CHAPTER - III

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Aculturation and Deculturation are the two major fallouts of cultural fission. Aculturation is a positive stance, a comprehensive acceptance of the tenets of one culture into another, deculturation, on the other hand, is a negative process, a dreadful distortion of one culture by another. It is not merely a clash causing anguish of alienation, it affects a death of the spirit, causing not merely a crisis of identity or existence, but a denial of existence. Kamala Markandaya and Arun Joshi have delineated this facet of culturation interaction in their novels, particularly in Possession and The Strange Case of Billy Biswas.

In the encounter between India and Britain, each gained to a considerable extent but one of the fall-outs of this tension in togetherness was the deculturation of India. Markandaya's novel Possession enacts this conflict arising out of the possessive spirit of English culture on the spiritual, natural self of Indian society. It is a novel which can be explained from various perspectives. An eminent and authoritative critic like
Iyengar finds in this novel a spiritual drama. He also hints that it is a spiritual quest where soul and body, mysticism and materialism interact. It can also be studied as a parable on the growth and development of art in alien climates. But, perhaps the most concrete interpretation of the novel can be made in terms of a probe into alien onslaught, on the indigenous cultural matrix. Even Iyengar hints towards these possibilities.

Kamala Markandaya is trying to make the story of Caroline and Valmiki, a parable of colonialism, a passing of Empire and current insidious movement of neocolonialism.¹

The novel has also been described as a parable of imperialism, particularly with respect to the degeneration of altruistic despotism into exploitation and selfinterest.

This novel is one of the most forceful artistic explorations of distortions of India's national character in the British embrace and of her consequent urge to be free.²

In fact, the novel deals with the characters of India and Britain and while weaving their lives into a fictional framework, she raises the question as to whether Indian has to cut itself off from its roots and shape itself in the image of materialistic West or seek its growth from the life giving springs of its own culture. In short, Possession is a study
of the process of the malevolent influence of one culture on another. This is the process of deculturation in the terminology of anthropologists. It is the story of Caroline Bell, Valmiki and the Swami because around this triangle other characters gain their relevance and through this three cornered relationships the novelist forges her understanding into two different cultures, two different ways of life. Caroline is the daughter of a British resident of one of the Indian states during the period of the British rule. She has been minutely described:

She was rich, divorced, well born said fashionable in Indian society concentrating upon essentials; really rich in the English way; with landed estates and money in sterling, really well-born, descended from a long line of men who had ruled India in the days of British raj, not loosely linked to a little known lord by marriage to an umpteenth cousin—which was the more usual cause for awe in India; and very boldly and publicly divorced with the headlines in the papers.  

She is a formidable lady of iron and steel; she was supremely confident, born and brought up to be so with as little thought of fallibility as a colonial in the first flash in Empire. She acts to fulfill whatever she desires and the desire to taste 'ark', the crude country liquor made by villagers takes her to a South Indian village where she meets by accident Valmiki, a rustic Tamil boy. Valmiki is an innocent child gifted
with natural qualities and talents of a painter. Caroline discerns the potentiality of a great artist in him and decides to take him away to London to sophisticate him and to develop his artistic talents under the influence of the advanced western civilization. Obviously, Caroline's attitude is indicative of the changed role of the white man to substitute the political dominance by the cultural dominance with a view to alienating Indians from their own cultural matrix. With arrogance and confidence coming down to her blood stream from her ancestors she has a purely commercial approach to human affairs. When she wants to snatch Valmiki away from his parents, her mind becomes clear from the dialogue:

"Tell him I'll compensate him for his son" said Caroline. "Say a couple of thousand rupees. Five thousand." The school master recoiled, equating 'compensate' with 'pay', his mild soul baulking at this buying and selling of human beings. Nevertheless, dutifully, he translated I intervened, as gently as I could. 'Not pay for the boy. She means to compensate you for the loss of his services ....enough for you to pay some other lad to mind your flock.' "Five thousand rupees?"

If Caroline is aggressively possessive and starkly commercial, Valmiki is spontaneously innocent but unflinchingly firm in his bondage with the spiritual root of India. He refuses to go with Lady Caroline unless he has met the Swami and has received his consent. Here comes in the third character, the
Swami. When Caroline, Valmiki and Anasuya, the narrator go to meet the Swami who lives in the wilderness on the hill side, they come across Swami and have the feeling that the Swami has an invisible channel of communication. The Swami is a powerful symbol in this novel. He stands for the spiritual strength of India's culture. Inside the cave of the Swami which is also a symbol of India's creative springs and nourishing belief, the narrator Anasuya finds a rich world of astonishing mature art:

I gazed and gazed and it was almost too much for me, too rich, too crammed with creation for me to absorb much or to comment. I turned away at last, wondering where this child of peasants could have gained his knowledge of the Hindu pantheon, a knowledge which see far as I could tell enabled him to accurately portray the deities, each with its divine attribute. Perhaps it was memory a study of the Gopuram of any temple or perhaps it was the Swami who had instructed him.

Valmiki gets the consent and blessings of his spiritual patron, the Swami and goes out to the western world with Caroline. He is young, innocent raw Indian sensibility without any protective layer of experience around him. He is taken to London, to Switzerland and later to many other countries. His life in the western world is a journey of experience, is an odyssey of growth and quest of his true self. Quite after a considerable gap of time Anasuya meets Caroline and Valmiki
in London. In the western culture Valmiki has been given every possible comfort and help and a happy situation for the flowering of his art has been created, but in spite of his best attempts he is not able to perform. His spring of inspiration has atrophied. The alien culture with all its dazzle and grandeur cannot awake the creative flow in his heart. When in London Caroline and Anasuya are trying to solve this problem, they come to understand that the real source of his creative strength lies in the nourishing relationship with the Swami. The Swami was like his father and mother and friend and he helped his creative talent find his expression:

"Yes." He stopped, and tussled with thought and remembrance and finding some English to bit knotted the veins of his forehead, his gesturing hands: it was so, I don't know, how only it was so. He say good, I feel good. He say work for God, I work for God. He say you paint well, I paint well. 6

It was the magic touch that was wanted in the life of Valmiki. Caroline, the inheritor of the British art of diplomacy and cunningness can adopt any means to achieve her end. She sends him counterfeited letter on behalf of the Swami and consequently Valmiki's dormant talents to paint turns fertile and green once again. The love-hate relationship between Caroline and Valmiki continues and Caroline gives her relationship with Valmiki a ballow generalisation. She says, "We go
out of our way to meet, and we squabble every time we do. It is a sort of love-hate relationship. Don't you think? Like the kind Britain and India used to have."

Valmiki earns his success as a painter in the western world. He had learnt its ways and had tried to assimilate the western culture into the texture of his life. The fact that Caroline had tried to change him and to cast him into a sophisticated young man with his uncountedness gone is very significant.

His English was good, the accent cultivated—Caroline had clearly made him work at it. Most of the uncountedness was gone, and some of the honesty. Did it make him more acceptable? In this polished western world, obviously yes. The East was too strident, too dissonant, too austere, too raw; it had to be muted, toned down, tarted up - its music larded with familiar rhythms, its literature wrenched into shapes recognised by western tradition, its dances made palatable by an infusion of known idioms, its people taught to genuflect before understatement—before a measure of acceptance came. Undilute East had always been too much for the West and soulful East always came lap-dog fashion to the West, mutely asking to be not too little and not too much, but just right.

Anasuya feels that Valmiki is now transformed into a westernised person, mixing freely with the British guests in the cocktail party, and feeling quite at ease in their
company. But a little later when his eyes catch her once or twice, she begins to feel:

That he was not only ardent partaker but partly onlooker as well: that there still remained for good augury vestiges of a cold and watchful inner eye, as disdainful of other as of himself.  

