CHAPTER II

THE FOREIGNER AND THE STRANGE CASE OF BILLY BISWAS

Arun Joshi’s first novel The Foreigner (1968) enjoys a prominent place in his literary contour for a variety of reasons. Primarily it is because it established his eminent place amongst the Indian novelists in English in terms of its literary ingenuity, socio-cultural dimensions and moral preoccupations. It is a seminal novel. Its themes have been repeated in his later novels. It has vast intercontinental area for its geographical expansion. The key-note of his unique vision of modern man’s predicament is a certain awareness of man’s restlessness and the consequential loneliness and anxiety. His awareness is also focused on the evils of man’s material concerns.

The novel has been approached from various points of view. Sindi Oberoi, emblematizes dispossession and isolation in all possible connotations. Alienated and disposed he finally falls a prey to inaction and indecision. The novel is about Sindi’s loneliness and the feelings of anguish in the wake of his estrangements from his environment, tradition and from his true self. It is about the problems of involvement and detachment, diffidence and lack of courage to face the hazards of life; it is also about the lack of commitment and ability to accept the responsibility of one’s action. It is the portrayal of the suffering of an individual who is cut off from his familial, social and cultural ties and is lost
in the intricate labyrinth of life. It is an emotionally charged narrative account of the protagonist’s search for meaning.

The title itself gains a symbolic importance in the larger context of human existence. It portrays the protagonist’s sense of metaphysical anguish at the meaninglessness of life. The unreality of the transitoriness associated with the world ‘Foreign’ permeates the whole structure of the novel. From this view, the novel has a remarkable degree of maturity suited to its theme. The awareness of man’s worthless life that breeds consequential anxiety is the keynote of Joshis’ vision of the plight of modern man. While Sindi Oberoi eventually perceives release from the anxieties of life through Karma yoga, the principle of action without detachment.

*The Foreigner* is a first person narration in the mode of reminiscence. It is Surrender (Sindi) Oberoi, the self-reflective protagonist who tells his own story. He describes with honesty and sincerity his search for meaning and purpose of life. The novel assumes the dimension of an authentic record of the extrinsic and extracacies of the human existence generated by a deep-rooted quest for self-knowledge. The protagonist, Sindi Oberoi is an existential character, rootless, restless and luckless in a mad, bad and absurd world. He is the cynical, alienated young man, belongs to a prolific genre, both in life and literature. “What way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell” (128) this seems to be the cry of the uprooted angry young men of the modern age.

The novel is a presentation of the uprooted hero who is away from his home grounds, regards his past as absolutely meaningless. Life has no hopes
for him in the future and he feels that it will be as bleak as the past. Sindi Oberoi is presented as a confused man, a product of diverse cultures. His mixed parental blood and up-bringing in an alien country instills in him a sense of rootlessness. Devoid of spiritual and cultural anchorage and being brought up in a loveless world, he harbors in him a deep sense of insecurity and unreality. Against this cultural background Sindi cultivates a sense of detachment to overpower the sad experiences of life. His bright career prospects and enviable academic achievements are of no avail because, from all around, he is overwhelmed by a nagging sense of loneliness and the chaos of being.

The prime concern of Arun Joshi in the novel is to present the gradual evolution of Sindi Oberoi from negative philosophy of detachment to its positive aspects. In the beginning Sindi depends on his own philosophy of non-involvement for happiness, which results in the death of Babu and June. But he slowly learns that the real detachment from men and matters comes when one performs one’s duty sincerely without any desire for the result as has laid down in The Gita.

Here Arun Joshi explores Sindi Oberoi’s anguished consciousness of being isolated from the whole apparatus of social convention and ritual. He finds himself in the predicament of an outsider. He is restless on the surface of life. He says to Mr. Khemka “You had a clear-cut system of morality, a caste system that laid down all you had to do you had a God; you had roots in the soil you lived upon look at me. I have no roots. I have no reason to be one thing rather than another” (118).
Like Meursault of Albert Camus’ *The Outsider* Sindi believes that “there is no end to suffering, no end to the struggle between good and evil” (39). He feels that his life is purposeless, he says that “Somebody had begotten me without a purpose and so far peace and a purpose” (55). His total involvement with self, as he realizes later, results in the death of his friend Babu and June. His dissatisfaction with the mechanical apparatus of life leads him to search for meaning in life. His awareness of the deeper layers of his personality makes him something like an existential being, alienated from the superficial reality of life.

