flimsiest of the reason like the boatman’s wife giving birth to an illegal child and the clown for laughing at the ways of the Grand Master. Thus under the pretext of the Era of Greatness, the officials have reasons enough to discipline all sundry and even the most fragile of the reason is made use of to suppress the Boatmen. The arrests also serve the purpose to warn other boatmen to be cautious as to never to offend the state and its head during the course of the Era of Ultimate Greatness. Added to this fear tactic are the organised processions and rallies arranged by the Master of Rallies parading the support to The Grand Master in the State. Thus a very strategic use of terror and popular appeal are employed in the form of series of arrests and affectionate appeal masterminded by rallies master. Thus power greedy rulers of the City promote all sorts of cunning machinations to satiate their hunger for power. This event in the novel reminds of the real historical event of the declaration of the Emergency in 1975 and its modus operandi to suppress the rights of people. In the name of the welfare of the state encoded in the three Beatitudes the Grand Master aims to fulfil his selfish desire for absolute power.

The first rule is that the people should offer their allegiance to the Grand Master because he is “the father and the mother of the city” (17). The second declaration is regarding the public property as the collective property of all; and this
can be preserved only when the population is checked. The third regulation is by way of caution which warns the rebellious people of being “received without mercy and be treated according to the Grand Master’s law of compassionate righteousness” (18).

The Grand Master is very much the victim of Identity confusion. For though he claims love for his people, in reality he acts against their interests. For instance, the three beatitudes if obeyed by the inmates of the City would give absolute power to the Grand Master. Joshi proves the intelligence of the intellectual elites to frame ideologies in a way, all the while hiding personal profit. The three beatitudes conceived by the Grand Master in the name of the welfare of the state is an instance of the kind. The beatitudes are as follows: Declaration of the public property as the collective property, framing of the law of compassionate righteousness to punish the erring citizens. The third is the declaration of the era of ultimate greatness giving full power to the government to discipline people. Then there is the condition that people either have to vow allegiance to the three beatitudes or face charges of treason against nation; both the way the people are the losers. The word “compassionate righteousness” (18) though foregrounds the spirit of compassion it is a camouflaged expression to quell dissention as per the desire of The Grand Master. The novel also portrays varied contexts of the rich exploiting the poor which has many parallels in real society. Rich businessmen displacing the poor of their habitation to build apartments and business molls are common in modern cities. The same is symbolically suggested in an event in the novel to prove the insensitivity of the rich towards the needs of the poor. The Grand Master’s wife wants the avenues leading from the palace to the river straightened to have a clear view of the scenic beauty of nature around the river. To straighten the avenue, the houses of the
boatmen in the way had to be cleared and the same is done remorselessly rendering them homeless. Added to this is the audacity of the Grandmaster’s men who advice the losers of their hearths and homes to believe in illusion or presumption that their lost homes and hearth were still in the same place. Ironically Vasu the editor of the underground journal calls it “Asthough Avenue” (38) for the “asthough attitude” (37). Thus throughout the novel the atrocities of the rulers are portrayed to satisfy their greed for power. Abusing of the vulnerable is a repeated feat one can witness in human history of any nation. The abuse of the weak for the desired end is best achieved today in context of modern cities with the aid of science and the technology supplements. In the novel for instance to suppress any dissenting voices amongst the boatmen, their quarters are attacked by helicopters equipped with scientific gadgets. Laser beams are used to flush out the hiding rebellious boatmen. The Boat men who are the chief dissenters and opponents of The Grand Master becoming the King are quelled mercilessly by invoking violence on them. Humiliated and disappointed he perpetrates atrocities of varied kind which is a fine paradigm of the abuse of power and authority. He takes recourse to two kinds of mal-practices; to gain and retain power and to eliminate dissention. The Grand Master through the rallies Master tries to popularise himself as the humble servant of the people anointed by God to be the King, to win people’s consent and also uses the Palace Astrologer to project himself as the future king, a clear case of misusing people’s vulnerability for astrology.

