CHAPTER IV

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas
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The Strange Case of Billy Biswas (1971) is the second novel of Arun Joshi. It revolves round the crisis of self, the resultant agony and Man’s quest for affirmation. Though it has some similarities with its predecessor, The Foreigner, it is another version of Man’s quest for understanding his self by shunning the world (Maya) through knowledge (Jnana). As The Foreigner was inspired by the theory of Karmayoga, The Strange Case draws its motivation from Jnanayoga (The Way of Knowledge). Deeply influenced by the oriental theories, the novel attempts to explore “that mysterious underworld which is the human soul.”¹ The despondency of its protagonist Billy Biswas is the result of his estrangement in modern society and civilization that forces him to take refuge in the world of tribals. The dedication of the novel, “To my father/in memory of thirty years of love and friendship”, shows how the protagonist has the sympathies of its creator. Arun Joshi deals with the theme of alienation in this novel for finding answers to some perennial questions. The motif of quest permeates the whole narrative as the novelist himself has admitted in his interview: “My novels are essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and of myself.”² The Strange Case of Billy Biswas develops the theme of anxiety and alienation more effectively than the treatment meted
out in his first novel, *The Foreigner*. It seems quite appropriate to quote K.R.S. Iyengar’s remark here: “In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), Arun Joshi has carried his exploration of the consciousness of hapless rootless people a stage further, and has revealed to our gaze new gas-chambers of self-forged misery”\(^3\). Billy’s quest is deeper than Sindi’s. Billy is not uprooted in the sense Sindi is. Billy has a family. He is not “anchorless” in the way Sindi is. He is born and brought up in a fairly comfortable background. He comes “from the upper crust of Indian society”\(^4\). His family has “all claims of aristocracy”. (12). It had originally come from Bengal. His grandfather had been the Prime Minister of a famous Princely State in Orissa. His father, after completing his law studies at the Inner Temple, had practised law at Allahabad and Delhi. He had also been the Indian ambassador to a European country. Billy has had his education in Britain and America. At the time when he is in America, his father is a judge of India’s Supreme Court. He is a lecturer of the Delhi University, after having completed his Ph.D. in Anthropology. He has a friend like Romi who is so affectionate to him. Yet Billy, it so appears, has little interest in the phoney, hot-shot and sordid modern civilization. The external attractions of the so-called civilized set-up of society do not matter at all for him. He is much interested in the exploration of his inner being. Romi rightly remarks:
If life's meaning lies not in the glossy surfaces of our pretensions but in those dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish forever, hidden from the dazzling light of the sun, then I do not know of any man who sought it more doggedly and, having received a signal, abandoned himself so recklessly to its cell. In brief, I know of no other man who so desperately pursued the tenuous thread of existence to its bitter end, no matter what trails of glory or shattered hearts he left behind in his turbulent wake. (8)

The story is unfolded from the witness narrator point of view. The narrator Romesh Sahai (Romi) is a friend of the protagonist Billy whom he has met as a student in New York. Romi performs the function of an involved friend and a detached narrator. As the story progresses Romi and Billy get more and more involved and both take the tale to an end. Despite being a concerned friend in Billy’s life, Romi finds Billy’s character to be an enigma. He disclaims in the beginning of the narrative that he has understood Billy:

As I grow old, I realize that the most futile cry of man is his impossible wish to be understood. The attempt to understand is probably even more futile. If in spite of this I propose to relate Billy's story, it is not so much because I claim to have understood him as it is on account of a deep and unrelieved sence of wonder that in the middle of the twentieth century, in the heart of Delhi's smart society, there should have lived a man of such extraordinary obsessions.⁵
Romi underlines his modesty still further, "I had neither the imagination nor the obsessive predilection of Billy Biswas." (150) This confession reminds one of Conrad's narrator in *Under Western Eyes* who begins by disclaiming "the possession of those high gifts of imagination and expression which would have enabled my pen to create for the reader the personality of the man who called himself... Razumov". Such statements highlight the dispassionate tone of the novel.

*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* starts with depicting Billy as a man of intellect, profound sensibility and unusual obsessions. The son of a judge of Supreme Court of India Billy belongs to a rich and respectable family. A glance at his library indicates his choiest interests:

Two of the stacks were devoted exclusively to anthropology. The third presented a mélange that to my mind, made no sense at all. It contained every thing from old copies of the *National Geographic Magazine* to the latest pornography that was being peddled in Times Square: from learned treatise on black magic and witchcraft to a critique of the theory of relativity. What struck me most was a series of nearly forty biographies including several on Van Gogh whose turbulent career, I learnt later, held considerable fascination for Billy at one time. On top of one of the book-cases were piled at least a hundred albums of jazz music. Those were played almost non-stop when he was in the apartment (9)

Romi meets Billy while searching an accommodation in New York. Billy offers to share with him his apartment in Harlem, the black
colony in America. Though Billy could very well afford to live in some other posh areas like Manhattten; as he comes of an “upper crust of Indian society” (5), he has chosen to live there because, as he tells Romi, he finds it “the most human place.” Romi accepts Billy's offer of sharing the flat which develops into an unusual friendship, remaining till the end of Billy's life.

On the very first day in his room, Billy tells Romi of Avocambo, a play running off Broadway and it gives an insight into the working of his mind:

It is quite an odd play, really. This chap from New York, quite educated and all that, goes down to the Congo and is so incensed by the heat and the light and the primitive music that he just goes out with his shotgun and starts killing everybody. What are fascinating, of course, are the workings of the deranged mind, what he says between each shot (6).

Billy likes the play because “one can quite imagine something like that happening to oneself” (7). It is also significant to note that the anthropologist Van Gogh's turbulent career “held considerable fascination for Billy at one time” (9). Though Billy belongs to the upper crust of Indian society, he stays at Harlem because he wants to realize his self to the full. He finds Harlem the only place where he may nurture his sense of belonging by wholly preserving his identity. His constant want to
identify himself with his environment is reflected in his aberrant behaviour, his way of living, eating and dressing and even thinking. It is for this that their American host describes Billy as an “anarchist” and “thoroughly crazy even by Indian standards” (5).