Sindi is an existential everyman of our time. In his narration he himself puts it as “I saw myself as I had always been. An uprooted young man living in the latter half of the twentieth century who had become detached from everything except himself” (164). He conforms to the copybook concept of Kierkgaardian existentialism that the purpose and direction of life are unknowable. Sindi putsforth the Kierkgaardian vision as:

Lying there in the bed I wondered in what way, if any, I belonged to the world that roared beneath my apartment window. Somebody had begotten me without a purpose and so far I had lived without a purpose… Perhaps I felt like that because I was foreigner in America. But then, what difference would it have made if I had lived in Kenya or India or any other place for what matter! It seemed to me that I would still be a foreigner. My foreignness lay within me and I couldn’t leave myself behind
wherever I went… So far as I knew everybody else did the same thing (55-56).

It is significant that the lines of the juke-box song touched his heart and have a peculiarly existential appeal, and most apply to his own life experience, his pathlessness:

Who knows where?
The road will lead?
Only a fool can say (152).

Sindi Oberoi has some affinity with Scobie, the Police Commissioner of the Gold Coast in Graham Greene’s *The Heart of Matter*. Though Scobie isn’t rootless, his abnormal sense of pity makes him think of the misery of the world, even of the heavenly bodies. Sometimes Scobie thinks that “What an absurd thing it was to expect happiness in a world so full of miseries?” (123).

He thinks that “Point out me a happy man and I will point out either egotism, evil or else an absolute ignorance” (123). Moreover he ruminates that “If one knew, he wondered, the facts would once have to feel pity even for the planets? If one reached what they called the heart of matter?” (124).

Sindi Oberoi, too, thinks of the lonely planet, and the sense of pity and frustration also engulfs him. The heart of matter with him is that he feels a foreigner wherever he goes and this is more psychological than physical. Arun Joshi quotes certain lines from T. S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”:

“And indeed there will be time
To wonder, “Do I dare?” “Do I dare?”

Time to turn back and descend the stair” (70).

Sindi Oberoi too is tossed up in his life of indecisions and rootlessness. As Pruforck is an archetypal everyman, the creation of the character of Sindi Oberoi is an evidence of Joshi’s contemporary sensibility etching out the inner wasteland of the archetypal modern Everyman. Sindi also feels the pangs of the racial discrimination. He says:

Born an Indian, I had been spat upon; I had been a European; I would have done the spitting. What difference does it make? I would still die and be forgotten by the world’s big shots any happier than we were (26).

The novel presents how Sindi Oberoi, an immigrant Indian suffers towards the discovery of the meaning and purpose of life. On the face of it, Sindi’s alienation from the world seems to be similar to the one that many existentialist heroes in the West suffer from. Sindi Oberoi finds himself in the predicament of an outsider compels comparison with Albert Camus’ *The Outsider*. Some critics found resemblance between Sindi and Meursault. Sindi was the Indian equivalent of the alienated outsider, who first emerged in Camus’ novel of the same name. He is an outsider like a character of Camus for his alienation is intrinsic. Like Meursault of Camus’ novel he is devoid of emotion, having no respect for society or religion. According to Sindi life is absurd as it holds no meaning and purpose for him. It is a reflection of the failure of his individual perception, his inability to see the reality in its proper
perspective. The absurdity of his life and committent sense of alienation from it do not result from any metaphysical loss of established order or a shock to the traditional mode of thinking, but from his ignorance, illusion, failure to adjust his emotional difficulties as well as his lack of proper adjustment of conduct. Again, his detachment is not permanent. It is transitional phase on the way of his self-realization. He has the vision of reality though he is born of mixed parentage and though he often gets mixed up about good and evil, right and wrong, he constantly suffers like Som Bhaskar and Billy Biswas from a feeling of restlessness. His discussion with the Catholic Priest in Scotland about religion, God and mysticism, and his anguished question to the policemen in Delhi, “Have you seen God?” (175) are the proofs of his spiritual quest. His life is a saga of rootlessness, geographical as well as emotional, and of his search for an anchor in a parentless world.

