Chapter – 7

Summing-Up
Arun Joshi is one of the most powerful Indian novelists in Indo-English literature. He is indeed a novelist of high order and his concern for fellow human beings has imparted a profound appeal to his works. His novels probe deep into the dark and innermost recesses of the human mind and illuminate the hidden corners and bring before us the inner, the mental life of his characters. Joshi portrays the conflict of the contemporary Indian. His fiction is a quest for the essence of human living. All his novels show both continuity and development. We see in his novels the reflections of Indian ethos, the teachings of The Bhagavad Gita, traces of western thoughts and ideology.

Arun Joshi’s writings are different from that of other Indian novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Kamala Markandaya and others. His characters are mainly in search of their lost self and their identity and embody the theme of anxiety. They are aware of what they have lost or are continuously losing and experience their dehumanization with a feeling of despair and anxiety. He is highly influenced by the western existential writers like Kafka, Camus, and Sartre. Though he has adopted their methods of writing, he has his roots in Indian society. As Shivani Vasta and Rashmi Gour opines:

Among the contemporary Indian English novelists, Arun Joshi has highlighted most effectively some of the eternal metaphysical and ethical questions.137
The protagonists in his novels suffer from the Hamletian dilemma “to be or not to be” but they reach a stage of life where their dilemma is resolved and they compromise with reality. Thus the anguish of alienation and the absurdity of situation are not the only predicaments in Joshi’s novels. Another dominant motif in his novels is man’s rootlessness and isolation, the cause of which is not any metaphysical loss of established tradition or norms but the lack of right adjustments of behavior in his protagonists.

Joshi is one of those modern Indian novelists in English who has broken new grounds. In his search for new themes, he has “renounced the larger world in favour of the inner life” and has engaged himself As Verghese Paul remarks “in a search for the essence of human living.”\textsuperscript{138} An outstanding novelist of human predicament, Joshi has chartered in all his five novels the inner crisis of the modern man. The most besetting problem that man faces today is the problem of meaninglessness. As Edmund Fuller opines that:

\begin{quote}
Man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but from inner problem ... a conviction of isolation, randomness and meaninglessness in his way of existence.\textsuperscript{139}
\end{quote}

After a detailed study of Joshi’s novels we can come to the conclusion that the central image of Joshi’s novels is that of a ‘foreigner’.
Joshi’s observation of human predicament assumes an existential stance when he pinpoints that identity; human contact and meaning are all contingent on a willingness to concede the basic facts of his existence. He is critical of the modern man who adores only material progress while plunging down deep into a spiritual gulf. Like William Wordsworth, Joshi also feels sorry for men who care only for their worldly advancement and never think seriously of their spiritual deterioration. He reveals an insight into the inner dilemma of their characters and has pointed out the absurdity of existence which is made perceptible in a social context. His characters spell out the absurdity of the human condition wherein the modern man is a part of the world of his own making, of his own choice.

Arun Joshi, very often uses the stream-of-consciousness technique to explore the inner crisis of man. He makes use of soliloquies that sound like the ravings of an upstart. It appears as though Arun Joshi has forgotten the fact that he is writing a novel and in his eagerness to publicize his views, he goes a little bit out of the way in narrating his story. The use of this technique has affected adversely and has failed to evoke sufficient success in the characters. Some of his utterances are mere platitudes with no trace of humour. A deliberate use of ironic mask and humour may have added dimensions and solved much of these problems. But, there are occasions where Joshi’s language becomes forceful and evocative. For
example he sees no marked difference between the present and the past.

Arun Joshi’s vision of life, his compassion and sensibility are manifested in the archetypal patterns of conflict between good and evil which is typically Indian. The crime manifested is amended in the protagonist’s mind itself which is a hundred times more forceful a punishment than what courts of Law can inflict. Hence the confession before a student who himself an apprentice is more appropriate than what it should have been if it had been done before any authority. Arun Joshi’s success in handling his seemingly flimsy material stands within the framework of his novel. His preoccupation with social and personal blemishes is made all the more attractive solely because of the autobiographical retrospective narrative of Ratan Rathor in *The Apprentice* which traces in a convincing manner the growth and development of the protagonist’s character. It casts a spell on the reader as it does on the imaginative companion.