Caroline derives satisfaction from her relationship with Val, and takes pride in that it was she who discovered him in a cave. In spite of the big difference in their age she takes handsome Valmiki as her attending lover in her luxurious company. Caroline has been a great beauty and she has several love affairs; she has been satisfying her nymph- hean needs, yet she takes a special pride in possessing an Indian as a lover. As Anasuya remarks, "the piquant combination of looks and talents - their looks, his talent, her talent in recognizing it." Whenever Caroline fails to carry well with Val, she describes it as an old element, "That England and India never did understand one another." In her own case Caroline's assessment is not wrong, for she fails to understand the significance of emotional reciprocation between the human beings, the spiritual values of India and the religious connotation of Valmiki's painting. In Caroline's remark that India and England never did understand one another, Markandaya expresses the basic truth of cultural differences between the nations. They could not understand each other because they were not ready to respect each other's
culture. To tell the truth, Caroline represents the possessive, proud, intolerant spirit of England and thus under her patronage Valmiki's true talent withers. Markandaya here gives a fictional form to a stage of Indo-British relationship which was a reality till some time back. Cultural clash remained a prevailing condition in India for a very long time. Only recently Cultural dissemination is now a world phenomenon and no country can insulate itself against. Markandaya shows the change in this process in her later novels.

The deeper relationship of Valmiki with Ellie and the arrival of the Swami come as a challenge to Caroline's placid life of passion and possession. Ellie is a Jewish girl of twenty years who looks crippled and aged because of the cruel inhumanities she had suffered at the hands of Nazis in concentration camps. She is described as a victim of "European crime in European confine." There is a deeper understanding between Valmiki and Ellie. For months they had been thrown together with opportunity for intimacy. Valmiki has been devoted to her. There was then under the skin bondage, the joint experience of calculating menuin, actively hostile in a cruel world. There was the joint feeling of being without roots, top heavy, sapling struggling to keep a crazy balance in an earth that quivered and shifted. When Anasuya comes to know of it and comes to know that she is bearing the child of Valmiki, she wants to know from her if she was in love with Valmiki.
"Does he love you? Are you in love with him?"
She said a surprising thing. "I lie with a man so, I do not talk about love, because I do not know if that is what I feel. It is not easy to feel because I am burnt out, inside I am burnt out. But Valmiki loves me. He does not know it, but he does. At times like tonight he forgets, he cannot understand himself how it is possible to love someone so dull as I am. You can see in his face he is asking this question. Then when the others are gone and it is daytime again he comes back to me, we are of one kind."

Ellie had lost her virginity long back at the concentration camp but she never conceived. She believes that it was not possible; she was too dry, she was not at all a human being. She had slept only once with Valmiki. She got the feeling for a child; her fertility has found an expression. This shows both, the simplicity of her character and her bond with Valmiki. Both of them live on the same channel of emotional response. Caroline is both cunning and cruel and she gets rid of Ellie very cleverly. She is triumphant in pushing off Ellie from Valmiki's life. In truth, Ellie never goes out of Valmiki's world. Later he accuses himself of being a party to the suffering of two lives - Ellie's and his child's whom she bore:

I let it happen. Annabel was right, I cared nothing for the sanctity of life - I, a Hindu,
bearing the mantle of a Brahmin and it was a sham, a hypocritical mockery, otherwise would I have let my child die slowly? - And for what? - for what? 13

Here in this guilt consciousness cultural dualism finds an expression and symbol. The unborn child of Ellie and Valmiki is a symbol of the process of deculturation, of the smothering, destroying spirit of British culture. Indian culture has to suffer and wither under the sinister impact of the alien culture. The Brahminic consciousness of Valmiki is a return of the native consciousness. His dilemma and the recognition of his guilt voice a copresence of two alien cultural stances in his life. If there were an assimilation between the two cultural perspectives, Caroline would have accepted their relationship and Valmiki would not have allowed his child to die before birth.

Another girl who comes in the life of Valmiki is Annabel. Annabel, 18 years old, small, slim, ordinary looking with bright brown eyes was no match with Caroline in elegance, but she has the freshness of the youth. And youth calls for youth. Valmiki came very close to her in no time. Their intimacy grew deeper. And for her sake and for love, Valmiki leaves Caroline. Caroline thinks Valmiki belongs to her and she will not lose her possession, "People don't easily give up what they think are their possession. The English never have." 14 Caroline does succeed in
separating them. She cunningly exposes Val's affairs with Ellie in the presence of Annabel who is roused to genuine indignation and breaks up her relations with Valmiki:

You got her into trouble and you got out quick before the whiff of suicide could offend your nostril and curl up those holy eastern sentiments of yours about the sanctity of life. Well, so much for them. So much for decency... More bloody fool I to have thought you had any because how could you, you aren't like us, you wouldn't even know what decency means. I'm only glad I'm getting out before my stink sends you scuttling as her did, poor little shrimp- getting out now while I still can.  

Caroline destroys Valmiki's relationship with Ellie and Annabel but she is not able to smother the influence of the Swami and Valmiki and his relationship with him. The Swami is a real challenge, the unsurmountable threat to Caroline's spirit of dominance and possessiveness. When the Swami visits London, she feels shaken and remarks angrily,

It's a seduction, spiritual if you like. There is no place for it in England. He ought never to have been allowed in. 

Caroline's influence on Valmiki is not a meaningful assimilation of the East and the West. It leads to a deculturation. In fact, Valmiki has never lost his Indianness. His
sense of guilt for his forsaken relationship with Ellie suggests his purity from inside. He declines to sell the nude paintings of Ellie even when he is in great need of money. He has tender feelings for the monkey Minou whom he has brought from the shop. His remarks about the money is suggestive.

Animals are created in their own right. I do not know when I stopped believing that, but I must have, must n't, to do what, I did? Bought her in a shop took possession like a God for ends of my own. 17

The similarity between the condition of Valmiki and the monkey is suggestive of the malevolent consequence of possession. The monkey bondage is invariably linked with Ellie's. It images Val-Caroline relationship. The monkey symbolizes Val and Caroline possessing each other:

Caroline, came first, all in her shining whiteness, leading by the hand Valmiki also in dazzling white and he leading by its chain a tiny monkey wearing a scarlet hip length jacket and a gilt leather collar. 18

Valmiki has never been alienated completely from Indian roots. It is evident from the divine inspiration which finds expression through the paintings which come under the influence of the West. The American critic understands the real imports of Valmiki's paintings when he remarks:
This young painter paints as if unknown to himself, he had glimpsed beyond the horizon, the transcendent power of the universe, and the refracted light brings a hint of the power and the menace into his own painting.  

When Valmiki returns to India, Anasuya sees the painting drawn by him in the Cave and remarks:

There was, too a change in his work, so subtle it might easily have been a flight of fancy: but to me there seemed to be a moving, extraordinary yearning in the human countenances he had depicted, upturned, groping towards the light, a quality of compassion and profundity in his divine images, that had never been apparent before.

The Swami has rightly deemed the work of Valmiki as a gift of God. Valmiki is redeemed by moral and spiritual consciousness of traditional cultural symbol, the Swami who welcomes Valmiki back into the service of God. He had already spoken about it earlier:

He came to me as a child, he said, he was my disciple during the formative years, nothing will touch that were other men despair, he will turn to God, unlikely thought it seems to you now. If he is fretted by wherever he is, he will return to me and it will not be the joyless voyage that you imagine, it will be a home coming.
Valmiki returns. His home coming makes his dispossession complete when Caroline makes her last effort to retrieve him from the wilderness of India and company of the Swami, Valmiki replies with the confidence: "The wilderness is mine, it is no longer terrible as it used to be. It is nothing." The Swami adds a rejoinder. "Even this waste land may have something to say, other than what you have seen." Valmiki's home coming suggests that cultural encounter may be destructive if one culture tries to dispossess another. Cultural growth needs liberty and co-existence. India's westernization, India's acceptance of the European culture is good till it is assimilated in its fabric but it becomes stifling if it attacks on its roots.

Arun Joshi also delineates this facet of cultural interaction in his novels, but in him the situation is articulated indirectly, figuratively through the story of Billy Biswas. The novel The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is a powerful indictment of the hot-shot, sordid modern culture and an eloquent assertion of the primitive way of life. Through Billy's quest for fulfilment, his longing to locate his real self not in the matrix of westernized culture but in the most innocent, most native even anthropological past of Indian culture. In the retreat of Billy Biswas from the modern wasteland of Delhi to the ancient Garden of Eden in Maikala jungle, from the smothering clutch of meena, who symbolizes western culture
of the West in India, to the primeval possessiveness of Bilasia the process of deculturation is fictively embodied.