Life becomes a devitalized affair for Sindi and he wanders aimlessly through the mazes of his existence to find peace, identity and purpose. His is a journey without maps along the roads of life, its endless labyrinthine ways. But his tortuous peregrinations so far and his constant self-questioning have led him nowhere because his adventures are not guided by any sense of direction and principle of purpose. And yet his quest for identity as well as meaning and purpose of life does not end in a miasma of despair. Arun Joshi, rooted as he is in the ancient wisdom of a life-affirming tradition, never accepts absurdity and estrangement as the ultimate conditions of life. He believes that alienation is something to be overcome and not to be cherished. He never reveals in
alienation for its own sake. He turns it into an analytical tool for the discovery of genuine choices. Unlike many existential characters in the West, he shows a tremendous capacity for transcendence. He comes out of the impasse after intense suffering and anguished soul searching. The novel records his movement from illusion to reality, from darkness to light and from death’s twilight kingdom to the new shares of life. In fine the novel projects the central character’s search for meaning.

Sindi makes relentless efforts to escape from the feeling of restlessness. He wanders through mazes of his existence, he is looking for a meaning and purpose of life. *The Foreigner* describes the experiences of the protagonist as a student of mechanical engineering in the American university in Boston and later as an employee in the firm of Mr. Khemka, a wealthy industrialist in Delhi. He presents himself as an uprooted young man living in the latter half of the twentieth century who wants to arrive at some meaning of his life; he wants to do “something meaningful” (14) i.e. something that could make him forget of himself. Thus, in itself it is a step in the right direction. He seems to be a foreigner to the world wherever he goes and at times even becomes a stranger to himself. An Indian by origin, brought up in Kenya, educated in London and America everywhere he is a foreigner, he confesses that “My foreignness lay within me” (55).

He feels a kind of rootlessness because of the fact that his hybrid birth didn’t place him anywhere. He didn’t receive the love of English mother and Kenyan- Indian father beyond the age of four when he hardly knew them, he
has vague memories of them, he says that he remembered them only through “a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs” (12). He is deeply pained when people ask him about his parents, he says that “I hated to talk about my parents. I hated the pity I got from people” (12). He had to repeat the episode of his parent’s accidental death “for the hundredth time” (12). He answers to the question of June about his asthma “As long as I can remember. They say my mother had it” (32). In his life there is hardly any parental influence except a very short time which he spends with his uncle, he expresses his sense as that “Away I can’t really be called a Hindu. My mother was English and my father, I am told, a sceptic. That doesn’t seek like a good beginning for a Hindu, does it?” (30). M. K. Naik’s quotation appropriately describes Sindi’s situation. Jasbir Jain quotes Naik who says that “Sindi grows up without family ties and without a country” (230). He is “an alien everywhere physically as well as metaphorically” (Mukherjee 203). After his uncle’s death life becomes purposeless to him, he says:

    Somebody has begotten me without a purpose and so far I had lived without a purpose… I hadn’t felt that when my uncle was living… The thought that he moved about in that small house on the outskirts of Nairobi gave me a feeling of having an anchor. After his death the security was destroyed. Now I suppose I existed only for dying (55-56).

This quotation expresses his shocking absurdity of existence. When his uncle was alive he tried to commit suicide and escape himself, he tells his uncle
“I was contemplating suicide since I was tired of living” (141). He considers life just meaningless and “death wipes out everything for most of us anyway. All that is left is a big mocking zero” (92). He convinces his uncle and leaves for London with no plans in mind except that he has to study engineering. For some time he gets a strange sense of freedom to know the meaning of life. He takes up certain jobs, first an evening job of a dish-washer in a night club in Soho where he meets Anna and has affair with her. Later on he meets Cathy who after certain affairs with him goes back to live with her husband. For sometime Sindi also works in a small village where he discusses religion, God and mysticism with catholic priest but remains unsatisfied he says that “All love whether of things persons or one was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion. Love begot greed and attachment and it led to possession” (145).

