CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

(A). A SURVEY OF INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH NOVELS AND THE NOVELISTS

Indian writing in English like all other new literatures of the world in English has been the outcome of national ferment and upsurge, which manifested itself as much in the socio-political life of the country. Creative writers like Romesh Chander Dutt, Bankim Chandra and Sri Aurobindo of the earlier time and K.S. Venkataramani, Bharathi Sarabhai, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao of the more recent years were themselves champions of the nationalist cause and spokesmen of the national culture. As K. S. Ramamurti observes:

Political urgency, reformistic motivation, journalistic impulse and creative imagination seem to have crises-crossed in the speeches and writings of the leaders like Surendranath Banerjee, Gopalakrishna Gokhale, V.S. Srinivasa Sastry, Sarojini Naidu and Jawaharlal Nehru and created patterns of writings which carry with them an unmistakable literary quality. ¹

Gandhi, who belongs to this class of personalities, has made a powerful impact on Indian thought, in general, and on Indian literatures, in particular.

Indian English novels like Toru Dutt's 'Bianca' or 'The Young Spanish Maiden' (1878) and R. C. Dutt's 'Lake of Palms' (1902); 'The
Slave Girl of Agra’ (1903) and Rabindranath Tagore’s ‘Home and the World’ (1919) and ‘The Wreck’ (1921) were written before the 1930s. But, while Binaca is incomplete, Tagore’s novels are translations from Bengali. So there was no school of Indian English fiction proper before the 1930s. As Makarand R. Paranjape says:

The early novelists used their works to promote social reforms. They espoused several liberal causes, campaigning for the education of women, the upliftment of depressed classes, widow-remarriage, and against child-marriage, dowry, superstition, sati, and untouchability, to list a few examples.²

However, as M. K. Naik says:

There came a sudden flowering of Indian fiction in English in the 1930s—a period during which the star of Gandhiji attained its meridian on the Indian horizon. Under the leadership of Gandhiji, the Indian freedom-struggle, already more than a generation old, became so thoroughly democratized that the freedom-consciousness percolated, for the first time to the very grass roots of Indian society and revitalized it to the core. It is possible to see a close connection between this development and the rise of the Indian novel in English.³

Incidentally it was the period in which Gandhiji became almost a household name. Naturally, the Indian English novelists were bound to give creative expression to the new political and social aspirations of the people. Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao who started writing during the 1930s convincingly demonstrate the impact of Gandhi on the Indian masses in their novels. Apart from these two, K. S. Venkataramani, R.K.
Narayana, Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya and Manohar Malgonkar have all written novels on the freedom struggle.

The events that followed independence have figured in the novels of Khuswant Singh, Anita Desai and Salman Rushdie. Makarand R. Paranjape observes:

The dominant ideology of several of these novels on the freedom struggle may be characterized as nationalistic. Of course, nationalism rarely reached a revolutionary dimension except in the works of those who write at the height of the freedom movement or who were themselves involved in it. With the rest, it became a comfortable majority position that they could easily adopt in retrospect of its obvious success— an attitude shared by most of us today. In other words, the Indian English novel remained bourgeois, albeit liberal.

Indian English Literature (IEL) refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. It is also associated with the works of members of the India diaspora, especially people like Salman Rushdie who was born in India. As a category, this production comes under the broader realm of Postcolonial literature the production from previously colonised countries such as India.

IEL has a relatively recent history; it is only one and a half centuries old. The first book written by an Indian in English was by Sake Dean Mahomet, titled Travels of Dean Mahomet. Mahomet's travel narrative was published in 1793 in England. In its early stages it was
influenced by the Western art form of the novel. Early Indian writers used English unadulterated by Indian words to convey an experience which was essentially Indian. Raja Rao’s ‘Kanthapura’ is Indian in terms of its storytelling qualities. Rabindranath Tagore wrote in Bengali and English and was responsible for the translation of his own work into English. Dhan Gopal Mukherjee was the first Indian author to win a literary award in the United States. Nirad C. Chaudhary, a writer of non-fiction, is best known for his 'The Autobiography of An Unknown Citizen' where he relates his life experiences and influences. He was a self-confessed Anglophile. P. Lal, a poet, translator, publisher and essayist, is the epitome of the literature, and besides translating the entire Mahabharata into English, has written many essays in defense of Indian literature in English. He also sponsors a press, Writers Workshop that has published over 3000 volumes of Indian writing in English.

R. K. Narayan is a writer who contributed over many decades and who continued to write till his death recently. He was discovered by Graham Greene in the sense that the latter helped him find a publisher in England. Graham Greene and Narayan remained close friends till the end. Similar to Thomas Hardy's ‘Wessex,’ Narayan created the fictitious town ‘Malgudi’ where he set his novels. Some criticise Narayan for the parochial, detached and closed world that he created in the face of the changing conditions in India at the times in which the stories are set. Others, such as Graham Greene, however, feel that through Malgudi they could vividly understand the Indian experience. Narayan's evocation of small town life and its experiences through the eyes of the
endearing child protagonist Swaminathan in Swami and Friends is a good sample of his writing style.

**LATER HISTORY**

Among the later writers, the most notable is Salman Rushdie, born in India, now living in the United States. Rushdie with his famous work Midnight’s Children (Booker Prize) 1981, Booker of Bookers 1992 ushered in a new trend of writing. He used a hybrid language—English generously peppered with Indian terms—to convey a theme that could be seen as representing the vast canvas of India. He is usually categorised under the magic realism mode of writing most famously associated with Gabriel García Márquez. Bharati Mukherjee, author of Jasmine 1989, has spent much of her career exploring issues involving immigration and identity with a particular focus upon the United States and Canada. Vikram Seth, author of ‘A Suitable Boy’ (1994) is a writer who uses a purer English and more realistic themes. Being a self-confessed fan of Jane Austen, his attention is on the story, its details and its twists and turns.