Billy's quest is deeper than Sindi Oberoi's. It is no more concerned with mere intellectual understanding. Billy Biswas is not uprooted in the sense Sindi is: he has roots the type of which Sindi craves for. He has a family, a tradition of self - his inner being. He is like an Indian saint who has little interest in external attraction; he concerns himself with self-realization. Romi remarks:

If life's meaning lies not in the glossy surfaces of our pretension but in those 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 call. In brief, I know of no other man who so desperately pursued the insidious threat of existence to its bitter end, not matter what trails of glory or shattered hearts he left behind in his turbulent wake.²⁴

Romi has sympathy for Billy and he judges Billy most affectionately. He thinks Billy to be a man of "extraordinary obsessions."²⁵ Even physically Billy is quite distinguished Romi notes: "I discovered that Billy had almost inhumanly sharp eyes,"²⁶ and he always carried a 'singular air.' He is extraordinarily sensitive. Though he has conventional roots,
yet he feels alienated. He feels as if he were a fish out of water. Mr. K.R.S. Iyengar's remarks is apt here: "In The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, Arun Joshi has carried his exploration of the consciousness of helpless rootless people a stage further, and has revealed to our gaze new gas-chambers of self-forged misery." Though he is among family members, yet he does not feel integrated with them. He is not in harmony. He is alone, isolated - a stranger. He writes to Tuula:

It seems, my dear Tuula, that we are swiftly losing what is known as one's grip on life, why else their constant blurring of reality? Who am I? Who are my parents? My wife? My child? At time I looked at them, sitting at the dinner table, And for a passing moment I cannot decide who they are or what accident of creation has brought us together.²⁸

In fact, Billy has been strange from his very childhood. He is extremely sensitive and his is a case of 'explosion of senses.' Tuula tells Romi that Billy feels "a great force, ... Urkraft, 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."²⁹ When he was only fourteen, he went to Bhubaneshwar and visited Konark. One night he, along with his uncle's chauffeur, went to the tribal people the chauffeur wanted to enjoy life, but Billy sat there and saw the tribal dance, drink and sing and make love. A Strange sensation overtook him. He recorded:
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 arms 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 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.  

Since then Billy remains restless as Som Bhaskar becomes so after his experience in a cave. When he hears a drum beating or listens to folk music, he is transported to a different world. Romi rightly sums up his impression of Billy: "It also gradually dawned upon me that it was around his interest in the primitive man that his entire life had been organized."  

This interest in primitivism is not a cultivated one. It is inborn in him. Tuula has analysed him correctly. That is why in New York, he chooses to live in a place where Negroes live. His father sends him to study engineering, but he opts for anthropology. In fact, Billy has a dislike for an organised life. The condition of his apartment in Harlem reveals his dislike of the organised life. One day Romi finds
him playing on a bongo-drums. He does not display dexterity. He impresses Romi that he is in a trance, is inspired and full of vitality. He is fascinated by Tuula because she has primitive force. She is far away from the commercial civilization. She has an insight into the inner recess of man's heart and she has mastered hypnotism, auto suggestion and intuition. Her sixth sense is fully developed. In her company, he feels at peace. Billy feels fascinated to study the mental working and responses of the so-called deranged people. He is amused to study their responses and attitude to life. He finds more meaning in their reactions than in those of the so-called cultured men. Anthropology brings Billy closer to the life he dreams of. Visions frequent him and he goes in a trance. In the beginning, he required a stimulus-like alcohol or dance or folk song or drum beating- to transport him to his dreamland, but as he has grown, his fascination for that other life has increased. Now the visions do not need a stimulus. They come automatically. One day while driving, he has an accident that leaves a scar. He knows nothing about that because he was in a trance. Billy throws light on his vision:

It would be life great blinding flash during which I would be totally unaware of anything else. And invariably it left me with the old depressing feeling that something had gone wrong with my life. I wan't where I belonged.
Billy wants to develop a harmony with the surroundings. He craves for satisfaction of his sense of belonging. And he decides to marry Meena Chatterjee, a very pretty and talkative girl. Even when he is close to Meena before marriage, Billy gets visions and becomes moody. He has a dream wherein he has a glimpse of Tuula with George and her lover. Her protests to Tuula that she was a lover and he has been concealed from him. Tuula ridicules his protest and mocks at his honesty. She is supposed to remark that of all persons, Billy complains of hypocrisy and dishonesty. This dream haunts him. He develops a feeling that he has become dishonest and a hypocrite. He is not true to his soul. For material joys and pleasures, he is deceiving his soul. In that very mood Billy joins Meena's picnic party. When her friend passes uncharitable remarks that the banjara's are thieves and their women's are whores, Billy cannot contain himself. He thinks that the remarks are assaults on his faith, his own tribe and his very own women. He jumps on the boy's throat. Meena is angry and asks him to keep off. Billy even calls off his engagement. But after sometime, he relaxes and apologises to Meena. They get married. But the vision does not leave him. Meena cannot engage his soul, his inner urge. To satisfy his soul, he undertakes expedition to tribal belts. But they give him momentary peace. He writes 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.\textsuperscript{33}

As a matter of fact, he is a stranger to the civilized world, and not the tribals. The civilized men are estranged to him. He has an intense hatred of them.

I see a roomful of finely dressed men and women seated on downy sofas and while I am looking at them under my very nose, they turn into a kennel of dogs yarning (their large teeth showing) or snuggling against each other or holding whisky glasses in their furred paws.\textsuperscript{34}

The imagery of dogs with large teeth and furred paws reveals the hatred of Billy and the character he thinks they bear. He has no love lost for the modern civilization. Like Wordsworth of 'The World is Too Much With us' Billy feels that his civilization is a monster. It is not a civilization, but a degradation:

I sometimes wonder whether civilization is anything more than the making and sending 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.\textsuperscript{35}
He hates the world because it "hangs on this peg of money."
His dislike of money is intense. He is drawn to Tuula because
she has no hankering after money. So is his Bilasia. It is
because of these pulls and visions that even the marriage does
not engage his soul. He finds that Meena fails to quench his
real thirst. She does not stir the spirit of his flesh. He loses
his buoyancy after marriage. Rominotices that he is a changed
man. Even Meena complained that Billy is not more the man she
had married. Romi remarks:

It was as though some part of him had gone on
strike. All my words simply sank upon his list
less mind without so much as causing a ripple.
Gone was the staggering intelligence, the spect-
roscopic interest, the sense of humour. He had
either turned banal, something I had seen happen
often enough, or, unknown to us, he was turned
upon obscure segment of himself, fretting out a
bitter secret, settling an old score. 36

Billy turns introvert. Since he is not in harmony with his
surroundings his family, his wife and his soul gets hurt and
estranged, he retires within himself. He is a pilgrim of the
spiritual world. But now he clearly understands what he does not
want. Hence in spite of Meena, visions of a woman haunt him.
Billy does not understand it. He simply feels that there is a
gap of communication between Meena and he. Sex is not an end in
intself. It does not release his tension. Hence he does not touch
Meena for many months. Billy and Meena cannot communicate and respond to each other. He confides to Romi that the marriage:

It might have been saved if Meena had possessed rare degree of empathy or even a sufficient idea of human suffering. These, I am afraid, she did not have. Her upbringing, her ambitions, twenty years of contact with a phoney society—all had ensured that she should not have it. So 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.37

Meena is an associate of this phoney society, a product of the sunset civilization. Talking of the civilization and society around him and Meena, Billy tells Romi:

I don't think I have ever met a more pompous, a more mixed-up lot of people. Artistically, they were dry as dust. Intellectually, they could do no better than mechanically mouth ideas that the west abandoned a generation ago. Their idea of romance was to go and see an American Movie or 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. All that was left was loudmouthed women and men in three piece suits dreaming their little adulteries.38

Billy does not expect Meena to respond to him. He feels lonely and needs someone who can share his thought, who can
respond to him, who can apply a balm to his injured and tortured self. He gets drawn to Rima Kaul who has been in love with him since the day she met him. She loves him intensely and passionately. His trips to Bombay bring him close to her. They develop a rapport. But for Billy Rima is not a sex-symbol; She is an embodiment of that empathy which Meena lacks. I felt happy not when I took her but when she said,

Oh how misunderstood you are, my poor boy, I know how you feel. Those who harras you should be put to death straightway. It was this that I was really looking for. 39

But Billy is wrong. It is not really a question of sympathy rather he does not known himself. He finds Rima different from Meena, and he feels she is a girl he wants. He play-acts to draw sympathy from her. He likes to see her in a melting mood. But when he possesses Rima, he realizes that his calculation has failed. Mere sympathy cannot satisfy his soul. Rima's body and sentiments cannot reveal his identity. It is another name of adultery that he has abhorred so much. He comes to realize that his relationship with Rima is another shame, a degradation. It is a corruption of his being.