Billy’s predicament becomes a strange case as he turns out to be a split personality-split between “primitive” and “civilized”. His strange case becomes “a universal myth of the primitive in the heart of man ever alienating him from the superficial and polished banalities of modern civilization”. Billy finds modern civilization fast degenerating, as well as normless and meaningless. He himself describes:

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 upper 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 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 go to one of those wretched restaurants and dance with their wives to a thirty-year-old 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 adulterirs. (178-79).

He finds himself misfit in a world like this and is in search of a place where he may not feel self-estranged, socially isolated and
culturally uprooted. His deep love for primitivism is an inborn propensity. This is why he chooses in New York to live in Harlem, a place where the Negroes live, although he could very well afford to stay in good hotels in some other area like Manhattan. But his quest for self-realization summons him to live in Harlem which is “the most human place he could find”(9) where he may feel a sense of belonging in the real sense of the term.

From his early childhood, Billy’s case has been “strange”. At the age of fourteen, he goes to Bhubaneswar: “The first thing that hit me about Bhubaneswar was the landscape”. (123). He finds “something much more insubstantial” about the place. One afternoon, he visits Konark. The sculptures at Konark, it seems to him, are capable of giving him a solution to his questions about the problem of his identity. He is led to understand:

What appealed to me was the shades of the same spirit that I spoke of although I knew then, 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. (124).

One night, he happens to go to the tribal people with his uncle’s chauffeur. With deep interest he watches the tribals dancing, drinking,
singing and making love. Extremely sensitive as he is, he feels a strange sensation: “Something similar happened to me then” (124-25). He records the impressions thus:

First a great shock of erotic energy passed through me, although, mind you, there was nothing particularly erotic about the whole business except once when a boy and a girl, their arm around each other, loitered past me giggling and tumbled into the bush beyond. The shock of erotic energy was followed by the same feeling of unreality or, as I said, a reality sharper than any I had ever known. It was a bit like having taken a dose of a hallucinatory drug, something I realized many years later when I was in Mexico. I remember saying to myself, even though I was only fourteen, I remember saying Something has gone wrong with my life. This is where I belong. This is what I have always dreamt of. (125)

Since then, Billy feels restless as Som Bhasker does in The Last Labyrinth after his experience in a cave. Whenever he listens to folk music or drum beating, he feels altogether transported to the world of the primitive which is different from that of the so-called civilized society. Like Sindi, he does not feel at ease in American society: “White America, he said, was much too civilized for him”. (9). He chooses to live in Harlem, which is “one of the worse slums of New York City”. (9).

It is Tuula Lindgren, the Swedish lady with “extraordinary intuition” (177) who understands the dilemma of Billy’s life. It is she
who knows what is going on “in the dark, inscrutable, unsmiling eyes of Bimal Biswas”. (19). Tuula, being far away from the commercial civilization, stands as a primitive force. She has mastered hypnotism, intuition and auto suggestion. She has an insight to see into the life of thing. Billy feels at home in her company and is fond of her. She is getting advanced training in psychiatric social work at Columbia in the United States. She is “strongly interested in India, especially in her tribal people, a subject about which Billy knew enough to keep her engaged not one but a hundred nights”. (17-18). She tells him about the theories of Freud, Carl Jung, Adler and Karl Menninger.

It was with Tulla Lindgren that Billy had spent all those summer evenings and that she was the second person who had any clue to what went on in the dark, inscrutable, unsmiling eyes of Bimal Biswas. (19).

With her he comes to have his first glimpse of “the other side” that summer. He explains to Tulla:

The other side. You know what I mean, don’t you? Most of us are aware only of the side on which we are born, but there is always the other side, the valley beyond the hills; the hills beyond the valley. (18-19)

It is towards this “other side” (18) or “other thing” (189) for which he continues his quest throughout his life: “That Other Thing was, and is, after all, what my life is all about”. (189)
The first part of the novel gives us glimpses into Billy's strangeness as a man and also of his liking for the primitive and unsophisticated people. Romi narrates Billy's story in New York and Delhi from his own observations. They are both around twenty two when they meet each other. He is soon impressed by Billy's "almost inhumanly sharp eyes" (39). In America, Billy is drawn towards books on Anthropology and he tells Romi:

All I want to do in life is to visit the places they describe, meet the people who live there, find out about the aboriginalness of the world (10).

It is around Billy's interest in the primitive life that his entire personality has been structured. Talking to Romi he tells of his "glimpse of the other side:" This other side concerns the primitive life untouched by sophistication and restraints of the civilized world.

Tuula Lindgren, understands the dilemma of Billy's life fully. She comes to know what goes in his "dark, inscrutable, unsmiling eyes" (15). She tells Romi that Billy is an extraordinary person and feels inside him a strange force:

A great force, urkraft, ...a primitive force. He is afraid of it and tries to suppress it...But it is very strong in him, much stronger than in you or me. It can explode any time (19)
She finds him “obsessed with a latent quest” (176). Romi on his part notes Billy's urge for the primitive at a music party at George's apartment. As Billy plays the pair of Bongo drums for nearly quarter of an hour, a hush descends on the atmosphere of the room. Romi and others feel the mesmeric pull of the music that holds everyone by its sheer vitality. The narrator recalls:

I am certain it was nothing very skilful or sophisticated from the viewpoint of music. What it had thought I think, was a mesmeric pull that held us by its sheer vitality. Little packages of sound... falling in one rhythm or another, creating patterns of sound that deep down I knew were not merely that but carried a more fundamental message although what it was I, or Billy for that matter, could not have said. They blazed through our liquor-stimulated sensibilities, like little meteors through the astral night, lighting up landscapes, hills and valleys, gaping charms of the mind that are otherwise forever shrouded in the black mist of the unconscious (17)

It awakens latent primitive urges in the audience and draws towards him a Negro girl who sits very close to Billy so that their knees nearly touch. Romi and Tuula are unable to find an explanation for Billy's erratic behaviour. Billy's reply is quite evasive because he says “I must have been disgustingy drunk...what else?” (18) But Romesh's description of Billy's “eating little and talking even less” (20), drinking almost nothing, sitting silently in a corner despite abundance of all that proves that Billy feels secluded there. He does not drink much to have forgotten
himself but makes an effort to attract the attention of the persons at the party. He succeeds in this and soon everybody's eyes are drawn towards him. Even during long walks with Billy, Romi finds his talks “...revealing not only the mind of the speaker but also the dark unknowable layers of the mysterious world that surrounded us” (22). Later he learns from Billy how he often had hallucinations: “It would be like a great blinding flash during which I would be totally unaware of anything else” (179). Tuula with whom Billy discusses his strange dreams, tells him, “in a very mild form such hallucinations occurred in everyone—all art in a way flowed out of them,” but she advises him not to “encourage them too much” (179).