Shashi Tharoor, in his ‘The Great Indian Novel’ (1989), follows a story-telling (though in a satirical mode) as in the Mahabharata drawing his ideas by going back and forth in time. His work as UN official living outside India has given him a vantage point that helps for constructing an objective Indianness. Other authors include Anita Desai, Kiran Desai Arundhati Roy, Bapsi Sidhwa, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Raj Kamal Jha, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharti Kirchner, Prakash Kona, Rohinton Mistry and
Moncy Pothen. It would be useful at this point to bring in the recent debates on Indian Writing in English (IWE).

One of the key issues raised in this context is the superiority/inferiority of IWE as opposed to the literary production in the various languages of India. Key polar concepts bandied in this context are superficial/authentic, imitative/creative, shallow/deep, critical/uncritical, elitist/parochial and so on.

The views of Rushdie and Amit Chaudhuri expressed through their books The Vintage Book of Indian Writing and The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature respectively essentialise this battle. Rushdie's statement in his book—"the ironic proposition that India's best writing since independence may have been done in the language of the departed imperialists is simply too much for some folks to bear"—created a lot of resentment among many writers, including writers in English. In his book, Amit Chaudhuri questions:

Can it be true that Indian writing, that endlessly rich, complex and problematic entity, is to be represented by a handful of writers who write in English, who live in England or America and whom one might have met at a party?  

Chaudhuri feels that after Rushdie, IWE started employing magical realism, bagginess, non-linear narrative and hybrid language to sustain themes seen as microcosms of India and supposedly reflecting Indian conditions. He contrasts this with the works of earlier writers such as Narayan where the use of English is pure, but the deciphering of meaning needs cultural familiarity. He also feels that Indianness is a theme constructed only in IWE and does not articulate itself in the
vernacular literatures. (It is probable that the level of Indianness constructed is directly proportional to the distance between the writer and India.) He further adds

The post-colonial novel becomes a trope for an ideal hybridity by which the West celebrates not so much Indianness, whatever that infinitely complex thing is, but its own historical quest, its reinterpretation of itself.⁶

Some of these arguments form an integral part of what is called postcolonial theory. The very categorisation of IWE—as IWE or under post-colonial literature—is seen by some as limiting. Amitav Ghosh made his views on this very clear by refusing to accept the Eurasian Commonwealth Writers Prize for his book The Glass Palace in 2001 and withdrawing it from the subsequent stage. The renowned writer V.S. Naipaul, a third generation Indian from Trinidad and Tobago and a Nobel Prize laureate, is a person who belongs to the world and usually not classified under IWE. Naipaul evokes ideas of homeland, rootlessness and his own personal feelings towards India in many of his books.

Jhumpa Lahiri, a Pulitzer Prize winner from the U.S., is a writer uncomfortable under the label of IWE. Recent writers in India such as Arundhati Roy and David Davidar show a direction towards contextuality and rootedness in their works. Arundhati Roy, a trained architect and the 1997 Booker prize winner for her ‘The God of Small Things,’ calls herself a "home grown" writer. Her award winning book is set in the immensely physical landscape of Kerala. Davidar sets his ‘The House of Blue Mangoes’ in Southern Tamil Nadu. In both the
books, geography and politics are integral part of the narrative. In his novel 'Lament of Mohini' (2000), Shreekumar Varma touches upon the unique matriarchal system and the sammandham system of marriage as he writes about the Namboodiris and the aristocrats of Kerala.

As the number of Indian writers in English keeps increasing, with everyone to tell a story, and as publishing houses in India vie among themselves to discover the next new whiz-kid who will land up with world fame, it could become increasingly difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff. Research, Debates and Seminars on IWE continue with increasing frequency. However, it might be too early stage in the history of Indian writing in English to pass any final judgement.

A much over-looked category of Indian writing in English is poetry. As stated above, Rabindranath Tagore wrote in Bengali and English and was responsible for the translation of his own work into English. Other early notable poets in English include Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Joseph Furtado, Armando Menezes, Toru Dutt, Romesh Chandra Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and her brother Harendranath Chattopadhyaya.

In modern times, Indian poetry in English was typified by two very different poets. Dom Moraes, winner of the Hawthorne Prize at the precocious age of 19 for his first book of poems 'A Beginning' went on to occupy a pre-eminent position among Indian poets writing in English. Nissim Ezekiel, who came from India’s tiny Jewish community, created a voice and place for Indian poets writing in English and championed their work. Their contemporaries in English poetry in India were Arvind Mehrotra, Jayanta Mahapatra, Gieve Patel, A. K. Ramanujan,
Rajagopal Parthasarathy, Keki Daruwala, Adil Jussawala, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Eunice De Souza, Kersi Katrak, P. Lal and Kamala Das among several others.

A generation of exiles also sprang from the Indian diaspora. Among these are names like Agha Shahid Ali, Sujata Bhatt, Melanie Silgardo and Vikram Seth. The current generation of Indian poets writing in English includes Ranjit Hoskote, Jeet Thayil, Tabish Khair, Vijay Nambisan, H. Masud Taj, Rukmini Bhaya Nair, C.P. Surendran, Moniza Alvi, Imtiaz Dharker, Gayatri Mazumdar, Vivek Narayanan, Meena Kandasamy, Sharanya Manivannan, Gavin Barrett, Anjum Hasan, Jerry Pinto, Shreekumar Varma, Smita Agarwal, Arundhathi Subramaniam, Anand Thakore, Meena Alexander, Gayatri Majumdar, Thachom Poyil Rajeevan, Mary Anne Mohanraj, Kumar Vikram and Reetika Vazirani (deceased).