It is from Scotland that Sindi goes to Boston to study Engineering at the M.I.T. Here he comes in contact with June Blyth. Even his love for June is streaked with hatred and anger, he says:

And every passing day my love fell upon my anger and both grew stronger. It was as if two high electrodes had taken root in my head and each of them kept spitting venom into my brain. The strain grew so great that almost lost all ability to think logically for any length of time. Often I suspected I was going mad (110).

Sindi is fed up with the ‘randomness of existence’ and does not accept the offer of a job at the M.I.T. He wants to go back to Nigeria or India which also is decided by the flip of a coin as “Head for Nigeria, I said the coin
showed tails, New Delhi” (149). It is this which changes the course of his life and he comes to New Delhi.

The loss of personal history, culture and national identity catapults him, as it were into the role of a detached observer or narrator of the whole drama of existence. He confesses all that he had to show us was “a ten stone body that had to be fed four times a day, twenty-eight times a week. This was the sum of a lifetime striving” (80). Thus, his is a case of “sociological anomic resulting in ontological insecurity or the psychosis of engulfment” (Prasad 29). Sindi becomes an anomic man and as a pessimistic narrator he tells the story of June, Babu, Sheila, Khemka, Muthu, Karl, Anna, Kathy, Judy etc. The death of his parents, his past experiences and the loneliness in his life makes him totally pessimistic and lost.

Sindi thinks that life is short-lived, unreal inescapably painful, full of illusions. He is unable to find his roots anywhere in the world. He is an insecure man, everybody around him is an enemy and everything is purposeless. He ruminates on the purposelessness of life as “I wondered in what way, if any, I belonged to the world that roared beneath my apartment window.

He broods over his loneliness in the ball of International Students Association which is intended to bring foreigners in contact with the Americans. There in the company Sindi Oberoi says that “Except for a bartender and me there wasn’t a soul in the room who wasn’t dancing or talking or beating his feet to music. It is remarkable how you can be in a
crowded room like that and still feel lonely, like you were sitting in your own
tomb” (22). Thus, he is totally different from the society. O.P. Bhatnagar
acutely captures his situation as he writes that “A strange feeling of aloneness,
of aloofness permeates the entire narrative and provides the necessary texture
and structure to the novel” (13-14). He never feels at home during his stay
either in the U.K. or U.S. Everywhere and every time he remains alienated and
rootless as he is cynical, misogynistic and detached. Babu in his letter wrote
that “Sindi was terribly cynical” (48). June’s mother told Sindi that “You are
just a cynic, my baby” (88). His flat-mate Karl once said him “I don’t know
you could laugh” (122). Even Sindi himself confessed that “I was cynical and
exhausted, grown old before time, weary with my own loneliness” (131). Once
Mr. Khemka said him that he was “living, but as bad as dead” (119). His
disgust with his own life is expressed by him in very strong terms, “Twenty
five years largely wasted in search of wrong things in wrong places” (90).

June, a beautiful girl loves him deeply but her love is not sincerely
reciprocated by him. He denies her marriage proposal by saying that he “did
not believe in marriage because marriage was more often a lust for possession
than anything else. People get married just as they bought new cars. And they
gabbled each other up” (60). He thinks that love that wanted to possess in
marriages was worse than no love at all, he says that “One shouldn’t be able to
love without wanting to possess… otherwise you end up by doing a lot more
harm than good” (66). He believes that in most of the marriages love soon ends
and hatred takes its place, “The hand that so lovingly held mine would perhaps
someday ache to hit me” (63). He is really, he says, one not “cutout for marriage and I don’t believe in marriage” (105). He continues that “I was afraid of possessing anybody and I was afraid of being possessed and marriage meant both” (106). June’s separation from him makes him realize that she had become a part of him “It was as if somebody had given me a big dose of anaesthesia” (123). And that their “separation had been like an unforeseen abortion” (150). Thus he is afraid of human relationships. From his point of view it is a burden upon his self, he says “I walked down the stairs wishing God has given me greater strength of enduring the burdens of friendship” (18). In America he is fed-up with his life and its routine, he says:

Each season was the same: working late into the night, eating alone in cheap cafeterias, attending weekend cooking sessions at the flat of countryman. This was the sum total of a foreign student’s existence. Fed up with many things. Fed up with the way we pretend to have forgotten the past and yet all time we are looking for an opportunity to revive it (25).