The Bhuvaneshwar episode presents Billy's personality to be still more mysterious. He tells Romi how at the age of fourteen, he had experienced the urge to live like a primitive man in the primitive world. He had received the intimations of his primitive self from the moment he emerged from the railway station. He remembers: “It was as though a slumbering part of me had suddenly come awake” (120). It had seemed to him that the sculptures at Konark could give him a solution to his questions about the problem of his anguish and identity: “Who was I? Where had I come from? Where I was going?” (20). 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 (122). One night, he
happens to go to the tribal people with his uncle's chauffeur and with deep interest he watches the tribals dancing, drinking, singing and being extremely sensitive. Billy feels a strange sensation.

While Romi is in America trying to understand Billy's psyche, he receives an urgent message of his father's death. Romi returns to India and after putting in great efforts here he enters the Indian Administrative Service. Billy on the other hand, returns to India after the completion of his doctoral degree in Anthropology. Even on his return to India, he does not feel homely and temperamentally satisfied at home. A sense of emptiness pervades him. He suffers from a sense of loss of socio-cultural ethos, finds himself in a vacuum, which his psyche is unable to comprehend. He experiences a strange feeling standing in a temple at the time of aarti.

I stood before the idols, my hands folded, my head bowed, incense of droop tickling my nostrils. I stood there while the pious voices of men, women, and children, rose and fell about me like little waves of a benevolent sea. What I had hoped to achieve by my visit I do not know. As I stood there, my eyeballs restive behind the quivering lids, it suddenly dawned upon me that it as a all a great waste, that the god who awaited me now was one to which no temples could be built. What awaited me now, I realized was Fate. (93-94)

It is such a moment of awareness that prompt, a man to take certain decisions to fill the void of his life. Billy's visit to the temple proves that
he is trying to adjust himself socially but finds that he is just wasting his
time by living in a civilization where people are simply busy making and
spending money. This search for viable alternatives lands him as a faculty
member into Delhi University where he starts undertaking numerous
expeditions for coming closer to primitive communities in hills and
forests. Billy's antipathy to the city folk and their quality of life is
reflected in the following extracts from his letters written to Tuula at
different points of time:

I see a roomful of finely dressed men and women seated on
downy sofas and while I am looking at them...they turn into a
kennel of dogs yawning yawing (their large teeth showing) or
snuggling against each other or holding whisky glasses in their
furred paws (92).

...the so called thinkers and philosophers and men like that...are
hired to find solution, throw light...on complications caused by
this making and spending of money. (92-93)

...we are swiftly losing what is known as one's grip of life. Why
else this constant blurring of reality? Who am I? Who are my
parents? My wife? My child? What accident of creation has
brought us together (93).

These observations show his concern for civilization, society and
individuals including his own self.

In order to overcome his aberrations, Billy decides to get married.

He thinks for one moment that marriage would give him a new anchor to
cling to and would lead him to an affirmation in life. His marriage to one Meena Biswas, a pretty young daughter of a retired Civil Servant is solemnized. Romi gets another opportunity to mark Billy's bizarre approach when he finds the latter defending before his father the conduct of a clerk who has sacrificed someone else's child to appease the goddess for the recovery of his ailing son:

Similar cases have been reported from Africa, Indonesia, and Japan from even a country like Sweden. As far as India is concerned, there are enough such cases to fill a thousand page volumes. Look up the court records of any of the tribal agencies, and you will know what I mean. (50)

He even asserts “there are worlds at the periphery of this one, above it and below it, and around it, of which we know nothing until we are in them” (50-51). Billy's marriage with Meena turns into a miserable failure. Meena is a product of this 'materialistic' civilization and disappoints Billy who is already disinclined to it. In fact, their marriage is an impulsive action resorted to under the impression that the bond with Meena will be strong enough to bind his split personality. However, it turns out to be otherwise. A product of the money machine culture Meena has worldly concerns. She wants nothing but money and glamour, which Billy hates. She does not even bother to understand Billy’s situation and establish a rapport with him. The marriage of “uneven minds” results in utter failure. Situ, Romi’s wife in their very first meeting, notices
Meena's discord with her husband. The arrogant traits of Meena's character become evident when Situ tells her husband: "Did you see how she looked me up and down?. As if she herself was no less than Miss India or something. Did you notice her hair?" (67), Billy's outburst is very poignant: "the more I tried to tell her what was corroding me, bringing me to the edge of despair, so to speak, the more resentful she became" (183).

This domestic strife accentuates Billy's ingrained alienation and he loses temper even at minor issues, quarrelling "all the time," "snapping at everybody" remaining in a "dark mood," not touching his wife for six months, always making fun of Meena, not keeping his promises to his wife and several other things. Meena complains to Romi that "things are falling apart" (70) and "Billy is getting stranger and stranger with every passing day" (71). Meena hardly initiates moves to improve the situation. She tells Romi: "You see, I just can't handle the situation anymore. It is all probably my fault. Perhaps I just don't understand him as a wife should" (72). She spies on Billy in an effort to blame his personality: "Tell me Romi, do you think he is having an... affair" (74). She suggests many solutions to Billy to get rid of her: "Go to your cannibals, if you find me so intolerable" (76) and "I wish I were dead" (76) and further "I will go away if that is what you want" (77). All these murmurs agonise
Billy but he replies in a composed mood, “That is not what I want, Meena. You know that” (77) and while saying this Billy finds himself very depressed. In this way Billy's attempt to find a refuge and anchor goes waste. When nearly three years later Romi meets Billy, he finds Billy finished “snuffed out like a candle left in the rain” (66). He says, “Gone was the staggering intelligence, the spectroscopic interests, the sense of humor” (66). It seems to him that the society of Delhi has begun to get on his nerves. Billy tells Romi later:

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 upper 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 no better than mechanically mouthed ideas that the West abandoned a generation ago. 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 load-mouthed women and men in three-piece suits dreaming their little adulteries (176-177).