Certain recent Indian novelists in English have made significant efforts to delineate the predicament of the modern man. The work of Arun Joshi in particular reads like the Spiritual odyssey of the twentieth century man who has lost his spiritual moorings. Despite some differences in their approach, all of Joshi’s heroes are Jasbir Jain remarks “men engaged in the meaning of life.” The novelist has tried to project through their experiences the crisis of the urbanized and highly industrialized modern civilization along with its
dehumanizing impact on the individual who is ever eager to find out and reaffirm the value of meaningful relatedness to life.

The central experience of Joshi’s novels is crisis sometimes a crisis of emotions and sentiments as in *The Foreigner* and *The Strange case of Billy Biswas*, sometimes a crisis of ethics and allegiance as in *The Apprentice* and *The City and the River*, sometimes a crisis of consciousness as in *The Last Labyrinth*.

Quest motif is found in all the novels of Arun Joshi. We see how he works out the hopeless longings that drive all his heroes. Lionel Trilling rightly remarks that the novel is “a perpetual quest for reality” and “the most effective agent of the moral imagination in our time.” Through his novels he delineates the individual’s inner crises and consciousness. In one of the interviews, Joshi has stated that he is stimulated into writing to explore “that mysterious underworld, which is the human soul.” He further writes in his novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*: “Life’s meaning lies not in the glossy surfaces of our pretensions, but in those dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish forever.” His characters throughout their lives try to seek that meaning of life in the meaningless world. They are “The lost Lonely Questers” after the absurd in the dark night of the soul, in the dark recesses of existence. His interviewer, Sujathja Mathai has rightly stated: “He sees lives as labyrinths-hopeless mazes where you may get irretrievably lost or discover the shining secret at the core of life.”
The novelist honorably withdraws from the outer social reality and engages himself totally towards the exploration of the human soul, the inner psyche of the modern man. Hari Mohan Prasad opines that:

His fiction is a quest for the essence of human living. The external world and reality emerge from the consciousness of the individuals. All his heroes are both Picaroes and pilgrims-Picaroes in their wanderings and pilgrims in their search for meaning of ‘Karma’, for the life force, for atonement, for the First Cause, for the Ultimate Truth, for God. His characters are essentially seekers and questers.\(^{146}\)

The central theme of his novels is expounded in *The Last Labyrinth*: “Hunger of the body. Hunger of the spirit. You suffer from one or the other, or both.”\(^{147}\) Sindi in *The Foreigner* is a quester after absurd wants, with a schism in his soul. He continues “wandering through the maze of (his) existence” striving to discover “the meaning of (his) life.”\(^{148}\) Billy Biswas in *The Strange case of Billy Biswas* is concerned with his search for the potential divinity that is there in latent form in his unconscious. It is this “Other Thing” for which he continues his quest: “That other thing was, and is, after all, what my life is all about.”(SCBB 135) Billy’s becoming a primitive is a step towards his spiritual awareness, his existentialist “search” (SCBB 135)
that ultimately drives him to the doors of death. Joshi, through Romi, describes Billy's quest so beautifully:

If life's meaning is 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 call. 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.

(SCBB 8)

Ratan, in *The Apprentice*, out of an acute sense of alienation and a quest to understand the meaning of life, undergoes the sternest apprenticeship in the world. Symbolically, he starts at the lowest – wiping the shoes of the congregation and thus begging forgiveness of all those whom he has harmed. He believes that polishing the shoes of the devotees will cleanse the filth enveloping his soul, will purge him of his vanity, and will bring an absolute humility and genial acceptance of life. He pleads that there is nothing wrong to make a second start: "One must try and not lose heart, not yield, at any cost, to despair."149 His existential decision to recover the lost self through an act of penitence makes him an affirmative kind of existential figure
and the personal values he discovers for himself surely lends meaning to his existence.