It gradually dawned on me that a tremendous corrupting force was working on me. It was as though my soul were taking revenge on me for having denied it for so long that other thing that it had been clamouring for. 40
He deems his affair with Rima as filth that wallows his being. Billy now intensely feels that no woman's body of this phony society - can satisfy him. It is not a hunger of sensual satisfaction. It is a quest for self realization for a union with the missing part of his soul. At this time, he merely feels that the material society corrupts him, degrades and estranges him from his own soul. Hence he is in quest of a surrounding that is in harmony with his soul. While sitting outside his tent in that last expedition, Billy is haunted by his sense of corruption. He feels that his soul responds to the voices of hills, forests, untamed Nature and the tribal people. They seem to be calling him. Sitting outside his tent in the forest, Billy listens to the calls of the streams, the hills, the forest and the tribals:

They all seemed to waiting and watching and staring at me. It was as though I was not Bimal Biswas, graduate of Columbia, the only son of a Supreme Court Judge, husband of Meena Biswas and father of a handsome child, it was as though I were not all this but the first man on earth facing the earth's first night... 'Come' it said. Come to our primitive world that would sooner or later overcome the works of man. Come. We have waited for you... Come, Come, Come, come. Why do you want to go back? This is all there is on the earth. This and the woman waiting for you in the little hut at the bottom of the hill. 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. 

In the beginning Billy does not understand his fascination for the primitive life. Suddenly he realises that it is not merely a fascination, but a search for his identity.

It was more or less the same with me except that I could not figure out what excited or troubled me unless it was a sudden interest in my own identity. Who was I? Where had I come from? Where was I going?

Being fascinated by the primitive surroundings, fed up with the strange, unresponsive, wooden Meena and corrupted by the charm of Rima Kaul, Billy gets a glimpse of Bisasia in Dhunia's hut. This pull is very powerful. Her presence transforms him:

It was I who had changed, or, rather quite suddenly and unaccountably I had ceased to resist what was the real me. All that I had been confusedly driving towards all, my life had been crystallized, brought into focus, so to speak, by what I had gone through during the interval between this visit and the time I had first met Bilasia.

The charm of Bilasia is not only sensual. It imparts thrill, nay vitality, to the very soul. When Romi meets her
he is overpowered.

As I stepped forward I had the distinct, if some what confused, feeling that I was facing not merely a human being but also the embodiment of that primal and invulnerable force that had ruled these hills, perhaps this earth, since time began and that, our proud claims to the contrary, still lay in wait for us not far from the doorstep of our air-conditioned rooms.

So, in Bilasia Billy finds the right woman who can enliven his soul. Meena deadens his senses, Rima corrupts him and the material civilization kills his innate natural instinct. It is Bilasia who caused explosion of senses - the proper medium to reach soul. Billy renounces the civilized world and its symbols in Meena and Rima. From Meena to Rima and from Rima to Bilasia is not a mere trifling in Billy's life, it is a development from sex to sympathy and from sympathy to sublimation. In Bilasia the physical and the elemental meet. She is both Lawrencian and Blakean. Bilasia, to use Jungean concept, is his missing self. Arun Joshi's protagonists are Pirandello's cluster of identities in search of wholeness. In terms of psychoanalysis, Billy and Bilasia are two selves of the same personality.

Consequently, when Billy encounters Bilasia alone in the festive moonlit night, he cannot resist her. She is attractive sexually no doubt, but she is captivating as the primeval force. "Her enormous eyes, only a little foggier with drink
poured out sexuality that was nearly as primeval as the forest
that surrounded them." When Bilasia makes herself available
to him, he does not feel that it is a union of two separate
bodies as in the case with Meena, or union of flesh as with
Rima. It is merging of a split self to realize the whole.

Desire was too mild a world for what I felt at
that moment. It was closer to madness of a man who
after great sin and much suffering finally finds
himself in the presence of his god. It was that
passing moment that rarely comes in 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.

In fact, Bilasia is the essence of the primitive force.
Now Billy's fascination for primitivism becomes an experience,
a realization, Now he knows what he has been waiting and what
he has realized. Bilasia, freed from the strangle-hold of
money-minded civilization, knows how to experience joy from
communion with Nattre, from naked primeval passions and the
rhythm of integrated and harmonised souls. Money has no place.
Billy tells Romi that they enjoy to live at the sustenance
level.

What I kept us happy, I suppose, were the same
thing that have kept all primitives happy
through the ages: the earth, the forest, the
rainbows, the liquor from the Mahua, and
occasional feast, a lot of dancing and love making, and, more than anything else, no ambition none at all. 47

They have conquered wants and do not fear death. Even when they suffer from a severe drought, they do not forget to sing, dance and love. They are not nourished by food and water but by enlivening their inner being by song, dance and love-making. Billy now knows his destination. He knows that he is a pilgrim. Primitivism will lead him to his goal.

Becoming a primitive was only a first step, a means to an end. Of course, I realized it only after I ran away. I realized then that I was seeking something else. I am still seeking something else. 48

So, Billy is like those saints of India who want to realize unity with the divine through awakening of their senses. Like Sadhakas of Tantra, Billy handers after self-realization, the experience of identification with the cosmos, the divine. He gets a taste of it and he cannot return to Meena or Mr. Biswas. For him Bilasia is Prakriti and he is Purush (male) and the cosmic whole can be experienced in their union.

According to Sankhya system of Philosophy, evolution takes place when Purush and Prakriti come into contact. Prakriti needs Purush in order to enjoy and also in order to obtain liberation (apavarga). As the ever active unlimited power,
Prakriti is called Shakti. Bilasia is Shakti for Billy. This consciousness of Shakti is extensive in Arun Joshi. In his *The Last Labyrinth*, Anuradha becomes soon Bhaskar's Shakti. Only when Billy meets Bilasia and unifies himself with her, he finds his real self and gets liberation. He gets his goal. That the pilgrim is near his goal before his death becomes amply clear. Romi's impression spells out this truth:

Gradually it dawned upon us that what we had killed was not a man, not even the son of a "Governor" but someone for whom civilized world had no equivalent. It was an though we had killed one of the numerous man-gods of the primitive pantheon.\(^{49}\)

Like an Indian seer, Billy has experienced godhood. Chandtola was quiet and lifeless after the death of the last king of the tribals. He was a king who was matchless in love-making magic and saintliness. He was a great artist who could chisel a stone-idol that captivated god. His wife was Devi Ma, the fountain of all supernatural powers and magic. Dhunia thinks that Billy is incarnation of that king. So, when he goes to Chandtola with Bilasia, the place begins to glow as predicted by Devi Ma. Dhunia tells Romi that:

Billy is like rain on parched lands, like balms on a wound. These hills have not seen the like of him since the last of our kings passed away.\(^{50}\)
The end of Billy's story is, in many ways, akin to that of The Hairy Ape by O'Neill. Yank in O'Neill's play is also a "symbol of man, who has lost his old harmony with Nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and has not yet acquired in a spiritual way." Yank's symbolism extends beyond psychology. Yank shakes hands with a Gorilla and is being crushed by him. He meets a death into his anthropological past. Billy is killed by the police in the process of retrieving him from the primitive world. His case is disposed off in the only way the civilized world knows. But both Yank and Billy, in similar yet varying ways, explore the profoundest human dilemma of belonging.
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CHAPTER - III- PART - II

THE CITY AND THE RIVER
CHAPTER - III- PART - II

THE CITY AND THE RIVER.