Utterly disgusted by the external scenario, Billy is gripped by strange hallucinations as he recounts to Tuula, “A strange woman keeps crossing my dreams. I have seen her on the streets of Delhi, nursing a child in the shade of a tree or hauling stone for a rich man's house” (93). Such behaviour leads Romi to infer that Billy's mental condition 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” (140).
Traces of such abnormality were also noticeable in his American sojourn.
At the age of twenty, he had visions” of being in a place other than where
I was, in a place very, very old, at times a wilderness, at other times, full
of strange primitive people” (123). Such hallucinations continue to haunt
him when he teaches at Delhi University. Whenever Billy takes his
students for expedition to Central India, he hears an irresistible call from
the hills he traverses on. He gives vent to his feelings in one of his letters
to Tuula:

When I return from an expedition, it is days before I can shake
off the sounds and smells of the forest. The curious feeling trails
me everywhere that I am a visitor from the wilderness to the
marts of the Big City and not the other way round (92).

All these happenings affect him greatly. On his last expedition he goes to
a tribal village to fetch ropes from the house of the headman of the
village, Dhunia, who had become his Maha prasad (an intimate friend).
Billy had saved the life of his niece by giving her antibiotics on his earlier
visit. He meets his niece Bilasia who had now grown into an untamed
village beauty. When he leaves for his camp, Dhunia invites him to come
next day to watch their dance. When he sleeps in the night he sees a
vision and he says it “a dream so erotic, the like of which I did not know
could still be conjured up by my unconsciousness” (118). He feels that
the whole hilly tract calls him to its primitive fold.

It is worth remembering that Billy is not only sensitive in the literal sense of the term but also conscious of his being. He therefore feels concerned with eternal question of his identity that has been upsetting him since the age of fourteen when he could realize that “something has gone wrong with my life” (123). Given his unhappy experiences, however, he comes to realize that he has been running only after shadowy and illusory appearances. Unable to resist the call of his inner self, he goes to the forest the next night. The call pricks him incessantly:

Come, come, come, come. Why do you want to go back? Why do you want to go back?.. You thought New York was real. You thought New Delhi was your destination. How mistaken you have been: Mistaken and Misled. Come now, come. Take us. Take us until you have had your fill. It is we who are the inheritors of the cosmic night (119).

Billy watches the dance of the tribals and participates in it as well. He drinks the wine and watches all that till it turns into a sort of “orgy” with the feverish beats of drums. He finally decides to abjure the civilized world to join the tribals forever to find out not only his roots but his identity also. He tells Dhunia the tribal chief, “I am fed up of those slimy bastards who are camped across that river, and I am fed up of the millions who surround me in the wretched city where I come from” (144). Lured
by the exciting dance he suddenly finds himself before Bilasia who looks up into his eyes with a smile on her lips: “Her enormous eyes, only a little foggier with drink, poured out a sexuality that was nearly as primeval as the forest that surrounded them” (139). The satisfaction that he gets from Bilasia after mating with her was never given to him before in his life:

   It was that passing moment that rarely comes in a man's life, when 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 the poor reflection of a million others. Bilasia at that moment was the essence of that primitive force that had called me night after night, year after year (140).

   Billy thus leaves the civilized world because he feels suffocated in the phoney atmosphere of the modern society. He rejects the artificiality and hollowness of the sophisticated people totally. Billy appreciates Tulla treatment of money as 'a whole lot of paper'. In a place like Delhi he feels as if he is “pinned down...like a dead butterfly” (47). He leaves the smart society because he finds his affirmation of the essence of human existence in the primitive life and makes a concerted effort to join another world away from this civilization. This is not an impulsive action but a well thought out plan. Billy has thought over this question the whole night on that rock beside his tent. His rebellion and abandoning of the city life cannot be termed as a simple case of misunderstanding in his mind. Earlier Billy had indulged himself in finding out his roots and identifying
himself with individuals, society, civilization before doing anything like this, but all of them have frustrated his quest. Billy moves out of civilization so mysteriously that he leaves no traces behind. People come to believe that he has been eaten away by a man-eater. Symbolically, it represents the breaking of bonds between the civilized world and Billy. He prefers living with Dhunia, Bilasia and others because he finds here an altogether different atmosphere, “Nobody here is interested in the prices of food grains or new seeds or roads or elections and stuff like that”. Billy's abandonment of the civilized world is an effort to free him from external distractions, which debar man from attaining detachment from the fruit of action. While stressing on such liberation (inner and outer) Joshi says:

...inner-liberation without detachment is not possible and selfishness is always stopping you from getting liberated. Loneliness is the state where you become aware that you are not liberated and you also do not know how to get liberated (8).

In a mood of celebration, Billy ponders over reaching the place to which he belonged:

Had he not known that every four weeks there was a moon like this, that there were hills as blue as these, and people in the hills that were all that he had ever wanted to be. Why did it take him thirty years to discover this? For all his so-called courage, he thought, he, even he, had been afraid, afraid and foolish squandering the priceless treasure of his life on that heap of tinsel that passed for civilization (139).
He loves the unrestrained life of the primitive people who go in for drinking and dancing and open orgiastic love making. Contrary to all this are the ways of the upper class sophisticated society which seems to Billy in no way different from those of a kennelful of dogs “yawning or struggling against each other” (92).