Arun Joshi’s Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel, *The Last Labyrinth*, depicts a fascinating exploration of the turbulent inner world of a millionaire industrialist, Som Bhaskar, whose mystical urge is presented in his incessant longing for the vitals of life and existence and who is relentlessly driven by undefined hungers which he unsuccessfully seeks to satisfy by possession of an object, a business enterprise and a woman named Anuradha who becomes more and more the centre of his entire existence. He is in quest of knowledge and is always guided by reason, not by faith. He is curious to know the secret of life and tries to probe into “that core of loneliness around which all of us are built.” (LL 54) He is convinced that all the problems can be solved if one has knowledge. He affirms:

> If only one knew! If only miracles were to take place, as of old, and one could suddenly, irrefutably, know. Without nagging, enervating doubts. I want. I want. If only one knew what one wanted. Or, may be, to know was what I wanted. To know. Just that. No more. No less. (LL 53)

But, surprisingly enough, his dilemma is not solved by his thirst for knowledge; it is rather aggravated by his intensely rational approach. It is Aftab who very plainly gives him the right directive and reminds him:
I told you are different, you don’t understand us. You work by logic. By your brain. You are proud of your education or what you consider education. There is an understanding that only suffering and humiliation bring. Anuradha has that. Even I have a bit of it. You are empty of that understanding. (LL 217)

Joshi seems to suggest that the unwavering faith is right substitute for rationalism. The panda also advises him that “Faith can move mountains.” Life’s riddles can be solved only by an unwavering faith, “this trust in the world’s mechanisms, this faith that the engine shall not seize, or worse, explode?” The mystical Indian way of life alone characterized by Geeta, Gargi, the Sufi Pir, Aftab and Anuradha can administer trust and faith in the tortured soul of Som. Gargi holds that suffering and sacrifice cleanse the soul of all impurities. Now, Som notices that change enter him. He discards Leela Sabnis, the embodiment of reason, and pines for Anuradha, the motivator into the world of belief and faith. He discloses his agonies before Gargi, Anuradha and Aftab. All of them have their answers to his quest and co-operate by extending a helping hand to him towards realization. Gargi writes to Som: “There is no harm in believing that God exists.” There is a gradual development of Som’s soul on the lines of faith and trust. His journey towards the temple at the mountains to encounter Krishna symbolizes his attempt towards reaching his soul. The dirt and filth hindering from having visions of God are being cleaned by
his suffering. Suffering and humiliation bring an understanding that helps in solving the problem of life. The novelist, through *The Last Labyrinth*, seems to suggest that the labyrinths of life can be resolved through unwavering faith, trust, intuition and open-hearted prayer to God that help in leading a really peaceful life.

Joshi’s last novel, *The City and The River*, is an existentialist commentary on the absurdity of human situation. Like his earlier novels, herein too, he continues to explore the existential predicament of his characters in an indifferent and hostile world. One thing new in the novel is that here Joshi has widened his canvas by taking up issues that concern larger humanity rather than some individuals. In this novel, too, he takes up his favourite issues of faith, commitment, choice, responsibility and identity, but the way how he handles these issues is somewhat different from that of his earlier novels. Here he looks at them with the spectacles of politics and makes this novel a political satire. There are many questers in the novel. Master Bhoma goes out in search of peace of mind after the disturbing events. The boatmen go to the river in search of their livelihood. The Hermit of the mountain seeks knowledge in isolation and he comes back to save the child for the welfare of the human race. The real quester is the Nameless-One whom the raft carries as an illegitimate child and brings back as an illumined one. The Nameless-One seeks knowledge during his discipleship with the great Yogeshwara and comes back to restore peace and order in the world around. By the end of the story,
the reader achieves a sense of having completed a quest. It is a universal human quest for purity through sacrifice “of egoism, selfishness, stupidity.” The yajna of life “burns only o sacrifice. When the fire is low, when the flame is dying, men must feed it with their own lives.”150 This is, perhaps, the meaning of the life in the meaningless world. This is certainly the meaning of the boatmen’s rebellion.