Before the publication of Joshi's fifth novel Prof. Madhusudan Frasad had criticised Joshi for "thematic sameness" and 'lack of thematic change, development or variety.' And The City and the River in many ways breaks fresh Joshian fictional ground. However, the novel falls in line with his earlier novels in terms of its rich thematic texture that he has unobtrusively built up. Fate and freedom, the archetypal conflict of good and evil, the inner map of contemporary civilization and the undercurrents that shape it, death and regeneration, human choice and its bearing on a cosmic context, and God's place in a materialistic dispensation are some of the motif-strands that the novel fuses into an integral scheme.

The novel is presented as a tale within a tale - a tale narrated by the Great Yogeshwara, with the express intent to educate his disciple, the Nameless- One who spent long thirty years under his master. The disciple has imbibed a lot in the extended stretch of apprenticeship - "the secrets of the body and the secrets of the spirit," "the way of the pilgrim" "the way of the warrior," "the ways of the tyrant" and "how to wait" (10)- but not the knowledge of his own self. As the disciple is celebrating his thirty-first birthday, he is now all
set to depart. On this climactic point in time, the sage narrates a tale that he hopes would gleam into his disciple insightful flashes about his own self ---"... in my telling, perhaps you will know who you are" (11). It may be noted that the didactic intent is hardly toned down and that the addressee is the Nameless-One who is as good as anybody. The narrator is the great Yogeshwara, the lord of Yoga which, regardless of its polymorphic character in Indian philosophical systems, means the union of body and spirit. Such implications are suggestive of the issues that would show up in the later sections.

The tale describes a huge modern effervescent city along the banks of a river, neither of which is given a name. The city does not have a locus in or near place like Malgudi of R.K. Narayan, or Paris of Raja Rao or Calcutta of Sudhin N. Ghose. There is a studied vagueness keeping in with the character of the tale. The city is delimited in the north by the pyramids. The lowest plain of the city near the ridge is inhabited by the boatmen who live in mud-huts. On still higher ground, the brick people take their abode. Beyond the brick colonies stood the "famous Seven Hills" that "vary in altitude" (12) which is the seat of the Grand Master's government. The palace is built on the tallest hill and the second is unoccupied "for some reason" (12). The other hills have huge buildings that house various offices of the city, under the watchful eye of the members of the Advisory Council. Beyond the Pyramids, far away, is a mountain out of reach of people.
The office of the Grand Master, the ruler of the city, is hereditary and the present incumbent knows the brick people but is not acquainted with the mud people. The Advisory Council is made up of the palace Astrologer, the Minister for Trade, the Education Adviser, the Police Commissioner and the Master of Rallies. The Astrologer who is "a hundred years old" (13) stays, in the palace and his loyalty and devotion to the Grand Master is unquestioned.

A large section of the novel concentrates on a realistic reproduction of the complex and subtle manoeuvres in the politico-social equation. The entire action of the novel pivotes on the question of allegiance. The Grand Master demands an unqualified allegiance from his people and even an isolated deviation into mistrusting him by anyone unsettled him. Hence the Grand Master decided "to settle the question of allegiance once and for all" (13). But to his great discomfiture, he found the boatmen stubbornly pig-headed and obstinately irrational in their beliefs and ways of life. When the whole world as envisaged by the Grand Master, was riding on the crest of a neoteric upsurge, the boatmen stuck to their antiquated ways, which was an irritable oddity. They did not evince the usual anxiety to better their lot, but took life casually as it came to them. However, their life was marked by a cool confidence that emanated from an insight into the real life of things - the recognition of the oneness of all. "The individual's consolation lies in knowing that behind and within his doom is the Imperishable-
which is his own very seed and essence ... such a realization transforms like magic the view of the seemingly merciless course of life, and bestows immediately a boon of peace."^{4}

The boatmen, contrary to what all others did, did not care to salute the Grand Master as he passed them, which he reckoned as blatant irreverence. The Grand Master remembered his father's caution: "Boatmen are not as simple as they seem.... They consider themselves to be the children of the river, and to the river, and river^{5} alone do they hold allegiance...and for their beliefs they are willing to die" (14). He also had forewarned him to "make sure where the boatmen stand" (14) with regard to political affairs. However, such counsels went in at one ear and out at the other.

However, it may be noted that the Grand Master's feverish insistence on absolute allegiance springs not from philanthropy or magnanimity but from a megalomaniacal longing to satisfy his absolutist designs. The Grand Master would brook no rival. He vowed to raze down ruthlessly, all stumbling blocks on his way up. The boatman's cold unconcern towards his authority, he construed, as sheer impudence. It was when the Grand Master was calculating the moves to bring the boatman to their knees that he had a dream, "that he had become a King" (14). The geography of the dream city approximated to his own city. However, there was opposition from a "host of naked man" (14) which he was resisting, so that "he woke up, bathed in sweat" (15). On the following day, the court Astrologer assured him that the dream
was the herald of the coming of a King, and about which there was an existent prophesy. The Grand Master relished the situation. If there is such a prophesy, he alone was entitled to become the King, he thought. The cunning schemer that he was, each of his moves, from then on, was carefully calculated to further his ambitions. A series of repressive measures, aided and abetted by the Astrologer and the Commissioner, were planned.

The boatmen were a large group and were multiplying at a terrific rate and hence in case of a show-down, the Grand Master well knew that the sheer brute strength of the boatmen was formidable. The first measure was to reduce their strength. So he started enforcing a law that was couched in the sweetest and most felicitous phraseology that appeared disarmingly innocent. The Astrologer who possessed a flair for appealing catchwords, skilfully titled the programme as "the Triple Way or the Way of the Three Beatitudes" (17). They are:

One, the Grand Master of the city is the father and the mother of the city ... Let them offer their allegiance to the Grand Master as a child to his father ... Since there are too many of us ... henceforth there shall be one and only one child to a mother and two to a home ... (Those who do not follow these will) be treated according to the Grand Master's law of compassionate righteousness (17-18).

The headman of the boatmen is a woman who possessed rare brilliance to comprehend the import of the Triple Way. She
asserted in unequivocal terms that the boatmen were the children of the Great River and they could not ever become the children of the Great River and they could not ever become the children of the Grand Master. The Astrologer's reply is revealing: "The times have changed. We are also children of the Grand Master, are we not?"(19). And she retorted that the boatmen were not time-servers. The stances of the Astrologer and the headman are too transparent to need elucidation. She was expressing her view of life that did not count a feverish pursuit after modish fancies among the foremost and cardinal elements of life. Significantly the boatmen too were aware of the prophesy, about the coming of a King.

Both the Grand Master and the Astrologer knew for certain that the river for the boatmen was not a mere lifeless stream of water, but a "symbol of the divine mother. Of God Himself" (22). This, however, appeared to the Grand Master, the embodiment of modernity and a diehard votary of scientific temper, as a "supersition... that keeps our people down" (22), and he has only utter contempt for such infantile credulity and insanity, and on such flimsy grounds he would be the last one to give up his ambition of becoming the King. The declaration of the "Era of Ultimate Greatness"(23), another unilateral decision from the Grand Master "reminded them of the Astrologer's three Beatitudes"(23).
It may be significantly pointed out that the Astrologer, the Grand Master's trusted lieutenant, is a disciple of the great Yogeswara and a fellow student of the Hermit of the Mountain. The Minister for Trade who is a cousin of the Grand Master and "the senior most member of the Council" (64) occupies the fourth tallest hill. Strangely, he is a friend of the Hermit of the Mountain to whom he had free access for consultation on any momentous issue. The Astrologer and the Minister for Trade represent wasted goodness even after knowing their dharma. The Minister for Trade entertained ambitions of becoming the King, if possible, or the Grand Master in the least. He is another Grand Master in miniature in his demands - "When I come to power people must swear allegiance to me" (113), epitomizes the absolutist inclination of his senior.