**INDO-NOSTALGIC WRITING**

Indo-Nostalgic writing is somewhat loosely defined term encompassing writings, in the English language, wherein nostalgia regarding the Indian Subcontinent, typically regarding India, represent a dominant theme or strong undercurrent. The writings may be memoirs, or quasi-fictionalized memoirs, travelogues, or inspired in part by real-life experiences and in part by the writer's imagination. This would include both mass-distributed 'Indo-Anglian' literatures put out by major publishing houses and also much shorter articles (e.g. feature pieces in mainstream or literary magazines) or poetry, including material published initially or solely in webzines.
Certainly, Indo-Nostalgic writings have much overlap with post-colonial literature but are generally not about 'heavy' topics such as cultural identity, conflicted identities, multilingualism or rootlessness. The writings are often less self-conscious and more light-hearted, perhaps dealing with impressionistic memories of places, people, cuisines, Only-in-India situations, or simply vignettes of 'the way things were'. Of late, a few Indo-nostalgic writers are beginning to show signs of 'long-distance nationalism', concomitant with the rise of nationalism within India against the backdrop of a booming economy.

Typically, the authors are either Western-based writers of Indian origin (e.g. Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry), or Western writers who have spent long periods of time in the Subcontinent, possibly having been born or raised in India, perhaps as the children of British Raj-era European expatriates or missionaries (e.g. Jim Corbett, Stephen Alter). Or, they may even be Anglo-Indians who have emigrated from the Subcontinent to the West. Third Culture often grows up to produce Indo-Nostalgic writings that exhibit palpably deep (and perhaps somewhat romanticized) feelings for their childhoods in the Subcontinent. Accordingly, another common theme in Indo-Nostalgic writing is "rediscovery" or its cousin, "reconnection".

Of course, for mass-distributed authors, Indo-Nostalgic writings may not necessarily represent all of their literary output, but certainly would represent a high percentage; it is their sweet spot, after all. Finally, it is worth nothing that the markets for such writers are almost entirely in the West; despite the rapid growth in the incomes of urban Indians, the sales of English-language literature within India (other than
books required for educational degrees or professional purposes) are minuscule compared to sales in the West, even if one includes pirated copies.

**THE MODERN PERIOD**

Poets such as Ghalib, lived and worked during the British era, when a literary revolution occurred in all the Indian languages as a result of contact with Western thought, when the printing press was introduced (by Christian missionaries), and when the influence of Western Educational Institution was strong. During the mid-19th century in the great ports of Mumbai, Calcutta, and Chennai, a prose literary tradition arose—encompassing the novel, short story, essay, and literary drama (this last incorporating both classical Sanskrit and Western models)—that gradually engulfed the customary Indian verse genres. Urdu poets remained faithful to the old forms while Bengalis were imitating such English poets as P. B. Shelley or T.S. Eliot.

Ram Mohan Roy’s campaign for introduction of scientific education in India and Swami Vivekananda’s works are considered to be great examples of the English literature in India. During the last 150 years many writers have contributed to the development of modern Indian literature, writing in any of the 18 major languages (as well as in English). Bengali has led the way and today has one of the most extensive literatures of any Indian language. One of its greatest representatives is Sir Rabindranath Tagore, the first Indian to win the Nobel Prize for literature (1913). Much of his prose and verse is available in his own English translations. Work by two other great 20th-century Indian leaders and writers is also widely known: the verse of the
Islamic leader and philosopher Sir Muhammad Iqbal, originally written in Urdu and Persian; and ‘The Autobiography of Mohandas K. Gandhi,’ ‘My Experiments with Truth,’ originally written in Gujarati between 1927 and 1929, is now considered a classic.

Several other writers are relatively well known to the West. They include Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) for his Glimpses of World History, Discovery of India and An Autobiography (1936); Mulk Raj Anand, among whose many works the early affectionate Untouchable (1935) and Coolie (1936) are novels of social protest; and R. K. Narayan, writer of novels and tales of village life in southern India. The first of Narayan’s many works, Swami and Friends, appeared in 1935; among his more recent titles are The English Teacher (1980), The Vendor of Sweets (1983), and Under the Banyan Tree (1985). Among the younger authors writing of modern India with nostalgia for the past is Anita Desai—as in Clear Light of Day (1980). Her In Custody (1984) is the story of a teacher’s fatal enchantment with poetry. Ved Mehta, although long resident in the U.S., recalls his Indian roots in a series of memoirs of his family and of his education at schools for the blind in India and America; among these works are ‘Vedi’ (1982) and ‘Sound Shadows of the New World’ (1986).

The other well-known writers are Dom Moraes (A Beginning), Nissim Ezekiel (The Unfurnished Man), P. Lal, A. K. Ramanujan (whose translations of Tamil classics are internationally known), Kamala Das, Arun Kolatkar and R. Parthasarathy; Toru Dutt; Sarojini Naidu; Aurobindo; Raja Rao, G.V. Desani, M. Ananthnarayanan, Bhadani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Arun Joshi, Kamala Markandaya, ,
Khushwant Singh, Nayantara Sahgal, O.V. Vijayan; Salman Rushdie; K. R. Sreenivasa Iyengar, C. D. Narsimhaiah and M. K. Naik etc. Among the latest other writers are Vikram Seth (A Suitable Boy), Allan Sealy (The Trotter-Nama), Sashi Tharoor (Show Business, The Great Indian Novel, Amitav Ghosh (Circle of Reason, Shadow Lines), Upamanyu Chatterjee (English August) and Vikram Chandra (Red Earth and Pouring Rain).