Sindi is overwhelmed by a nagging sense of loneliness and the chaos of his being. He is painfully aware of his miserable past, he says:

And yet all shores are alien when you can’t belong anywhere. Twenty-fifth Christmas on this planet, twenty-five years largely wasted in search of wrong thing in wrong places. Twenty five years gone in the search of peace, and what did I have to show for achievement (90).
Thus, the problem that Sindi faces is that of finding a meaning in the absurdity around him. His professor finds him lost and though he is offered a teaching assignment in the faculty, he has not accepted it and shifts to New York for an assignment where he develops with his team “a machine that will throw twenty thousand people out of work and make them feel so small that they would go home dead drunk” (172). In his inner crisis he finds the past haunting him like a ghost, yet as he says “Like a castrated bull I returned to the yoke of everyday life for whatever it was worth” (124). Even his discussion with the catholic priest fails in satisfying him, he says:

I was born a catholic and I was a great church-goer until I have fifteen… One sunday everything seemed false, the opposite of what it had been. Everybody around me seemed to be play-acting. The priest read his sermons just like my uncle read the markets aloud from the newspaper every morning (30).

As he doesn’t believe in the religion so he makes a sceptical remark to the question of his girl friend, June about his belief in God, he tells “She asked me again if I believed in God. I said I didn’t know. But I supposed I didn’t” (30). June tells him that “There is something strange about you, you know, somewhat distant. I’d guess that when people are with you they didn’t feel like they are with a human being … I have a feeling you’d be a foreigner everywhere” (29). Thus June’s comment proves that Sindi is somewhat different from other men and he wants to know who he is? Sindi is totally
alienated or an anomic man. The French sociologist Durkheim and Robert K. Merton speak of theory of anomic men. They says:

Anomie signifies that state of mind of one who has been pulled up from his moral roots that has no longer any sense of continuity of talk or sense of obligation. The anomic man has become spiritually sterile, responsive only to himself, responsible to no one (Maciver 84).

Sindi acts as these sociologists say, his is a psychic case. He has purely detached business towards life and people. He watches the world go by without any reaction; he is totally unaware of the happiness provided by emotional bonds. All his relationships with Anna, Kathy, Judy, June etc. are “fizzled out like an ill packed cracker” (121) because he could not pay the price of being loved. His miserable past experiences have given him so painful lessons as he remarks that “Even after several years. Somewhere in the labyrinth of my consciousness the wound still bled. I felt sad and perhaps showed it” (61).

Sindi believes that the world around him is illusive, temporary and unreal as he says to June:

…I have loved people as much as I love myself. It isn’t much but that isn’t my fault. And then to be in love in your sense requires one to take things seriously, assume that there is permanence about things. Nothing ever seems real to me, leave alone permanent. Nothing seems to be important (92).
Because of the sense of insecurity he cannot love himself. He not only disallows him to love others but also be loved by other as he himself confesses “I wasn’t the kind of man one could love; I had learnt that long ago” (34).

Sindi always tries to find meaning in his present life. To him man is merely a toy or puppet in the hands of time, and life is full of agony and pain, he lives helplessly, nothing is in his hand, never he will be free and everything is imposed on him and he has to wait till time decides the future. His attitude towards the world can be described in Macbeth’s words as:

Life is but a walking shadow,

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It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing (39).

He realizes that man acts as a free agent is mere illusion and nothing more. He tells his friend Karl the same thing:

You are never free, Karl. How can anybody take away your freedom when you never had it in the first place? All freedom is illusion. You had no choice in your birth nor do you even choose your death. And in between is a vast expanse of lawless sands that pileup where the wind blows (67- 68).

This realization on the part of Oberoi proves the fact that he seeks for meaning, he is actively engaged in search of meaning. June proposes him for marriage but he is least inclined to marriage. Sindi is not interested in marriage, he says:
It is not that all marriages are painful… It is one big illusion that has been pounded into them by society. For a while they go around bloated with their own pride imagining things which just are not there. And then gradually the whole thing crumbles and they begin to kill each other bit by bit (91).