In the name of disciplining the people many arrests of important people who oppose the Grand Master’s desire on fake charges are made. All good forces namely the honest police officer Dharmavira, the astronomer professor and his student Master Bhoma or Bhumiputra, the Head Boatman and the old man by name
Patanjali are all murdered one way or the other, by the secret machinations of the Grand Master; all the while cautiously safeguarding his role in the mayhem. The attack on the Rose Garden that is symbolic of an ideal city (a utopian condition) in the novel marks the climax of destruction. Thus the fortune of an egalitarian society is shown as eluding the nations due to the chauvinistic educated elite who separated from the bulk of the people by education, class, power and privilege purport selfish machinations to meet the desired end.

Interestingly a woman called as The Head Boatman is considered as the leader of mud people and she guides her fellow men to protest and nullify the anarchy let loose by the Grand Master. Joshi portrays the The Head Boatman (a woman) as the capable combatant. She is the one who guides the whole community of the mud people to show allegiance only to the river; symbolic of life and nature and not to any other authority. She also instils strength in her people to least care for the three beatitudes of the Grand Master and also encourages them to retain steadfast in their decision to oppose the ways of the corrupt ruler. Joshi believes in the immense capacity of the ordinary masses to rebel when extremes of atrocities are reached. In Joshi’s novel while the brick people remain indifferent and passive, the gesture of rebellion begins from the mud-people. The mud people though are ignorant and ill-equipped unlike the elite yet their number is their strength and have immense common sense to understand the right and wrong better. Sensing this The Grand Master imposes population control on them and tries to subjugate them with the help of scientific gadgets. The police commissioner of the City says “---- the poorer the city, the more guns its government needs” (82). Joshi identifies mud people living in close proximity with the River, symbolic of life itself as full of vitality and strength. But all the good forces are destroyed even before their action
take promising turn and before instilling any change die suggesting the difficulty of the task ahead. The Grand Master’s sin reaches its pinnacle when he becomes a king by the unanimous selection of the Council of Ministers of his cabinet least caring for the people’s referendum. The Grand Master in his fulfilment of his greed for power exceeds all human limits and commits morally outrageous acts.

The city and the River purport an interesting authorial ideology as a solution to the sad affair of the state which however has lot philosophical overtones. The solution is embedded in the words of the Great Yogeshwar. The very idea of God or a saviour in this novel is conveyed through the character of the Great Yogeshwar, an ancient sage like being who is ageless impressing others as vast as the sky and as tall as the mountains. He is beyond all human vulnerabilities with identities similar to that of an ageless seer and teacher projected in Indian cultural heritage. Characters like the Astrologer, the Minister for Trade and the Hermit of the Mountain are disciples of the Great Yogeshwar, educated and tutored by him. They are all mute witness to the reign of terror precipitated by the Grand Master. The Great Yogeshwar believes that human history is an endless cycle of periodic disintegration and regeneration. He knows the means to break the cycle and change the nemesis of the city. The disintegration can be arrested if humanity is capable of suppressing “egoism, selfishness, stupidity” (263). Capacity for Purity can be attained only through sacrifice which in turn can stop the cycle of disintegration but inability to sacrifice by humans precipitates all other failures. The great Yogeshwar also tells to the Nameless-One “God resides as much in a Grand Master as in you or in me.” (262) and adds “it is what you are inside that governs what you are outside.” (264) Yogeshwar in such words implies the idea of stable identity expounded by psychologists. When inner self and its faiths co-ordinate with outward expressions,
it is said that stability in identity is achieved and such attainment in turn boosts self-confidence followed by self-respect and self-esteem.