The Indian literary tradition is primarily one of verse and is also essentially oral. The earliest works were composed to be sung or recited and were so transmitted for many generations before being written down. As a result, the earliest records of a text may be later by several centuries than the conjectured date of its composition. Furthermore, perhaps because so much Indian literature is either religious or a reworking of familiar stories from the Sanskrit epics, ‘The Ramayana’ and ‘The Mahabharata,’ and the mythological writings known as Puranas, the authors often remain anonymous. Biographical details of the lives of most of the earlier Indian writers exist only in much later stories and legends.

In medieval Indian literature the earliest works in many of the languages were sectarian, designed to advance or to celebrate some unorthodox regional belief. Examples are the Caryapa Das in Bengali, Tantric verses of the 12th century, and the Lilacaritra (circa 1280), in Marathi. In Kannada (Kanarese) from the 10th century, and later in Gujarati from the 13th century, the first truly indigenous works are Jain romances; ostensibly the lives of Jain saints, these are actually popular tales based on Sanskrit and Pali themes. Other example was in
Rajasthani of the bardic tales of chivalry and heroic resistance to the first Muslim invasions - such as the 12th-century epic poem Prithiraja-raso by Chand Bardai of Lahore.

Most important of all for later Indian literature were the first traces in the vernacular languages of the northern Indian cults of Krishna and of Rama. Included are the 12th-century poems by Jaydev, called the Gitagovinda (The Cowherd's Song); and about 1400, a group of religious love poems written in Maithili (eastern Hindi of Bihar) by the poet Vidyapati were a seminal influence on the cult of Radha-Krishna in Bengal.

Much traditional Indian literature is derived in theme and form not only from Sanskrit literature but also from the Buddhist and Jain texts written in the Pali language and the other Prakrits (medieval dialects of Sanskrit). This applies to literature in the Dravidian languages of the south as well as to literature in the Indo-Iranian languages of the north. Invasions of Persians and Turks, beginning in the 14th century, resulted in the influence of Persian and Islamic culture in Urdu, although important Islamic strands can be found in other literatures as well, especially those written in Bengali, Gujarati, and Kashmiri. After 1817, entirely new literary values were established that remain dominant today.

The Urdu poets almost always wrote in Persian forms, using the ghazal for love poetry in addition to an Islamic form of bhakti, the masnavi for narrative verse, and the marsiya for elegies. Urdu then gained use as a literary language in Delhi and Lucknow. The ghazals of
Mir and Ghalib mark the highest achievement of Urdu lyric verse. The Urdu poets were mostly sophisticated, urban artists, but some adopted the idiom of folk poetry, as is typical of the verses in Punjabi, Pushtu, Sindhi or other regional languages.

(B). ARUN JOSHI AS A NOVELIST

Arun Joshi is one of the distinguished Indian English novelists. His fiction delineates the modernity of human condition and explores some fundamental problems of human existence. His fictional world marks a serious attempt at disentangling the convoluted maze. Joshi’s metaphor for life with its complexity and inexplicable mystery. The present part of this chapter is a comprehensive study of his fictional world. His fictional world is most strange. Peeling the multiple layers of artificiality, his protagonists seek to confront the mystery of life beyond the last labyrinth. His work represents a unique depiction of the dual between the internal and the external, the intuitive and the imposed.

He catches the bewilderment of the individual psyche, confronted with the overbearing socio-cultural environment and the ever-beckoning modern promise of self-gratification and self-fulfillment. In the face of this dual onslaught his protagonists—Ratan, Billy Biswas, Som, Sindi Oberoi and others—are seen poised tantalizingly at different junctures of the philosophic spectrum. Applying sociological, psycho-analytic, structural and other approaches of formal textual analysis, the essays in the present anthology take a fresh look at Arun Joshi’s works, revealing areas and stances, hitherto left unexplored, offer critical insights into the working of the protagonist’s minds, besides scrutinizing the rhetorical
devices and formal strategies, deployed by the novelist for coalescing the matter with the manner.

Joshi is one of the few India novelists in English who have successfully revealed subtleties and complexities of contemporary Indian life. He has produced very compelling works of fiction. Sensitively alive to the predicament of modern man, Joshi has ably delineated unfortunate consequences of the absence of values and faith in life. In fact, he has been rarely excelled in exerted by the complex character and demands of the society in which modern man is doomed to live. This awareness of man's rootlessness and the consequential anxiety is the keynote of Joshi's unique vision of the plight of modern man. His novels delineate human problems rather than issues arising out of ephemeral loyalties. Joshi marks a definite departure from the general run of Indian novelists in English and his experimentations in themes and technique have added new proportions to the art of the modern Indian English novel. He is one of those modern Indian novelists in English who have broken new grounds. In his search for new themes, he has renounced the larger world in favour of the inner man and has engaged himself in a search for the essence of human living. An outstanding novelist of human predicament, he has chartered in all his five novels the inner crisis of the modern man. The most besetting problem that man faces today is the problem of meaninglessness. As Edmund Fuller remarks, in our age 'man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but also from inner problem ... a conviction of isolation, randomness and meaninglessness in his way of existence.' The problem of meaninglessness is so pervasive that it
threatens to corrode every sphere of human life. It has been treated in considerable detail in American and European literature. Its treatment by Indian novelists like Joshi is no less interesting.