The ambition and superficiality of the upper society are represented by Meena, Billy's father, Meena's father and Rima Kaul. Though Billy marries Meena Chatterjee to derive some satisfaction out of his life, he feels a corrupting force working upon him. Meena fails to understand him and they quarrel intermittently. Meena becomes the mother of Billy's child but the emotional gap and lack of understanding prevails. Meena and Billy are not made for each other. According to Romi, 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” (183). It is Meena's lack of understanding that out of despair and agony, Billy seduces Rima Kaul, a girl related to Meena. His passions lead him astray and his romance with Rima Kaul is degraded into seduction. One afternoon he takes her to Juhu, hires a room in a third-rate room and seduces her. He remarks: “After it was over I looked into her clear trusting eyes, and I had a first glimpse of my degradation” (186). He
behaves in a hypocritical manner even after all this and points out:

The worst of it was that in spite of this knowledge of my degradation, I continued to behave as before, I continued to whine and lie and sham. I found that I could not stop. I met her three or four times after that. Each time I would determine to be honest-with her, with myself-and each time I would start to play the part as soon as I got the chance... I offered to divorce Meena and marry her even though Rima herself never even hoisted at such a thing. I agreed to start living with her as soon as possible. And all the time I know that I intended no such thing (186).

This experience fills Billy with remorse and he blames the civilized world for this:

It gradually dawned on me that a tremendous corrupting force was working on me. It was as though my soul was taking revenge on me for having denied it for so long that Other Thing that it had been clamoring for (187).

The terrible shock he receives at his degradation instigates his flight from the civilized world. At this point Billy is left in a dilemma what to do. He explains his mysterious disappearance to Romi: “I had two clear choices: I could either follow this call, this vision, whatever the cost, or be condemned to total decay” (188).

Billy decides to go in for the first option viz., following the call of his vision. The tribal girl Bilasia seems to be calling him from the
primitive world and Billy falls madly in her love treating her as “the essence of that primitive force that had called me night after night, year after year” (140). Her voluptuousness attracts Billy and the sexual union with Bilasia gives him much satisfaction:

Her hair was loose. Just behind her left ear there was a red flower. The necklace of beads glowed a little in the darkness. Come, come, come, she said and Billy Biswas, son of a Supreme Court Justice, went. It was closer to madness, the terrible madness of a man who after great pain and much suffering finally finds himself in the presence of his god (140).

Billy feels himself at ease in a world devoid of rat race and its resultant miseries. Living among simple people you can “look through their hearts.” Even Romi wonders at the relationship of love between the adivasis and says: “...I marveled at the intense beauty of this human relationship that was born out of so much love” (141). Billy tells Romi the cause of his happiness later: “the earth, the forest, the rainbows, the liquor from the mahua, an occasional feast, a lot of dancing and love making, and, more than anything else, no ambition, none at all” (146).

Billy is very right at this place because it is “ambition” which causes anxiety and rivalry and makes people snobbish. All types of self-possession come due to ambition, which destroys man's values and drives a person to alienation. In the primitive world no “ambition” is to be
found. It is this *friendly*, simple and pure atmosphere that new vistas of knowledge are opened before Billy. The mysterious glow of Chandtola revives to its original after the union of Billy and Bilasia. It seems to us that the whole tribal world is itself waiting for Billy to come and join them. The flame of Chandtola (a peak) had glowed during moonlit nights when the tribal King and the Queen happily lived. It was extinguished when the old King while trying to make the idol of 'God was poisoned by his relatives. The revival of Chandtola leads to the primitive people that Billy is the reincarnation of their Kings who were poisoned thousand years ago.

Billy is recognized not only as their King, but is treated as endowed with magical and supernatural powers also. Dhunia (Billy's *Maha prasad*) claims that he has seen Billy send away a tiger who had been roaming in the jungle for a week killing their cattle. He also had brought back Dhunia's grandson to life that had been dead for two hours. All these things remain only sensational ideas for Romi, as he never gets a proof for substantiating the veracity of these impressions. But Romi realizes Billy's power of profound faith and unfathomed knowledge when Billy does some improbable things. He predicts rains when there is no sign of relief from the scorching sun. Dhunia aptly informs Romi that Billy "is like rain on parched lands, like balm on a wound. These hills
have not seen the like of him since the last of our Kings passed away” (157-158).

Ten years after his disappearance Billy meets Romi in the jungle. Romi, the district collector of that stretch, is on a tour to the Maikala Range and is startled at Billy’s figure when he spots him. Billy is wearing a loin-cloth and is completely tribalized. He attributes his mysterious disappearance to an irresistible urge towards the primitive people and one comes to know about him more clearly.

After this chance meeting Billy keeps on visiting Romi again and again and in the meantime cures Romi’s wife Situ’s migraine with some herb. Billy takes the promise on the part of Romi that he will not disclose his whereabouts to anybody but Romi’s wife Situ forces him to tell her about Billy. Romi fearfully tells Situ and Situ gives out the secret. The tragedy takes place when the so-called civilized world impinges upon the world of tribals, which provides Billy unusual peace and serenity. In other words, the tragedy takes place when an established man is forced to uproot himself by people whom he hates.

It may be noted here that Billy finds himself emotionally attached to Rima so much that he starts crying when Romi tells him about Rima’s death in an accident. Billy is attached to none of the members of his family, wife, son, and father. So Rima’s statement that Billy “had nothing
to come back to” (87) becomes very significant. When Meena and Billy’s father hear about his reappearance, they rush to seek him again. Romesh tries his best to calm down Mr. Biswas and Meena. They do not realize Billy’s case and insist on meeting Billy even without his consent. They do not want to lose any opportunity of finding Billy and after Romi’s rejection of their requests, Billy’s father reports the whole matter to the Chief Secretary who later on threatens to punish Romesh. The orders for searching Billy are given to Rele, the Superintendent of Police, who is no better than an instrument to quell people who revolt against the civilized society. All these people fail to understand Billy’s problem and the operation to find out Billy starts. They go to the village where Billy resides with Bilasia and their two sons. None of the villagers is ready to give any clue of Billy’s whereabouts. One other news spreads that Billy has killed a constable. The police carry out the combing and ultimately a hasty bullet of a constable kills Billy. Billy dies uttering “You bastards” (231).

Here Billy’s statement shows his contempt for the values of the “civilized world” which does not hesitate to kill him. The tragedy with Billy is that none tries to understand his problem even after his death. All these people think rationally whereas Billy's problem is emotional and is related to his very entity. Mr. Biswas, Meena, Chief Secretary, Rele along
with his men and even Situ, Romi’s wife stand as Joshi says:

Only the representatives of a society which, in its middle mediocrity bracketed men like Billy with irresponsible fools and common criminals and considered it their duty to prevent them from seeking such meagre fulfillment of their destiny as their tortured lives allowed (229-30).