Joshi seems to suggest that “The cure, surely, (of all sorts of problems) is within oneself.” (TCTR 69) Like The Last Labyrinth, this novel, too, emphasizes the significance of faith, prayer, understanding and truth. The novelist puts forward his hypothesis through the Astrologer: “Ours is spiritual civilization. It is through prayer and through vows that a man perfects himself.” (TCTR 100) As God resides in each soul, Joshi reassures that “all should be well” (TCTR 29) and we find The City and the River certainly far more optimistic than his earlier novels.

In all the five novels that Arun Joshi has written, we find a forward movement from one novel to the other. We see that the novelist has progressed from Sindi’s search for self in The Foreigner to Billy’s search for true self in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, from Ratan’s cry of conscience in The Apprentice to Som’s cry of consciousness in The Last Labyrinth. In The City and the River, he emphasizes the value of suffering and sacrifice. Like eminent novelists of the world such as Dostoevsky, Kafka and Tolstoy, he has learnt the
value of suffering. In *The Last Labyrinth*, through Aftab, Joshi speaks: “There is an understanding that only suffering and humiliation bring”. (LL 217) There is a progression from suffering in *The Last Labyrinth* to sacrifice in *The City and The River*. This understanding, Joshi affirms in *The City and the River*, brings tranquility and enables to learn only by ourselves. A clear understanding unfolds Truth which “destroys the falsehood at its very roots, (and) leaves all men free to choose as they will.” (TCTR 112) The last two novels are similar in the sense that both emphasize the significance of faith, prayer, understanding and truth. In his last novel, Joshi affirms:

In any case we are only instruments – of the great God in the highest heaven who is the Master of the universe. –

His is the will, His is the force.” (TCTR 264)

He suggests that one who prays, who believes in God, tends to be peaceful, contented and in the long run happy and hopeful. The Great Yogeshwara tells the Nameless-One: “God resides as much in a Grand Master as in you and me. Is not, therefore, always, room for hope?” (TCTR 263) Hence, this novel is regarded as the most optimistic novel of Joshi.

Joshi is also not like Mulk Raj Anand or R.K. Narayan, Kamala Markandaya or Bhabani Bhattacharya. Mulk Raj Anand is an advocate of the downtrodden and the underprivileged. He wrote about the untouchable, the coolie, the sepoj and the labourer. He was
associated with the Progressive Writers Movement and the Leftist Peace Movement. He has political leanings and, as such, he is necessarily a committed writer. R.K. Narayan, on the other hand, is not a committed novelist. He is an observer of life, pure and simple. He depicted things as he had seen them in real life. He has no philosophy of life to discuss, no axe to grind. Verily speaking, he does not like deliberate writing at all. He tells Ved Mehta: “I can’t like any writing that’s deliberate. If an author is deliberate, then I can’t read him – he’s not readable.” He belongs to no school, advances no movement. He is not a reformist, nor is he a propagandist. His concern is with all men, particularly of the middle class, and the facts of daily life have taken the form of fiction in his hand. In the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya, the peasant life in Indian villages has been sympathetically dealt with; Bhabani Bhattacharya’s novels are set against the background of Indian social scene with special reference to certain political and historical events. *So Many Hungers* covers the incidents that took place in 1942 and thereafter. *Shadow From Ladkh* pictures India at the time of the Chinese invasion of 1962.

Anitha Desai, like Arun Joshi, has shifted from the outer world to the inner recesses of the mind and heart. She, too, is concerned with exploring the enigma of modern woman. But in her novels, as in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal, the crisis is born out of marital discord, a lack of understanding between husband and wife. On the
other hand, Arun Joshi’s specialty lies in unraveling diverse facets of crisis in modern man’s life. He has the potentiality to give a proper fictive form to the chaos in the mind of the modern man and to correlate it to human condition. His characters are in search of their lost selves.