The Education Adviser is a real force to reckon with. He was "poor" (34) but rose to heights by organizing the "downcastmen, half of the city's youth" (34) that went on rampage exercising brute force with gay abandon, and thereby forcing the Grand Master to grant a "constituency of students with the young Adviser as its head" (34). He maintains a private army of his own so that "today he is dreaded, as are his shocktroops" (35). He was admitted to the Advisory Council with the ulterior motives to frustrate a possible alliance between his shock-brigades and the boatmen. The Education Adviser is a chip of the old block in his eagerness to occupy "the place of the Grand Master or, at worst, his deputy" (61).
The Commissioner, a "low-caste but competent," hardworking and conscientious" (79), is a keyman of the Council. The Grand Master wanted to allot this crucial portfolio to one he was familiar, "as familiar, say, as with my dog" (79), and this explains the complexion of the relationship that the Grand Master expects from the Commissioner - a bootlicking nentity that fawns and wags its tail whenever its master snaps his fingers and, who would readily cringe and cover at his slightest displeasure. In spite of this dog-like loyalty towards the Grand Master, there is no love lost between him and the Education Adviser.

The Master of Rallies represents nurture debauched, for he is "a child of the boatmen", "good at studies" (71) and scholarly but is ignored by all. His dread renders him mute before the Grand Master, in spite of a sincere intent to speak the truth. He has no peace now, though he nostalgically reminisces a time he had peace when he believed in God. However, now he is unable to feel the presence of God. "I felt his presence on the river when I was a child. But where is God now?" (76). Faced with a pointless existence the Master of Rallies commits suicide. The Grand Master's retinue includes the stuffy chief of Army, General Starch who is bothered about the loss of the fortune-telling parrot; his deputy; the Education Adviser's insolent son and the chicly swanky staff secretary.
The opposite camp is constituted by the boatmen led by their headman, the woman, always clad in black and assisted by Bhumiputra, popularly called Master Bhma who is a teacher of Mathematics; Bhumiputra's sister and Dharma Vira and his family, consisting of Dharma's father, father's brother who is a reputed astronomer and popularly called the Professor, Dharma's Grand father, Dharma's mother, his fiancée, Shailaja and her brother. Besides, the group avails itself of the counsel of the Little Star and the Hermit of the Mountain.

Dharma, the police officer under the Commissioner, true to his name, is "known for obedience and perfect adherence to duty" (23) and "innocent of heart and had yet to learn the ways of the world"(24). He true to his name, is singular as a character that lives fully upto the Upanisadic concept of Svadharma. Dharma turns out to be an instrument for the execution of the evil designs of the Grand Master unwittingly. Dharma's father, an official in the Grand Master's government evinces a casual agnostic indifference. The malady that plagued Dharma's father was diagnosed by his doctor as "stasis of the soul, Atrophy of the brain and locomotor functions" (135). The recommended remedy was to exercise the "soul" (134) and to allow the soul to "speak when it wants to speak. Let it rip" (134). Dharma's father is a specimen of the innumerable city dwellers who would surmount any grave social or spiritual problem by ignoring its existence. Interestingly, Dharma and his father are
the two characters who undergo greatest transformation in the novel.

The grandiloquent Era of Ultimate Greatness, despite all the fanfare, is a ruthless and suppressive dictatorship intent on the elimination of the slightest opposition to the Grand Master's royal road to throne. It may be noted that from among the intellectuals Bhumiputra had to wage a solitary battle to debunk the pretensions of the Grand Master. Around him were staunch and gushing enthusiasts of the era and they lavished unbounded acclaim on the sagacious Grand Master. However, Bhumiputra declared that the "King was naked" (153). Yet to his colleagues, Bhumiputra is a rebel.

In fact, the novel projects Bhumiputra as the prophet anointed with an apocalyptic mission. In spite of himself, he found himself narrating the parable to his students. One also learns that as he walked beside the river remorse-stricken, an "apparition" (154) in the guise of an old man materialised in the dark reassuring him. The apparition informs Bhumiputra of his prophetic mission: "You have been chosen to speak. The great river has chosen you to speak with the tongue of men what they cannot hear in her troubled lament. She commands you to speak for her, and also for her numerous children" (153). Bhumiputra thus is entrusted with the onerous mission of denouncing evil, to warn the world of the impending retribution and to bring them back to the path of truth.
From then on, Bhumiputra dominates the action of the novel. He starts preaching with unprecedented vigour to different classes of his students, so that "the king is naked became a slogan, a cry of revolt" (154). The reverberant echoes of the slogan created ripples in the Grand Master's palace. Even when the staff secretary called him and warned him of dire consequences if he did not desist from such incendiary speech, Bhumiputra was not shaken. However, the second visit of the apparition that described himself as "the Hermit of the Mountain" (157) apart from putting him on his mettle, imparted a great revelation:

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

And here is the quintessential Upanisadic wisdom.

It is only after his arrest what was so far a personal mission snowballs into a movement. The providential escape of Bhumiputra from the jeep when it hit an electric pole as he was carried off by the Grand Master's men, and his disappearance brought the Professor, the great astronomer on to the arena. Bhumiputra was a favourite student of the Professor
himself. The arrest and the disappearance of his student exer-
cised his mind a great deal, and he himself was on a personal
search for Bhumiputra.

It may be noted here that the Professor himself is gene-
rously assisted by supernatural powers. For instance, as the
Professor was searching for Bhumiputra, he approached many but
all pleaded either ignorance or helplessness. Three days he
wanders along the street and on the fourth day, he comes to
rest on a granite pillar on the bank of the river. As he sits
downcast and dejected "A brown boy of ten or eleven" (30)
materialises before him. The boy, hereafter, becomes a constant
companion to the Professor. As it is, many things are inscrutable
about the boy. He introduces himself to the Professor as a star
in the heavens. He tells the Professor: Well, I saw you looking
at me through your telescope that night ... and you looked so
troubled I thought I would come down and inquire what the matter
was " (40); the other details about the star only reinforce
the mystery surrounding it. The star says that it does not
have a name now though it had been named Patanjali in the past,
and as "thousands of years old" (42). A further series of
cryptic remarks are meant to supply insightful flashes into
Reality. "everyone is thousands and thousands of years old...
Unfortunately we forget this the most. That is the world's
misfortune" (42). And here the star seems; to be suggesting
to the reader the possible solution for the debased and reprobate
world. The star also informs the Professor that it has no local habitation which is indicative of its omnipresence. The star also assured the Professor of its help whenever required, and it lives upto its promise.

One notices a similar ambiguity surrounding the Hermit of the Mountain too. The Hermit is described as a fellow student of the Astrologer under the great Yogeshwara, and he too confesses that "it has been ages since I was in the mountains" (157), though he declares to Bhumiputra: "when I was your age, eighty years ago, I left this city ..." (155). The Hermit's and the Little Star's remarks clearly betray the consciousness of a timeless existence. However the Astrologer, in spite of having undergone the same training as that of the Hermit could recognize only a "hundred years" (13) existence in his life. The recognition of this timeless existence is as good as the realization of one's unity with the Absolute and hence one's imperishability.

The intrusive apparitions of the Hermit of the mountain and the Little Star juxtapose the supernatural and the phenomenal world. And this is in truly Indian character, as Sudhin Ghose in The Flame of the Forest says:

The boundaries between the natural, between the divine, human and even animal creatures on the one hand and the vegetable and the inanimate world on the other are singularly vague and undefined ... Troops of divine and
semi-divine personages appear on the Indian scene on every possible occasion.... A constant communication is kept up between the visible and the invisible, and such is their mutual interdependence that each seems to need the other's help...  

Significantly enough, the supernatural agents do not possess an incapacitating or unhinging effect on human volition. They fail to make a dent in the human will to choose and hence such promptings can be sidetracked effortlessly. It is also interesting to note that the Little Star is like Ariel in The Tempest or Puck in A Midsummer Night's Dream in its agility and ethereal bearing. However, the Little Star wields much lesser ascendency than either Ariel or Puck. The Minister for Trade, for instance, in spite of a close association with the Hermit, failed to profit from it. At best the sway of the supernatural agency is a prompting audible to only a docile listener. Hence there is no supernatural overindulgence and the consequent loss of tenability.

The unavailing struggle of individuals trapped in the maelstrom of ignorance (avidya) finds clear illustration in the Grand Master and his cronies. The Commissioner gets worked up over the escape of Bhumiputra, described as the "kingpin of a conspiracy" (43) "against a king" (144). He also fabricated a report in which he accused the Education Adviser of masterminding the attack on the police party and freeing
Bhumiputra. The Education Adviser, far from being dispirited at the baseless allegations, relished the turn of events. It now offered him a convenient lever with which he could "blackmail" (63) the Grand Master. In case the conspiracy succeeded, and there was no reason why it did not, he could move higher up in the chain.