This is the meaning he seeks from the marriage. Further he explains his view about marriage that “Marriage wouldn’t help, June. We are alone, both you and I. That is the problem. And our aloneness must be resolved from within. You can’t send two persons through a ceremony and except that their aloneness will disappear…” (107).

He believes that marriage is a big illusion and “Death wipes out everything for most of us anyway. All that is left is a big mocking zero” (92). His search for meaning continues as he says that “Good things and bad things appear to be the same in the long run of existence” (93). Thus, in Sindi’s self the realization of absurdity can be seen. He sees it in his life as well as in other people’s life. Commenting upon the ‘absurdity’ Eugene Ionesco observes that “Absurdity is that which is devoid of purpose… Cut off his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, and useless” (56).

Sindi becomes a typical Sartrean hero expressing his metaphysical anguish at the meaninglessness of the human condition. He resembles Roquentin, Sartre’s hero of Nausea who reflects the absurdity of existence as he says “We were a heap of existents inconvenienced, embarrassed by
ourselves, we hadn’t the slightest reason for being there, any of us, each existent, embarrassed, vaguely ill at ease, felt superfluous in relation to others” (184).

In Boston he comes in close contact with Baburao Khemka, an epicurean man. As June’s marriage proposal was rejected by Sindi since June and Babu came very close to each other, both loved each other. Once Sindi invites June to dine with him but she refuses and informs him that soon she will be get married to Babu. He puts down the receiver and presses his face hard against the metal of the phone and cries, he says that “The edge of pain was intense that it left me completely numb” (123). After receiving this shocking news he remains in a state of coma for some time. Its seems to be strange that though he is not willing to marry June, he is deeply depressed and agonised by her separation. He reacts that “Seperation had been like an unforeseen abortion. It was as if somebody had given me a big dose of anesthesis” (123). Thus, he is totally confused regarding what kind of dogma or rules to adopt and what kind of life to lead.

As a result Sindi jumps from one place to another, one rule to another set of rules but finds nothing. He talks of detachment and gets involved somewhere. For him nothing seems to be real but everything is illusive (maya) and which haunts him. He himself expresses his confusion in the way that “I had wanted detachment but I didn’t know what kind of resolutions here necessary to achieve it” (66).
Sindi is in search of meaning of life, permanence in life and would like to do something meaningful. He wants peace, a capacity to love and the courage to live without desire and attachment. His various experiences leave him with unanswered questions “like swollen carcasses strewn on river banks after a flood” (92). Always he feels being pushed “on the giant wheel, going round and round, waiting for the fall” (75). The lines of the juke-box song touched his heart and reminds him of his pitilessness:

Who knows where?
The road will lead?
Only a fool can say (152).

He considers his life as a labyrinth and becomes conscious of life’s hollowness or vagueness as:

Taller than the tallest tree,
Deeper than the deep blue sea,
That’s how it’s going to be
All the way (152).

He is always confused. He thinks that he doesn’t suit fit in the world, he explains it saying that “Cynical and exhausted, grown old before his time, weary with my own loneliness” (131).

Babu’s death in the car accident brings meaning to Sindi. We get it from June who confesses to Babu about her love-affair with Sindi and because of his Indian mental makeup Babu fails to accept the American standards. In the fit
of temper Babu drives off his car blindly and is killed in the car accident. Sindi feels guilty of having driven a man or Babu to death he states it as:

   It suddenly struck me that something had been knocked out of me. I just was not the same person anymore… I felt as if there was nothing left that I could depend upon… I felt like a desert or like a vast field of naked oats in winter time. I felt more alone and naked in the world than I had ever felt before (149).

   Babu’s death lighted a ray of light, of meaning in the mind of Sindi. Sindi considers himself responsible for Babu’s death even murder. This realization in him starts at this moment as he realizes that “All along I had acted out of lust and greed and selfishness, and they had applauded my wisdom. When I had sought only detachment I had driven a man to his death. It all seemed very logical now that it happened” (148).