The constable becomes fearful because he has shot the son of a Supreme Court Judge and Meena without realising her guilt wants the havaldar to be brought to book. None of them realizes that Billy indulged in a “search for truth” (175), which is not to be understood by a materialistic people who have sold their souls to Mammon. Romi comments upon the disposal of Billy's case: “It had been disposed of in the only manner that a humdrum society knows of disposing its rebels, its seers, its true lovers” (238). Romi further suggests the result of those who revolt:

...Nothing but blind blundering vengeance, howsoever camouflaged, awaits all those who dare to step out of its stifling confines. It is a confrontation whose outcome is as certain as the end of solitary boats beating against a maelstrom (238).

In this way The Strange Case of Billy Biswas portrays how a man of extraordinary obsessions is destroyed by civilization due to his rebellious nature. This story parallels the story of the King of the
primitives who staked his life in the hopeless attempt to make the face of God and got nothing.

Like *The Foreigner*, this novel is another variation of the doomed existential quest of man for affirmation in an absurd world since life's meaning lies in the "dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish forever, hidden from the dazzling light of the Sun" (4). *The Strange Case* presents forth the attraction for the mysterious forces of the Universe like Bilasia, the tribal girl and Billy's quest for his identity, which results in the death of Billy Biswas in the end. He seems to be in a perfect knowledge of his destruction as suggested by Romi but the more important factor is that Billy takes refuge in the tribal civilization as the last resort. He seeks his identity with the civilization, society, and individuals and in the process feels like losing his own identity. It is only to find out his roots that he goes to the primitive folds which "guarded him as his own" (239) until his reappearance from "the sanctuary of the great god of primitive world" (239).

Thus the outward journey performed by Billy Biswas is symbolic of his relentless quest for a personal salvation. His spiritual concern highlights the meaninglessness of our prosperity and civilized society in the first part of the novel when he finds himself alienated from individuals, society and civilization as such. Though Billy goes on putting
in efforts to remain a part and parcel of society by pinning his hopes on individuals (the smallest social unit) he fails in every effort. After seducing Rima Kaul, he realises his own degradation and yearns to transcend his life of degradation into a life of life sustaining values. The burden of his degradation is so great that instead of breaking himself he prefers to abjure the city life and join the tribals. It is in those folds of Maikala Hills that he relieves himself of his burden and finds his identity. The efforts of Meena and Billy's father to get Billy back can be interpreted in terms of attempts to uproot him again from his locale. At this juncture, Billy prefers dying to succumbing to their wish.

The protagonist, ultimately, has to pay price with his life for not conforming to the norms of the so-called civilized society and for daring “to step out of its stifling confines” (240) and “The strange case of Billy Biswas had at last been disposed of. It had been disposed of in the only manner that a humdrum society knows of disposing its rebels, its seers. Its true lovers”(240)

Billy death “should not be taken as the death of an isolationist but as the triumph of his ideals and principles”. The civilized world is all out to destroy him. Even Romi, his trusted friend and the only link from civilization that Billy keeps, ultimately betrays him. He betrays the confidence reposed in him and fails to protect Billy as things get beyond
his control when his wife Situ discloses the secret to Billy’s father and wife. On the other hand, the tribal world seeks to perpetuate the memory of the man-god by offering him a shrine. Billy’s dying words “you bastards” (233), watching his close friend Romi approaching him, are significant and meaningful. “It is at the same time a direct abuse, an expression of anger at the betrayal of friendship and the meaningless assault of the civilized world on his creative privacy”10 As Billy uses the expression thrice in the novel, it is his finally confirmed verdict on civilization which is not natural but bastardly. In The Foreigner, it is Sindi who infringes the society and in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas it is the society that is responsible for the tragedy of Billy.

To Meenakshi Mukherjee, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is “a compelling novel about a strange quest drawing upon myth and folk-lore to reiterate its elemental concerns”.11 As per the oral tradition of story-telling, the novel is a great success as the narrator and the audience both share a common mythology. It is interesting to note that the union of Billy and Bilasia is taken as the union of “Jeevatma” and “Parmatama”. the union of “Purush” and “Prakriti”. The novel fits into the scheme of Indian classics, which are nothing but the collective unconscious of the whole nation. P. Lal rightly remarks: “Without an absorption in the myths of the lands of one’s fore-fathers, it is not even
possible to live a meaningful life”\textsuperscript{12} In using myth as a structural pattern, there is a mythical situation underlying the entire texture of the novel. All myths are used with a view to bringing out Billy’s experience on the pattern of the ‘rishis’ and ‘mahatmas’ of the rich Indian heritage as Joshi himself admits that “the influence of our religious thinkers is, of course, there”\textsuperscript{13} in the novel which is “primarily concerned with religious issues the problems of an essentially Hindu mind.”\textsuperscript{14}

The novel reveals to us the falsity of the so-called refinement of the Indian upper class society. It is obviously anti-bourgeois in taste and “testifies a loss of confidence in the anglicized Indian tradition of high culture”\textsuperscript{15} which is the offshoot of the Western culture.

It is remarkable that the novel opens in New York's Harlem, the black ghetto of America. It is a conscious choice on the part of Billy Biswas to take residence in Harlem, which cannot be regarded as a dignified place by the middle class standards. It appears that he takes refuge in Harlem after being totally fed up of the dissipation around. He is a rebel from the very beginning. An individual of such temperament defies all theories of rebellion. He vehemently denounces the moral and spiritual degradation of his own culture from which he has come when he says to Romi:

\begin{quote}
What got me was the superficiality, the sense of values. I don't think all city societies are shallow as ours. I am, of course, talking mainly of the so-called upper classes (177).
\end{quote}
Such a view hardly comes from a man of negative attitude. When he seduces Rima Kaul in the midst of his quarrels with Meena, his wife, he thinks he would forever hold himself in contempt and remorse for what he has done to Rima. He concludes that he has started to behave in the same manner as the general people of city would have behaved. What makes his condition all the more worse is that Rima is still fond of him and is emotionally attached to him. He hears the voice of his soul scolding him: “Hear 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” (187)

The realisation goads him to search for the other thing which is his search for affirmation both physical as well as spiritual: “That other thing was, and is, after all, what my life is all about” (187). Joshi explains it as a mystical drive in Billy Biswas “very often a mystical drive or an erotic drive or a primitive drive are all common. I would say that he had all these three drives at one stage of his life. Anyway, the mystical one seems to be the most important”\textsuperscript{16}. Romi fails to understand these big words and asks Billy whether he means his desire to become a primitive. Billy says:

\begin{quote}
I don't want to sound too pompous, old chap, becoming a primitive was only a first step, a means to an end. Of course, I
\end{quote}
realized it only after I ran away. I realized then that I was seeking something else. I am still seeking something else (187).