Man fails to perceive today the very purpose behind life and the relevance of his existence in a hostile world. Notwithstanding unprecedented scientific and technological advancements, which have added immensely to his physical pleasures and comforts, the contemporary man is doomed to find himself in a tragic muddle. The prevailing economic conditions culminating in the abject poverty of the masses and the economic squeeze of the middle class on the one hand, and the economic affluence of the newly rich on the other, the drag of social conventions and traditions, the fast-changing value system consequent upon the impact of rapid modernization accruing from industrialization and urbanization, the inter-generational tensions engendered with changing ethos—all these make increasing and often disturbing demands on the individual and contribute in their own ways to his sense of meaninglessness of life.

Joshi’s work in particular reads like the spiritual odyssey of the twentieth century man who has lost his spiritual moorings. Despite some differences in their approach, all of Joshi’s heroes are "men engaged in the meaning of life." The novelist has tried to project through their experiences the crisis of the urbanized and highly industrialized modern civilization along with its dehumanizing impact on the individual who is ever eager to find out and reaffirm the value of meaningful relatedness in life.
THE FOREIGNER (1968)

Arun Joshi’s first novel, The Foreigner (1968), explores in depth the problems of Sindi Oberoi. It has been remarked: ‘A strange feeling of aloneness and aloofness ... permeates the entire narrative and provides the necessary texture and structure to the novel.’  

In her review of the novel, Meenakshi Mukherjee describes the hero of The Foreigner as ‘a perennial outsider.’ Sindi is always lonely and ill at ease in the world in which he has to live. He belongs to no country, no people and regards himself as ‘an uprooted young man living (aimlessly) in the latter half of the twentieth century.’ Born in Kenya of an Indian father and a British mother, both of whom died early, Sindi is brought up by his uncle. He goes as an engineering student to Boston, where a foreign students’ party he meets June, an attractive American young woman, with whom he has a short-lived but passionate love-affair. His loneliness is apparent to anyone who meets and talks to him. Sindi is trapped in his own loneliness, which is accentuated by his withdrawal from the society around him.

At a deeper level, ‘The Foreigner’ can be viewed as attempt to plumb man’s perennial dilemmas. It is about things that Sindi wants – the courage to be and the capacity to love. His alienation is of the soul and not of geography. As he himself confides, his ‘foreignness’ lies ‘within’ him and drives him from crisis to crisis rendering it difficult for him to leave ‘himself’ behind wherever he goes. Right from the beginning, he is oppressed by a desire to find the meaning of life.’

While gathering miscellaneous experience in life, however, he becomes conscience of the impermanence of things. He says to June:
'nothing ever seems real to me, leave alone permanent. Nothing seems to be very important.' (107) His entire life is geared around his quest for permanence in life. When they have been together for some time, June suggests that they get married. But he tells her: 'We are alone, both you and I. That is the problem. And our aloneness must be resolved from within.' (126) He argues with himself on the meaning of life and its affairs.

Sindi's sufferings are manifestations of a spiritual crisis, which all sensitive people have to face today. His position is that of 'the dull school boy who always gets stuck with the same unanswerable questions.' (138) He wants peace, a capacity to love and the courage to live 'without desire and attachment.' (138) Above all he wants to conquer pain' and death, which 'wipes out everything" leaving only 'a big mocking hero.' (107) His various experiences in life, however, leave him with unanswered questions "like swollen carcasses strewn on river bank after a flood.' He is keen on knowing his 'purpose' in life, knowledge of which is essential before he can make earnest efforts to 'fulfill' it. (138) All his attempts in this regard, however, fizzle out 'like an ill-packed cracker.' (139) He squanders away the meager quarto of happiness given to him. He feels always being pushed 'on the giant wheel, going round and round, waiting for the fall.' (85)

The 'pathlessness' of the road to New York reminds Sindi of his own pathlessness. He also remembers the lines from a popular song, which runs: ‘who knows where the road will lead? Only a fool can say.’ He becomes conscious of the fact that for no less than twenty years he
himself ‘had moved whichever way life had led’ him. (196) He compares his meaningless existence to that of ‘an idiot without a keeper.’ (163)

Sindi is critical of the ultra-modern, mechanized society in which he is ‘considered quite a misfit.’ (15) Before ‘the abominable wheel of industrialization,’ he feels driven ‘like torn bits of paper on a windy day.’ (43) The strain of adjustment on him proves intolerable. The emptiness that surrounds him leaves him ‘completely dazed’ or in ‘just one long coma.’ It was, he observes, ‘as if somebody had given me a big dose of anesthesia.’ (141) The feeling of his nakedness in the hands of existence grew every passing day. He felt some ‘abominable hands groping and probing’ into his soul, ‘ripping dry scars open and dipping into old wounds.’ (48) He begins to question Mrs. Blyth: ‘And what use have you made of your extra height and extra years? You carry heavier guns and have longer time to make each other unhappy, that's all. Can you call that an achievement?’ (102)

It is this lack of a definite frame of reference and a system of values that is responsible for Sindi’s problems. He feels himself stranger in India to both the corrupt rich man and the half-naked struggling labourer. The common people, he finds, ‘have the benefit of their delusions,’ which ‘protect them from the lonely meaninglessness’ of life. (126) But Sindi has no delusions to bank upon. He is not ‘fortunate enough to have been born with their simpleness’ of life. (126) His existential drifting over the surface of the earth and his experimentation with self only intensify his dismal loneliness and acute sense of meaninglessness of life. He tries to seek, finally, in detachment a solution to his problems.
THE STRANGE CASE OF BILLY BISWAS (1971)