Life, for the Grand Master and the members of the Council, is a saga of intrigues and one-up-manship, and each one by hook or by crook tries to outmaneuver the rest. However, for the boatmen, and Bhumiputra and his men, it is a heroic struggle to defend the spiritual tradition they have inherited. The Annual Festival of the River is a momentous occasion in their life, when they renew their allegiance to the great River. For the Grand Master, it is a day of affirmation by one and all of the absolute sovereignty of the Grand Master. Hence, the events were heading towards a final showdown in the Annual Festival of the River.

On the day of the Festival of the River, the inordinate and unprecedented restrictions raised the boatmen's ire. Notwithstanding, they meekly submitted to all of them including the salute to the Grand Master, even though they loathed "to salute a man, he he a GrandMaster" for, "all their lives, for ages beyond memory, boatmen had saluted the great river who was their mother" (90). They protested against the unlawful detention of Bhumiputra by pasting on the prow of each boat,
his portrait that came in the State-owned newspaper branding him an arch-conspirator. The Grand Master being "shortsighted" (98) physically and figuratively could not see the audacious display of the portraits and thereby failed to read the writing on the walls.

It may be pointed out that the ceremonies on the day of the Festival were geared to the eventual deification of the Grand Master. The Astrologer, the Master of the ceremonies, while performing the yajña, strangely deviated "to substitute the hymn of the great river with another composition that spoke of the greatness of kings and their indispensability to the earth" (97). The Hermit of the Mountain who was the only one who could understand the tongue among those present, was rudely shaken by the brazen and impudent irreverence. He reminded the Astrologer of the "blasphemy" and the "sacrilege" he committed and immediately left the place. However, the reminders did not bring in the desired impact on the Astrologer as he was already past the stage when a broad hint could bring him back on the rails.

The Astrologer's speech after the ceremony is significant. He briefed the crowd about the grave threat unleashed by the "asuras" (100), the evil forces looming large over the city. He put on a grieving front and appealed to everyone to be ever vigilant to isolate such forces. The names of Bhumiputra and associate were pointed out as the ring leaders of the conspiracy, out to obliterate the goodness represented by the
Grand Master and his council. The crowd was raised to such a frenzy that the "cheer-leaders now demanded Master Bhma's head" (99). Stealthily, amidst the din, the Astrologer administered an oath to the crowd to fight against the conspirators and to hold their "allegiance to the Grand Master and to no one else" (100). The ceremony was capped with the coronation of the Grand Master's son.

The Grand Master on his way to deifying himself leaves no stone, unturned and adopts the most despicable tactics. The "Professor and hundreds of boatmen" (102) were apprehended as "their lips during the oath-taking ceremony, it had been observed, had not moved at all" (102). Evidently, the Grand Master and his company believed in paying lip-service which they did swearing in the name of God and spirituality. Paradoxically, the Astrologer himself swore in the name of "Dharma Rajya" (101) and asserted: "ours is a spiritual civilization. It is through prayer and through vows that a man perfects himself" (100. But there is little grace when the devil in the garb of one's guardian angel comes swearing by the Sastras.

With the firm backing of Truth with them, the Professor and Headman refused to be cowed down by threats and they intensified their activities. The conduct of the lottery stall with the pedagogic intent, though ingenious, called for a heroic will. Repeated arrests only hardened them, and were not afraid to die for Truth. The eternally dark mines where the Professor
and the headman are subjected to horrors of the most inhuman kind, are reminiscent of Hitlerian concentration camps. The description of the various punishments would send shivers down the spine of the most hardened villains. The Astrologer's visit to the mines to intimidate the headman who never hid her utter disregard for the Grand Master and his buddies fails to have any effect. Hence she is carried off and is blinded and "poured acid into the perforations" (164). Once the headman is blinded the Professor declares a fast unto death, demanding a fair trial for the Grand Master and justice to the prisoners. However the demand remained a demand and the Professor starved himself to death.

When Bhumiputra returned to the city after his peregrinations, he had nothing else but the parable of the naked king to teach, which now became "the chronicle of the city's humiliation" (148). The boatmen gathered behind Bhumiputra for a showdown. The strike calls to mind Gandhian civil disobedience when the boatmen refuse to move the goods on the river. While Arun Joshi himself was very much influenced by Gandhiji, the civil disobedience by the boatmen failed to have any impact. The well-equipped naval force of the Grand Master immediately did the work efficiently and fast with sophisticated mechanised boats. The licences of the boatmen were cancelled. And battle followed. The boatmen were supported by the shock-brigades unconditionally, though Bhumiputra was against such an unholy alliance. They stormed the goldmines and "turned the
GoldMines into a heap of rubble" (83). They became blind with fury and indulged in large scale vandalism.

Though the boatmen's struggle bears a close affinity to a political upheaval, their fight is not for temporal benefits but for Truth. The boatmen liberated from the Gold Mines rested for two days and on the third day they put up barricades. But for the intervention of Bhumi putra, the boatmen would have set the whole city on fire. Yet their patience was monumental in the face of extreme provocations. They put forward four demands and allow a week's time for the Grand Master who spurns all such voices of sanity. And with a casual boldness he sets fire to the petition.

The seven days that interpose between the final catastrophe and the day of petition pass off with an uneasy calm, and the fighting resumed with an unprecedented vigour. The ultimatum issued by the Council to the boatmen to return to work and dismantle the barricades was ineffectual. Nonchalant as they were, the boatmen shrugged off such intimidating tactics with the contempt it deserved. They well knew that they had to brace up for a do or die battle. However, one finds Bhumi putra downcast as he alone had an inkling of the shape of things in store for the city.

As the battle rages menacingly the newly constituted council meet as usual and the Grand Master declares the dissolution of the erstwhile Advisory Council and the formation of
a brand new one named the Supreme Council. Here, again it may be noted that a small titular change makes much headway for the Grand Master in opening his way to unchallenged supremacy. It is also interesting to observe how the Council deplore the pathetic law and order situation to conclude that only a heavy hand of a monarch could set the city right. They nominate the Grand Master as the king of the city. The procedure for nomination as was their wont, yet again makes a mockery of truth and justice. There was to be no election for the future kings; sacred thread was to be a must for the aspirant to kingship; and the position was to be made hereditary - underscoring the horrible narcissistic bottom to which men of the time are prone to.

The Minister for Trade was made the New Grand Master. Drunk with absolute power the decision of the council is to crush all opposition ruthlessly, and the Commissioner is enjoined to produce Bhumiputra "dead or alive, within seventy-two hours" (215). The King's tanks mounted with modern sophisticated lethal laser weapons razed down the barricades. The boat-men along with their Headman were charred to ashes and were pushed down the ebbing river after the operation of "silent lasers for fifteen-seconds" (227). The Grandfather's desperate efforts to protect Bhumiputra was ineffectual. A combined operation of specially trained commando force backed by a large contingent of soldiers and naval vessels made a sudden swoop on the Grandfather's farm where Bhumiputra lay hid. The whole episode comes off as a ridiculous anti-climax where the disarming
simplicity and innocence of a university teacher is pitted against the brute force of a mighty State. The operation made a clean sweep of the opposition and the site bore a gruesome spectacle. "By 19.30 hrs. it was fully dark and except for the rumble of the falling rain, all was quite" (247). The Hermit of the mountain came to the "debris under which Grandfather, Mother, Dharma, Shailaja, Vasu and Bhma lay" (250-51). Dharma's father had been apprehended earlier.

In religion and literature, a gross violation of propriety or a great act of benediction generally sinks deep down into Nature. In The City and the River, after the crude profanation of the sanctity of a human race, the Nature takes on different aspects. Dark clouds loomed large. The Great River swelled menacingly to transform itself into a "veritable sea" (249). The rising water engulfed the Hermit and the Parrot[9] that had taken shelter with the Hermit. The rain lashed the city without let up and the water rose up threateningly to the Seven Hills. The Education Adviser and the New Grand Master fought for the helicopter to death. The King was swallowed up by the river - "For seven days and seven nights it rained without a stop ...Of the Grand Master and his city nothing remained" (260). The flooding river too need not dishearten the gushing votaries of rationalism, for cataclysmic floods (Pralaya)[10] are a part of all great mythologies (e.g., Noah's flood in the Bible). And the Gita says, "Whenever there occurs a relaxation or weakening
of the principle of duty and a rise of unrighteousness, then
I pour Myself forth." And the Hermit says, "... when men
desecrate her, minister and sing instead hymns in praise of
kings, the epoch must come to an end. That is all I know"(115).