Later when Romi asks what was he seeking? Was it God? He reluctantly replies that it was not God but a thing similar to God. Here it becomes clear that he is searching for salvation and affirmation of his self in life.

The novelist has portrayed the primitive girl Bilasia as a foil to the sophisticated Meena Biswas. This contrast colours the central vision of the novel. When Billy sees Bilasia for the first time, she appears to him the essence of that 'urkraft' that had called Billy night after night. It was to this call he responded in his childhood at Bhuvaneshwar. It was the same force which made Billy so frenzied when the Negro girl moved-sexually to him when he played a pair of Bongo drums. Further he blames the same force enacting its revenge on him when he seduced Rima Kaul:

It was as though a master mind had arranged the whole thing to give me a preview of what awaited me if I continued to defy its call. Poor Rima had crystallized for me the alternatives, although I did not realise this until I sat outside my tent that fateful night (187-188).

Billy, though born and brought up in the same culture builds his own glass castle because his soul is yearning for affirmation and he cannot compromise with forces opposed to it.
Right from the very beginning, Billy's life is dominated by his visions and hallucinations. He ponders at length on the typically human handicap:

Sometimes I think the human mind is equipped with a built in apparatus for compromise. As soon as you are faced with a difficult choice this apparatus is switched on. It runs about here and there, brokering between various parts of man, rationalizing this, postponing that, until what is left is the conventional expedients of the age and hardly a choice. Deep down we are afraid that the price of making such choices is terrible, not realizing that the price of not making them is even more terrible (188).

Billy's experience just before his momentous decision to make his final departure into the jungle on the second day of his expedition has apparent mystic undertones. He feels that "the inheritors of the cosmic night" (119) were "waiting and walking and staring" at him and he was the "first man on earth facing the earth's first night" (118). Billy's departure is not an escape from life and its realities but an escape into what he thinks "real life" far from the "madding crowd's ignoble strife." It is there that he experiences the fulfillment of human existence.

Billy presents himself as "a refugee from civilization" (140). The dogged determination that we notice in his search for meaning in an incoherent and chaotic world is a sterling trait of his character. He recapitulates how he could get out of the confusing mess:
I certainly underwent a deep metamorphosis that was, no doubt, responsible for all that I did subsequently. Layer upon layer was peeled off me until nothing but my primitive self was left trembling (119).

Driven by elemental human impulses which are in consonance with his own innate nature Billy's conduct is the manifestation of those organic drives which are at loggerheads with the rational forces: “I had no idea it was going to happen. It was two days-and two nights-before I knew what I had done. By then it was too late” (109).

Billy's rejection of all familial ties tantamount to renunciation which "has always been an Indian ideal of life" (Mukherjee: 97). The inevitability of events that happen in Billy’s life supports the metaphysical touch of his quest. His withdrawal from the world is in the nature of a reflex action, he withdraws in order to preserve himself from “those rapacious representatives of civilization.” Jasbir Jain rightly comments, “Long before his physical disappearance into the saal forests of the Maikala Hills, he had ceased to belong to the world” (18). As Sindi in The Foreigner gets his revelation sitting on a "weathered stone," Billy gets it when he meets Bilasia. It is a movement, which makes him feel 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 the poor reflection of a million others” (140).
The Foreigner and The Strange Case suggest different approaches to solve life's meaninglessness. The Foreigner presents detachment as a possible panacea for life's problems. "I don't want to get involved," says he though "everywhere I turned I saw involvement" (19). The detachment, which he cultivates to overcome his painful memories and meaninglessness of life, becomes a source of deeper agony to him. The fault with Sindi lies in his mistaking detachment for inaction but later on he finds that "Detachment consisted of right action and not escape from it" (20). The lesson, which he takes, is "detachment lies in actually getting involved" (21). Billy, on the other hand, testifies that if one is able to establish a rapport with, he can get rid of all agonies of life Bilasia represents here "the primitive culture, the untapped subterranean resources of psychic energy" (22). Further we are reminded that Bilasia is "the embodiment of that primal and invulnerable force, that has ruled these hills (Maikala) perhaps this earth, since time began" (224). Joshi depicts the beauty of Bilasia with an unforgettable mixture of myth and nature:

...She had that untamed beauty that comes to flower only in primitive people. It was as though nature were cocking a snook at Meena Biswases of the world, informing them once again how little it cared for their self-proclaimed superiority. Looking at Bilasia one could well believe that these were the children of Kings condemned to exile by those rapacious representatives of
civilization who had ruled the thrones of Delhi and still continued to do so. Where else could be found that proud carriage, a figure so graceful, eyes where brightness made your pulse quicken. Where else had I ever seen a grief so tragic that might well have brought tears to the eyes of a stone god (141).

No wonder, time and again Billy recalls the momentous experience: “I arrived at the fork in my life that, without being conscious of it, I had waited for all my life. I took the turning that was as irrevocable as it was awesome. Why all this happened to me I do not know and even if I knew I could not put it into words” (142).