Joshi's another novel called 'The Strange Case of Billy Biswas' (1971) also aims at delineating the human predicament. 'Billy, like Sindi is in search of a human world of emotional fullness—a world of meaningful relatedness.' Billy is aware of the deeper layers of his personality and feels totally alienated from the superficial reality of life. It is significant to note that Van Goth's turbulent career 'held considerable fascination for Billy at one time.' 10 (13) Billy's expression itself is symptomatic of 'a mixture of nearly all those emotions that one tends to associate with a great predicament.' (43-44) 'No other man' than him, we are told, 'so desperately pursued the tenuous thread of existence to its bitter end.' (8) Renouncing his past, his family and the everyday world, the rich, sophisticated and U.S. educated Billy goes in search of the meaning of life. The novel probes into his ‘dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish for ever, hidden from the dazzling light of the sun.’ (8)

As a student in America, Billy is less interested in books on anthropology than the places described in them. He would like to learn with real interest and absorption about ‘the aboriginalness of the world’ (14) and it is ‘around his interest in the primitive man that his entire life had been organized.’ (14) He has the first glimpse of ‘the other side’ of his personality at a music ‘session,’ which keeps on exerting ‘a mesmeric pull’ on him. (18, 21) Soon he finds himself ‘itching to be back’ to a congenial atmosphere. (27) His itch for India is an itch for realization and for the relevance of life.
On returning to India, however, he feels like a fish out of water and sees no other way out but to fly from the civilized, sophisticated modern society. He makes a trip to the tribal wilderness – ‘the vast emptiness of central India’ (19) and vanishes into the saal forests for the Maikala Hills with a view to leading the life of a tribal and carving for his soul an inner shrine of peace and happiness.

Romi Sahai meets Billy after a lapse of three years and is surprised to find him in a mental condition, which is ‘closer to madness, the terrible madness of a man who after great sin and much suffering finally finds himself in the presence of his God.’ (142) Billy's behavior makes him think, "as though some part of him (Billy) had gone on strike.'

Billy's experience just before he takes the momentous decision to make the final departure into the jungle on the second day of his expedition has mystic undertones and reminds us of Siddhartha's renunciation of his wife and child. Billy felt as if ‘the inheritors of the cosmic night’ (121) were ‘waiting and walking and staring' at him and he was the first man on earth facing the earth's first night.' (119) His departure is a prelude to an arduous quest for something beyond himself. It is not an escape from life and its realities but an escape into what he considers to be the 'real' life, far from the madding crowd and the sordid, meaningless existence in the civilized world. It is in the primitive tribal life that he finds his own fulfillment and the essence of human existence. When he comes into contact with Bilasia, who reflects. According to him, the very quintessence of the primitive force, he feels that he has ‘suddenly discovered that bit of himself that he has
searched for all his life and without which his life is nothing more than a poor reflection of a million other.’(142)

Billy never feels at home in the sophisticated world. He finds something basically wrong with it because it is ‘hung on this peg of money.’ (97) He often wonders, ‘Whether civilization is anything more than the making and spending of money.’ (96) He is terribly unhappy when he finds himself ‘tied up in knot by a stifling system of expectations’ of this mundane world,’ (127)

Meena, Billy’s wife, represents the ambition and superficiality of the modern phony society. Meena and Billy are not made for each other. She fully knows that ‘things are falling apart:’ and that ‘Billy had gone through ... a sea change.’ (74) ‘All I know,’ says she, ‘is that Billy is getting stranger with every passing day.’ Billy’s departure might have been avoided if only she had possessed ‘a rare degree of empathy or even a sufficient idea of human suffering.’ (185) It is her lack of understanding that lands Billy to the edge of despair culminating, subsequently, in the seduction of Rima Kaul.

Billy is thus ‘a refugee from civilization.’ (140) The tenacity with which he pursues his quest in ‘an incoherent and meaningless world’ is really astounding. Billy withdraws from the civilized world because it begins to make inroads into his own character. He remembers that all his life he had been confusedly driving towards his real self. Billy’s search for meaning, however, is conducted in a very hostile atmosphere and he has to pay a heavy price for it.

THE APPRENTICE (1974)
Joshi’s another novel, ‘The Apprentice’ (1974), also depicts, though less exhaustively, the plight of the contemporary man, who is “sailing about in a confused society without norms, without direction, without even perhaps, a purpose.” The protagonist, Ratan Rathor, comes of an impoverished middle-class family. He has to find his own way and pay his own price in this world. He is the child of a double inheritance. His father was patriotic and courageous, but his mother was endowed with worldly wisdom.

Torn by these two conflicting philosophies of life, Ratan finds it extremely difficult from the very beginning to live smoothly in the "petrified and frozen" world of civilization. He has no other way but to mediated appearances and eradicated with the world of ordinary decencies. He naturally, faces tension and resentment precisely because he has to put up with totally divergent social norm and expectations. He is convinced that life is characterized by chaos, absurdity, brutality, disorganization and insensitivity. Faced with the dehumanizing materialism of today an unfortunately circumstanced person like Ratan, who is endowed with a heightened sensibility, feels crushed under the growing weight of meaninglessness and isolation from his innermost nature and surroundings.

Ratan undergoes thus a profound change. The man who grew violent and rebellious even at the thought of "careers and bourgeois filth," becomes in due course "a thick-sin and washout." While he tries to seek "solace from the annals of corruption," his dying conscience keeps on pricing him. At every stage he stays an initial resistance only to discover the futility of his efforts.
Ratan is keeping on finding out the purpose of life and all its activities. But he takes almost a life-time to free himself from the shackles of the valueless urban civilization. In his eagerness, he visits the temple to derive courage from the world of religion. To his horror, however, he discovers that even religion is not free from corruption; it is corrupt and can hardly be expected to provide any solutions to various problems of this meaningless world. He is shaken out of his moral inertia when he sees the faceless head of his friend, the Brigadier. He tries to restore his mental peace by undergoing, finally, the most difficult penance in the world; every mooring on his way to the office, he wipes off outside the temple the shoes of the congregation. Joshi presented his characters with the real quality of humanity.