Joshi like other existentialists is deeply concerned with man’s feeling of alienation, truthlessness and anxiety in life. But he differs from the western existentialist writers in the sense that it is the existential dilemma, the anguish of alienation and the absurdity of situation which never remain the same. His central motif is quest and all his characters are therefore questers and seekers. His novels explore the relevance of God to man and affirm that “The world belongs to God.” Joshi admitted to his interviewer, Purabi Banerjee, that he might have been considerably influenced by the existentialists:

I did read Camus and Sartre. I liked The Outsider. I might have been influenced by them. Sartre I did not understand clearly or like. As for existential philosophers like Kierkegaard, I have never understood anything except odd statements.152

However, in The Last Labyrinth, when Anuradha, Som’s “Shakti”, his gateway to self-realization, disappears, he cries bitterly.
Anuradha, if there is a God and if you have met Him and if He is willing to listen, then, Anuradha, my soul, tell Him, tell this God to have mercy upon me. (LL 223)

This is “a cry for grace, a belief in God.” This cry is what Camus means by “metaphysical revolt”. In his last novel *The City and the River*, this “cry” for grace is established as firm faith that leads a human being to perfection. Joshi puts forward his hypothesis through the Astrologer: “It is through prayer and vow that a man perfects himself.” (TCTR 100) He opines that “the belief in God restores peace to human soul.” The novel explores the relevance of God to man and affirms that “the world belongs to God”. The final message of Joshi seems to be that the only solution to life’s problems lies in complete surrender to God’s Will: “In the great hand of God we stand, and can only do our best. For the rest, it is His law and His Will.” He further states that “God is the highest Truth as it is known to each one of us” and that “He is the noblest thing each of us can imagine”. Joshi reassures repeatedly that “all should be well” and that God resides in each soul.

One notices that Arun Joshi’s novels are to some extent autobiographical. He speaks out his beliefs, ideas and experiences of life through his characters. Joshi is anti materialistic and dislikes possession in any form. His dislike of material values is clearly seen in his second novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, where the protagonist disowns all the material values and wealth for primitive
life. Though Joshi had his education abroad, he does not fully approve the western-values. *The Foreigner* is a clear example of his rejection of these values. The struggle, torments, estrangements of his characters seem to highlight some of the phases of the novelist’s life where he too underwent such a struggle. The novels of Joshi depict the dilemma of an Indian with the western orientation and education. As he was educated abroad and stayed there for a long period of time, he was able to depict such type of western thoughts and to juxtapose both the western and the Indian thoughts with emphasis on the karmic principle of Gita.

Arun Joshi’s novels reveal a world where man is confirmed by the self and the questions of his existence. Instead of projecting the material agents, he concentrates on the depiction of the interior of individual psyche, the outer journey leading to inner depths of mind. In his novels, he depicts the protagonist’s mental conflicts, torments and estrangements and finally their resolving of problems and acquiring selfhood. With the theme of projecting the characters with their ambitions, needs, dreams, failures, disappointments, withdrawals, detachment and alienation, Arun Joshi has added a new dimension and hope to the Indo-English literature. None of the other Indian novelists captures this consciousness of the protagonists with such depth and perfection. In connection with the European fiction Joshi should be remembered with Camus, Graham Greence, Henry James and Saul Bellow and in the Indian context he can be very well
be ranked with R.K. Narayan, Anita Desai and many other modern Indo-English writers.

Arun Joshi’s novels are increasingly bold attempt to discover the meaning of life. They try to device ways and means for eliminating the discrepancy between the individual’s pursuits and his fulfillment. His heroes are lonely and misfit to live and in the world and face the meaninglessness of life. Though they are not religious or saintly, they are humble enough to learn lessons taught to them by life’s general problems of alienation, meaninglessness and lack of values in particular. While experiencing the normal claims of love and hatred, doubts and dilemmas, they try to face challenges of their meaningless life by outstripping the narrow confines of their distraught selves. He suggests a different solution in each of his novels. In every novel of his, he applies karma and its principle in depicting the characters, their problems and solutions. As Tapan Kumar Ghosh rightly observes:

Joshi may be regarded as *avante grade* novelist in the sense that for the first time in the history of Indian novel in English he has powerfully exploited and given sustained treatment to a very potent theme of his times, namely a maladjusted individual pitted against an insane, lopsided society which is unhinged from its cultural as well as spiritual moorings, and his uncompromising search for identity.\(^{154}\)