Commenting on the nature of quest-motif, Meenakshi Mukherjee seems to be closer to the heart of the narrative: “It is a compelling novel about a strange quest drawing upon myth and folk-lore to reiterate its elemental concerns” (23). Billy possesses an extraordinary vision of a simpler and purer life-style. He complains to Tuula of a “constant blurring of reality” (93). Tuula detects the expression of a primitive force due to which Billy becomes enchanted with the music and dance of the Bhils and with the supernatural charms of the Chandtola peak. The patience of the Bhils is sharply contrasted against the barren pleasures of Delhi “Smart set.” Billy seeks to identify himself with them by discarding away his western clothes and starts wearing only a loincloth. Romi notice the transformation of his friend and says: “For all his so called courage,
he thought, he...had been afraid, afraid and foolish, squandering the priceless treasure of his life on the heap of tinsel that passed for civilization” (139). As compared to the “heap of tinsel,” the value of the vision is superior as Billy himself voices to the narrator: “The essence of life, it seems to me, can be communicated only in the language of visions and what vision has lasted a period even as short as a man's life” (140). Billy unconsciously dwells on the perennial human situation, which defies artificial barriers:

What kept us happy, I suppose, were the same things that kept all primitives happy through the ages: the earth, the forest, the rainbows...an occasional feast, a lot of dancing and love making, and more than anything else, no ambition, none at all (146).

Arun Joshi has very remarkably maintained the contrast between the impulsive behaviour of Billy and the cool account of Romi, the collector friend of Billy. The novel begins with a very humane relationship between these two Indian students in America, Bimal Biswas and Romesh Sahai. The novelist has placed them in an American setting to convince the readers that a great force, "urkraft" as Tuula puts it, is very strong in him and even an expensive schooling and his exposure to a highly civilized and modern western society cannot destroy or overcome that force that possesses him completely. His following observation communicated in one of his letters to Tuula is very revealing:
I sometimes wonder whether civilization is anything more than 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.

As a part of technique, Billy's letters betray the inner mossy labyrinths of his personality. It is these private thoughts that show the working of his mind, which is obsessed with ethered concerns. His renunciation is all effort to free him from all desires, longings and egotism, which is a pre-requisite for man to attain peace in the way of knowledge. His “becoming a primitive was only a first step, a means to an end” (187) that takes him to liberation at the end. S. Radhakrishnan has rightly said:

To get the existential experience of the self, we should get free from the diversity of objects, external and internal, which impedes and prevents the direct or intuitive vision of the essence of the self.24

Billy's assertion that “I am still seeking something else” like God (187) makes him a true seeker for affirmation through the way of knowledge. His life among tribals is free from desire, anger, ambition, ego and deception that grip the city folk. It has purity and peace that seldom comes in the way of the civilized world.
In fact, the entire novel is an attempt to discuss Billy’s instinctive yearning for affirmation. It is not merely the events of his life that the narrator recounts but he also tries to find the truth hidden behind them. So, instead of a straightforward narration of events in their chronological order, the narrator deals with introspective memories, in most thoughts and feelings, intimate human relations, personal letters and discussions. The discussions with Rima Kaul who is head over heels in love with Billy, with Bilasia, with the nosy little fellow from Patna, all serve this purpose. The discussions with Dhunia, the tribal headman explains the psychological impact made by Kala Pahar on Billy which forms the foundation of the novel: “You see what you can when you are awake, and what you cannot see when you are awake comes to you in dreams. It is all the same” (150). The words “strange” and “case” in the title have serious implications. Billy's case is strange because in a world where everyone is running after money and its comforts, Billy though belonging to the upper strata of the Delhi society, opts out of it to achieve affirmation and meaning in his life. He is very much similar to the sages and "rishis" in the past that had renounced civilization for the primitive life as a means of realizing the truth and God. For psychoanalysts and psychiatrists, he may be a case for study and analysis. His predicament is peculiar and his search is a search for the hidden meaning behind his existence. The title
also suggests the civilized world's comment on Billy's behaviour, which to the conformists might look as "strange."

The action of the novel has a definite movement. The narrator looks back at his life and events in America and India to juxtapose the nature of experiences. Billy's death at the hands of the humdrum world provides pathos to the story. Though the tribals regard him as a mythical King, his death is a loss only to his immediate relatives and Romi who tries to understand him. The second phase of the novel begins with Billy's appearance in front of Romi and hence forward, the novel moves steadily to a purposeful end. The theme of the novel is embodied in the couplet cited on the opening page:

I came a thousand miles to see your face, O mountain, A thousand miles did I come to see your face.25

Though the novel runs along existential lines, it strives to assert much needed values. In a way the novel speaks for spiritual realisation in contrast to mundane entanglements.

Arun Joshi in this novel offers a dramatic presentation of the complex character of Billy who in the first part of the novel finds himself rootless and alienated from individuals, society and civilization as such. There is every possibility of his breaking down. In the latter part, he takes refuge in the world of tribals only when there is no option left. It is in the
tribal world that he finds his identity, his roots. There he feels “established”. When certain external forces try to uproot him from there, he prefers dying to succumbing to their “black and deep desires”. The so-called civilized world destroys him by all means, the tribal world “guarded him as his own” (241) until his reappearance from “the sanctuary of the great god of the primitive world”. (241). Thus, the novel stands as a bitter commentary on the tyranny of the forces of phony civilization that crushes man’s desire for self-existence and kinship with nature. Manohar Bandopadhyay’s this extract beautifully sums up the novel:

There are however few example in the realm of Indian fiction where such themes have been powerfully exploited and given sustained treatment to match its world counterpart, when a new ground was broken by Arun Joshi in 1971 with his second, and so far the best novel, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, a censorious war had sparked off damning the author for display of escapism and defeatist alienation. Of course, the critics could not disagree for its gripping tale, absorbing study of tribal life and the moving story of male-female union in the ‘final embodiment of the human spirit.’ And quite recently there has been a positive renewal of opinion about the novel of which we have almost no parallel in Indo-English fiction. In this novel Joshi picked up the theme of the maladjusted hero and rather added a new dimension to his work in portraying his hero’s struggle not merely for his quest of identity but also for his uncompromising search of ‘selfs spiritual reality.’
The novel deviates slightly from *The Foreigner* in the end as Sindi Oberoi finds his meaning in the civilized world itself and learns to live like a *Karmayogi* whereas Billy derives his meaning only after renouncing his city life and joining the primitive world for pure and righteous living. The modern civilization is presented as a great usurper of souls and Billy strives to find out viable alternatives for "the most futile cry of man in smart society" (3). Arun Joshi's third novel *The Apprentice* centers on yet another approach to life viz. devotion (*Bhakti*) to be examined in the next chapter.
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