Even T. S. Eliot’s image of The Waste Land matches well with the ambience of The City. W. B. Yeats had envisioned Christ to be born at the end of the cycle of two thousand years not as an image of humility and kindness or of equanimity and grace but as ferocious; a sphinx like creature embodying brute strength matching with the evil disposition of the modern world. T.S Eliot described post war world reality thus: “The immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history”, and imagined the image of the Waste Land as synonymous with the context. Joshi seems similarly disappointed at the incapacity of humans to outgrow the vulnerability for greed for power and money. His faith in human incapacity for virtues is such that he imagines cycles of oppressions characterising human history. Thus the novel expresses doubt as to the possibility of ever realising the egalitarian ideals in human society. The defeat of all revolutions like French revolution and post–independent India’s disappointments all signifies the same. The end of colonisation in India had culminated with assurance of realising democratic ideals. But in reality practices of inequality continued intact within the Indian society resulting in utter disappointment among the masses. The ruling classes equipped with power weapons; socio-economic, cultural, and political edge of information and money neo-colonised their own people. Hence Joshi makes one of his character in The City describe human history as a “cyclic repetition of periodic power gain and disintegration, an endless repetition” (262). Pessimism of Joshi in the matter is very intense, thus an ambience of existential angst is made to pervade the whole novel. Thus a perfect egalitarian life for humanity repudiating
chauvinism and exclusivity of any kind is purported as a distant dream wish never to be realised.

When all human efforts to curtail the Grand Master fail, his execution as a Monarch is affected successfully not by any human agent but by the mediation of nature. When humans fail to control the abuses of fellow human being, the city has its natural nemesis or retribution in the form of flood. The whole city and its inhabitants are washed away by the raising flood of the turbulent river signifying divine retribution. Further at the end of the novel, in the dialogue that ensues between the one identified as the Hermit of the mountain, also called as The great Yogeshwar and The Nameless One, the circular or cyclic movements of history is discussed. The great Yogeshwar preaches on the continuity of life and changing of the old order by giving place to new. This sacred enlightened visionary tells the Nameless One (the one and only who survives the great flood to repeat the history of Mankind),

On the ruins of the city, as always happens, a new city has arisen. In the city of the future as well, the character types remain unchanged. The men have other names but the forces they embody remain unchanged (262).

But he also has a sure means to stop this endless repetition, this periodic disintegration. The Great Yogeshwar declares, “We need purity and “to attain purity we have to shed off egoism, selfishness, stupidity and sacrifice” (262). Joshi accords the malaise of the society to the inherent incapacity of the humanity to live idealisms of any kind practically or in the difficulty to reform. He portends his vision of the future in the natural nemesis of flood. The Great Yogeshwar has the answer but to live it verbatim one needs to transcend the greed for power. Thus Arun
Joshi is a great artist in that he strives to go beyond the telling of a good and captivating story and endeavour to communicate something more significant and valuable that makes us reflect on our own lives, on the lives of our nation and on the history of human kind itself. At a time when materialism and individualism is eating into the innards of moral fabric of the society, sensitive individuals do suffer from the “crisis of the consciousness” where he or she does feel that something is wrong and that, is causing all of the suffering and misery so rampant says James Robinson. By consciousness he means “The simplest definition of consciousness is the manner in which we view the world”. The journey of life there is always the evolution of the consciousness from the ‘lowest form’ to the ‘highest form’ or the ‘enlightened form’ The change from one state of consciousness to the other changes our meaning of reality. This is described by James Robinson thus:

At the lowest form of consciousness, we are in the survival mode, living from crisis to crisis. At the highest form of consciousness, also known as enlightenment, we realize that what we perceive is only an illusion and nothing is real. When we are enlightened, we know that we create our own reality.

Arun Joshi’s characters given to identity conflict always show a change from the lowest level of consciousness to the highest kind when they start perceiving the reality around in their own way and are either happy or unhappy about them and create their own reality. This sorting out of Identity conflicts towards some kind of resolutions is the greatest achievement of Joshi’s characters and a fine paradigm of what is called as Identity formation or attainment of Ideal adulthood. The resolution of identity conflict is ingrained in the words of O.P. Mathur in “Survival and
Affirmation in Joshi’s Novels” thus “strong affirmations: right detachment and meaningful action, confrontation with evil and corruption, humanitarianism and love of the people, faith in the operation of destiny and of quest for peace, fulfillment and salvation within one’s own cultural pavement” (426).
Works Cited


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