The river becomes a great fictional character with a
divine halo similar to the river in Hermann Hesse's Siddhartha
and unlike Congo river in Conrad's Heart of Darkness and
Mississippi in Huckleberry Finn. Significantly such attribution
of divinity to the great river does not strain credibility in
the land of the Ganga. River Himavati in Kanthapura, the
Ganga in The Serpent and the Rope, Sarayu in R.K. Narayan
could offer illustrative fictional parallels.

The number seven is a recurring digit in the novel - seven
hills, seven councillors, seven days, seven nights etc. - the
mystical number that stands for infinity and hence underscores
the universal validity of the theme. And Dwivedi says that
Arun Joshi "presents the aspects of Indian life so skilfully
that it becomes universal in his creative smithy." The affi-
nity between The City and the River and Macbeth is striking.
In both hunger for power is the springboard to action which
is goaded by a prophecy. Both have villain heroes who for
their unbridled ambition are made to pay with their own lives.
The Grand Master-turned king has a despicable end, while Mac-
beth attains tragic heights. Both of them wreak extensive
destruction about them. Nonetheless, a closer scrutiny would
surprise one with their distinctness and contrasting focal vision. While in Macbeth the protagonist is motivated solely by political ambition, in The City and the River, political supremacy is not the end, but a means to deification.

The existence of a prophesy that speaks of coming of a king is known to many people including the Astrologer, the Hermit, the Headman and Shailaja's brother. It reads:

Who knows, who can read the signs,
The workings of immortal time?
..............................
To his kingdom at last the king returns(8).

The Astrologer and the Hermit of the mountain used to argue about the exact interpretation of the prophesy when they were fellow students under the Great Yogeshwara. Once they approached him to settle the dispute but the Great Yogeshwara only said, "cities, my children, even as men, make their own horoscopes" (217). Later, the Hermit of the Mountain had confided to the Minister for Trade that prophesies were not deterministic and binding, and they were true only to the extent man allows them to be true. The Hermit added that the king referred to in the prophesy may well be God himself, for, "God, too, is a king" (69). Still later, when the Grand Master learns that the Minister for Trade is assisted by a Hermit, he too is eager to approach the Hermit. Interestingly, the Minister for Trade denies having received any help from the Hermit,
which, in a way, was true, as he never profited from spiritual
counsels and could merely describe the hermit as "inscrutable"
(202). And, besides, "the king the prophesy speaks of, he thinks
is God himself... God as Truth" (202), said the Minister. God
and Truth were irrelevant entities in the Grand Master's scheme
of things and hence he immediately forbids the Minister to talk
about the Hermit any more.

There seems to be no valid reason for the boatmen.
Bhumiputra and the rest to begrudge the coming of a king. In
fact, they were not so much against a king as anyone bent upon
wresting their time-honoured allegiance from the great river.
The Grand Master, once he enthroned himself as king feels, on
top of the world, unrivalled, and disdainfully dismisses
everything above him. "And God - what is God? Where is He?
Does he even exist?" (219). There was also a vain bid by the
Astrologer to identify the Grand Master with the Absolute. The
Astrologer, for instance, when he requests the Headman at the
Goldmines to take the oath of allegiance to the Grand Master,
says to her: "All I ask is that you also swear to the Grand
Master. He and the great river are one" (164). And this was the
limit for the boatmen. It is also significant that during the
Festival of the River, the Hermit went off in a huff precisely
when the Astrologer started "to substitute the hymn of the
great river with another composition that spoke of the great-
ness of kings and their indispensability to the earth" (97).
For with the Hermit of the Mountain Arun Joshi, too seems to say: "The world belongs to God ... Let him be the King of what is His" (70). The Grand Master, then, is guilty of the sin of apotheosis of the self and hence the retribution. Macbeth commits no such sin. The novel then is a solemn entreaty through the fictional framework to reinstate the already dislodged spiritual tradition and to give God his due - to be aware here and now of His presence which is paradoxically a transcendent presence. And this is possible only by knowledge (jnana) of the unity of one's self with the Absolute. The Nameless-One presumably gets the insight into his self.

For this, one needs to make hard personal choices with effort. External props of whatever nature fall short of solution. If outside help was of consequence, the Astrologer, the disciple of the great Yogeshwara himself, would not have ended up as he did, nor would the Minister of Trade who listened to the Hermit's counsels, need to have such a tragic finale.

Notwithstanding the unredeemed villainy and tragic end of the Grand Master-turned king and his cohorts, Joshi's vision is not one of unrelieved darkness and gloom. As G.S. Amur says: "His novels take us to the heart of darkness... but he is not a prophet of despair. All his novels hold out promise of regeneration and redemption." All the five novels then are "songs of the spiritual triumph of man despite the defeat of his physical powers." The images of opposing symbols of
city and river are not a facile polarisation of the two as irreconcilable entities, but objects to be viewed through the advaitic-Upanisadic framework.
REFERENCES

1. Radhakrishnan, Arun Joshi 11.


3. In Chandyogya Upanisad (VIII.3.4) the gods and demons sent Indira and Virochana respectively to Prajapati to learn the teaching about the self. Prajapati commanded them to undergo penance for thirty-two years to qualify themselves for the teaching.


5. Eck Diana ("Rivers", Encyclopaedia of Religion Vol. 12 provides an enlightening article in the entry on River. She says that there are many tribal and ancient cultures whose orientation in the world is provided not by the four cardinal direction but by the river itself: upstream and downstream. This was especially so when they were dependent on the river for livelihood. It may also be recalled that it is due to this orientation that many ancient civilizations came to be called river civilizations: Mesopotamia along the Tigris and Euphrates, Egypt along the Nile, the Indus Valley along the Indus. In all these, river functions as a fundamental means of world orientation.

During the Vedic period there were seven sacred rivers viz., the five rivers of the Punjаб, Indus and Sarasvati:
Later on, with the concentration of the Aryans around the Ganges Valley, Ganga became the dominant river, and drew around it many myths regarding its origin and life. Diana says that "the importance of the Ganges as the Faradigmatic river - holy, cleansing, and life-giving" is further seen in its widespread duplication in other rivers. "Today we have seven sacred rivers often known as the "seven Ganges" - Indus or Sindhu, Saraswati, Yamuna, Godavari, Kaveri and Narmada. The confluence of the rivers such as that at Prayaga where the Ganges, Yamuna and Sarasvati meet is especially holy, and is a site of special pilgrimage. Festivities like Kumbh Mela correspond to the annual festival of the river in the novel.

One also remembers that for the Hindus, Ganges is not just a holy river but the embodiment of the divine. She is called "liquid Sakti," or female energy, female Goddess, the counterpart of the great Lord Siva. Ganga is often addressed as Ganga Mata, Mother Ganges. The other sacred rivers are also similarly addressed as mother and worshipped as goddesses.

6. The springboard to action in Shakespeare's Macbeth too is apparently the same - the prophesy, scheming, realization of the prophesy, and retribution.


8. One may note, among numerous instances in Milton's Paradise Lost, the central event of the Fall is invested with a cosmic dimension:
Earth trembled from her entrails, as again
In pangs, and Nature gave a second groan;
Sky loured, and muttering thunder, some
sad drops
Wept at completing of the mortal sin original
(PL IX 1000-1005).

In The Rime of the Ancient Mariner of Coleridge,
even as the Mariner blesses the water snakes,
nature pours forth rain, "And when I awoke it
rained" (Lines 296-300). In religious literature,
death of Christ is described as a megacosmic event:
"Then the curtain hanging in the Temple was torn
in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the
rocks split apart" (Matt. 27.51). Hence in the
Advaitic Indian tradition it acquires greater
credibility and significance.


10 G.S. Amur, "A New Parable,"rev. of The City and the
River, by Arun Joshi, Indian Literature July-August

11 Dwivedi 100.