**THE LAST LABYRINTH (1981)**

Joshi’s Sahitya Akademi Award winner novel, ‘The Last Labyrinth’ (1981), probes into the turbulent inner world of an industrialist, Som Bhaskar, who becomes a millionaire at the age of thirty. He is married a woman of his choice, who has borne him two children and is ‘all that a wife could be, ‘yet he’ goofed it all up’ 12 (40) and is relentlessly driven by undefined hungers. Amidst intriguing juxtapositions, the novel plunges into a haunting world of life, love, God and Death, the greatest of all mysteries – ‘the last labyrinth.’ With its spiritual and sensuous dimensions interwoven, it is a story of deeper seeking through love. The novel raises some pertinent questions about life and its meaning and tries to unravel the still unresolved mysteries of God and Death. He tries to quench his ravaging desires by possession of an object, a business
enterprises and a woman named Anuradha of indeterminate age and origin, tall, handsome and tender.

Anuradha, who knew him so well, explains the reasons of his unhappiness and dissatisfaction. She says, ‘You don’t know what is wrong and you don’t know what you want.’ (106) Leela Sabnis thinks that his troubles originate from his habit of ‘always playing games with the world.’ She tells him bluntly: ‘You are lonely on the one hand. On the other, you have built a shell around yourself ... You are bored, bored still in your little shell. That is the long and short of it.’ (80)

Som’s troubles get multiplied not only because of ‘the terrible loneliness’ of his heart (23) but also because of his awareness of the lack of relevance in life. He finds the world meaningless. As a student he was upset by futile activities of life and begged the Headmaster’s wife ‘to explain the meaning of it at all.’ As a consequence of his grim experiences in life, Som develops ‘a new loathing for the squalid world.’ (46) He is disgusted with the people and himself. Som rushes about in search of happiness and meaningfulness in life. ‘How happy I must be, ‘he exclaims, ‘to have no problems in life.’ (98) But life is teeming with troubles and pains, which are all the more keenly felt by sensitive people. The greatest dilemma of human life is its ultimate reality, i.e. death. Like his father, Som is vexed by the mere thought of it.

Som is urged on by a keen desire to know the meaning of life. But he fails to make any headway in this regard. The world remains to him ‘a mysterious world, as pretentious and meaningless as the holy bulls of
Benaras.’ (108) He tries his best to have a peep into its mystery. His interest in its secrets is genuine.

Som’s search for the secrets of life becomes hopelessly complicated because of his yearning to have the best of both the worlds – the world of matter and spirit. He maintains, ‘What I needed, perhaps, was something, somebody, somewhere in which the two worlds combined. (82) Such wishes are not normally granted and one is in for frustration and disillusionment. Som also suffers in life, as his friend K. puts it, on account of his proneness to ‘romanticizing ... blowing things larger than life.’ (189) Speaking of the unfortunate situation his is trapped in, Som himself observes:

In his desperation, Som even plans to visit temples every evening. He begins, ultimately, to nurture self-pity and, like one who had been completely vanquished by life, utters the terrible death wish. ‘A peaceful death’ – that is all he wants, for he is mercilessly torn apart by his doubts. (164) He is eaten up by his own ‘strange mad thoughts’ (223) and is incapable of paying adequate heed to the world and its normal demands. His flourishing business is reduced to ‘a big mass.’ (223) Finally, when he tries to kill himself, he is stopped by Geeta who shakes him ‘gently as though rousing a man from sleep.’ (224) We are given to believe that the unquestioning trust of his intelligent and understanding wife will restore peace to his life.

**THE CITY AND THE RIVER (1990)**

This novel is published after a gap of nine years by Vision Books, New Delhi. Joshi has come of the murky and suffocating tunnel
traversed by Som Bhaskar, and offered his readers a glimpse of a new light. Although in many respects it strikes a different tone from his earlier novels. ‘The City And The River’ is, in fact, a continuation of and an improvement upon Joshi’s major thematic concerns. Once again, Joshi has set out on a quest for spiritual commitment, for a still center amidst the turmoil and uncertainty of contemporary life. The anguish human quest for survival, and for a better alternative, in the labyrinth of contemporary life with its inescapable paraphernalia of materialism, corruption, cynicism, alienation and dwindling spiritual faith, has been the leit motif of Joshi’s fictional works.

This novel is the ‘parable of the times’ set in a wider backdrop and using a artistically satisfying mixture of prophecy, fantasy and a startlingly ingenious vision of Real politik, the book is a severe commentary on the times, containing echoes of the Indian Emergency in 1970s. It reflects the Indian reality but is set in an imaginary locale. With a view to achieving wider significance and, perhaps, to avoiding controversy, Joshi has placed this novel in a ‘temporal setting which is deliberately confused’. Hermits, Yajnas, sacrifice; primitive people co-exist with electronic surveillance, ultra modern lasers, helicopters, videos, spying and inquisition. In fact, the novel moves on two stories in an Arian city, which is governed by a sinisterly benevolent dictator called the Grand Master and his Council of Advisors. It is a story of great struggle and terrible suffering, of idealism and exemplary spiritual courage shown by a beleaguered people who resist till death the authoritarian tendencies let loose by the effort of an ambitious and myopic ruler to become a king. It contains a severe indictment of the
corruption and malpractice of the political leaders, businessmen, Police and Army chiefs.

This novel presents the reality of the modern political parties in India. This is the fusion of satire and philosophical discussion held together by a well-written story which might be described as a political novel. In this novel there is a parable of human choice between allegiance to God and allegiance to man, or rather between religion and politics. It narrates how men, who are essentially free to choose, create by their conscious and free choice the environment they live in. This novel also presented ‘the relevance of God to men’s choice and whether, all said and done, the world indeed belongs to God and to no one else’ in brief this novel is like, the earlier novels of Joshi, about the quest for spiritual commitment, for ‘an inner spirit that is beyond any religion.’ The two levels of the narrative– the political and the metaphysical– are inextricably woven to articulate Joshi’s vision. The correspondence becomes almost perfect. This novel is suffused with the indigenous sensibility of the novelist, his cultural and spiritual ethos. The karmic principle of the Gita is central in this novel. Gandhian influence is also can be seen in this novel. This is the reflection of Indian religious thoughts. It presents some important facets of India’s religious thought as it presents with unaltering candour and intelligent wit a grim commentary on the country’s political reality with its corruption, horror and authoritarian tendencies. Politics becomes in novelist’s hands useful means of presenting a vision of life, which is, by all means, a spiritual one. The book Review praised this novel:
'A sharp observation, an unflinching candour, an intelligent wit, combined with easy flowing prose, lend the story a unique charm that only a well written period novel can evince…'  

This novel is divided into eleven sections including a Prologue and an Epilogue. The Prologue strikes a fresh note in Joshi’s fiction. Set in an imaginary locale, it introduces an aged but agile guru called the Great Yogeshwara, and his disciple, ‘The Nameless One.’ (09) They have lived together for thirty years in a hermitage amidst snow-covered mountains. The great sage has taught the Nameless–One ‘the ancient tongue that no one understood’ the thoughts that a race of men had in this tongue left behind’ (10) this novel receives its dramatic tension from the opposition between the city and the river which are two ‘opposing symbols’ even though in the totality of the novelist’s vision they are not irreconcilable. Both the palace Astrologer who is the mentor of the Grand Master and de facto ruler of the city, and the hermit of the Mountain who identifies himself with the river and the river populace, are disciple of the Great Yogeshwara. Joshi presents the life of river men:

There is a man living in a boat on the river. The boat has neither oars nor a boatman. All day it floats up and down the river. The man sleeps or watches the riverbank. At sun set the boat starts moving towards land. Where it touches the man steps out. He spends the night with the boatmen. He tells them many amusing stories including the story of the king.  

The river, on whose banks the events of the novel unfold, has at once a physical presence and a symbolic reality. The story of this novel
contains the life and activity of the people who work out their daily chores on the riverbanks. In fictional terms, the river populace—the boatmen as they are called—constitute the principal opposition group of the power and authority of the city's rulers. They insist on offering their allegiance to the river alone, which is for them 'a symbol of the divine mother. This novel, despite its weight of metaphysical truth, is not a philosophical tract recording the utterances of its characters and vocalizing the abstruse doctrines of an ancient tradition. Joshi's success lies in the fact that the philosophical observations are presented so naturally in fictional terms that this novel ceases to read like a book. The main theme of this novel is political and mental conflict between men and power and the human quest for perfection.

This novel carries the inconclusive quest of Som Bhaskar in the last labyrinth beyond the intellectual effort to find an equation and an internal system of order, implying that such an order not only demands total commitment and acceptance of personal and collective responsibilities but also offers a hope of redemption. Indeed, as a reaffirmation of Indian wisdom and as an experiment of a parable as a fictional mode to convey mythic truths and political satire, this is the remarkable tour de force in contemporary Indian English fiction.

Thus, we can say that Joshi's fictional world is an informed and artistic portrayal of individual minds overpowered by conflicting urges within themselves. It highlights the basic contradictions of the post-Independence Indian society with its scientific and technological progress, growth of materialism, spiritual degeneration and confusion of values. His novels articulate the problems of Westernized Indians who
have somehow lost their spiritual moorings and suffer from cynicism, estrangement from the community, intellectual doubt and crisis of faith. They reveal Joshi’s deep concern for the almost institutionalized corruption, moral decline and precipitate erosion of values in post-independence India.

His fictional world is revelation of a world where the self confronts man and the questions of his existence. His search is directed at the inscrutable region of human psyche and he enters into that mysterious region of uncertainty and inscrutability. This effort of his makes him a great artist of psychological insight. Reading Joshi's novels is not always a smooth experience; there are moments when one is assailed by doubts and questions. There is ‘something’ that attracts one's attention and grips. Joshi delves into the inner recesses of human psyche where he finds instincts and impulses at work; he seeks a process of the apprehension of reality, which may lead him to the world of the core of the truth of man’s life. He realizes man’s uniqueness and loneliness in an indifferent and inscrutable universe.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2 Makarand R. Paranjape Indian Political Thinking in the Twentieth Century Nooroji to Nehru: An Introductory Survey, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, P. 221.


7 Ibid., p. 168.

8 The Foreigner, Oriental Paperbacks New Delhi, 1977, p. 54.

9 The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, Oriental Paperbacks New Delhi, 1977, p. 84.

10 The Apprentice, Oriental Paperbacks New Delhi, 1977, p. 45.

11 The last Labyrinth, Oriental Paperbacks New Delhi, 1977, p. 15.

12 The City And The River Oriental Paperbacks New Delhi, 1977, p. 9

13 The Book Review

14 Ibid., p. 98

15 Ibid., p. 98