   He looks at June from a new way that “She carried death with her. She had been an accomplice in a murder and she didn’t even know it. But ignorance of sin… is no excuse” (9). Babu’s death shockes him very much, so, he resolves to leave America and to go to India, but the worse is yet to follow. When he is waiting for visa papers in New York, he receives a letter from June and comes to known that in her womb she is carrying Babu’s child. She requests him to come to Boston to see her. As per her request when he goes to Boston, he visits June’s house that he finds it locked. From her neighbors he comes to known that June had died after an abortion and her mother had gone away from the house. June’s death left Sindi desperate. Now he is totally
depressed, frustrated and he is left musing on his so called creed of non-
involvement that “My parents, my uncle, my lovers, Babu and June, their
parents and finally myself, one by one all were called by the invisible judges
and asked to give their evidence”(165). His musing is a part of his search for
meaning. From every event, every moment he tries to find meaning that will
leave him to peace.

He has habit of introspecting, searching his mind. He interprets his past
and his action in the past. He tells:

My falling in love with June because she was what I was not: her
leaving me for Babu for a dream; because I had lost the capacity
to dream; and now finally the end of her dream. And what could
I, who had so little control over his own destiny and actions, do to
stem the tide whose course was set long ago? (139).

He realizes that he is a toy tossed here and there by the destiny for its pleasure,
as William Shakespeare says:

As files to the wanton boys,
are we to the gods,
They kill us for their sport (45).

In his past experience at university, he learns that he needs real
experience other than studying. He says:

I joined London University, but very soon I got tired of the
classroom lectures. I didn’t have any trouble with my course and
I passed the exam creditably enough when they came, but the
question that bothered me was very different. I wanted to know the meaning of my life. All my classrooms didn’t tell me a thing about it. Ultimately, I decided that I needed, experience other than studying… (142).

Targedy with Babu and later with June is all due to Sindi’s wrong notion of detachment. Babu died because of June’s confession and June died in the abortion of the foetus that was of Babu. Both the events make Sindi lost in the phantom of his past. In the search of the meaning in life he comes to known that suffering is inescapable or inevitable. He is shattered because of Babu and June’s death; he says:

All that I had thought was pleasurable had eluded in pain, and after all this I was as far from finding the purpose of my life as I had been to start with. It all puzzled me. And I spent a whole year wandering through the maze of my existence looking for answer. It wasn’t until the next summer that the answer came, not wholly but in a good enough measure, good enough to start with (144).

Thus, Arun Joshi emphasizes the mysterious and incalculable nature of human life. Human life is mysterious and uncontrollable and one can’t help getting involved inevitably, Sindi very aptly describes “One doesn’t choose one’s involvement” (41). He believes in the old saying that ‘man proposes and God disposes’. Babu and June’s deaths act as a peripetia because realization in Sindi takes place hence onwards as he realizes that “The detachment at that time had meant inaction. Now I had began to see the fallacy in it. Detachment
consisted of right action and not escape from it” (162). Thus realization in Sindi took place. He himself identifies his situation as:

An uprooted young man living in the later half of twentieth century who has become detached from everything except himself. Where Kathy and Anna had taught me to be detached from others. June’s death finally broke my attachment to myself. It was here that my hope lay (164).

Thus, he tells us about the realization took place in him, further he says that “… I felt as if some indefatigable surgeon was cleaning mp my soul with the sharp edge of his scalpel” (165).

In the frustrated mood Sindi comes to India, the land of his ancestors. He goes to Delhi, meets Babu’s father Mr. Khemka and sister, Sheila, he discusses with them on the different events or issues related with Babu’s life.

His initial life in Delhi is one of chasm. Meanwhile he is invited by Mr. Khemka to work as his personal assistant. Though he accepts that job, he doesn’t see eye to eye with him. Mr. Khemka “is a modern Maharaja” (104). He has three houses in New Delhi and a villa in Mussoorie and he earns thirty thousand per day, while daily wage–earners in his factory get only three rupees per day. There is the misunderstanding between Mr. Khemka and his employees. There is a region of servility syndrome in his office and works. His employees looked upon both Mr. Khemka and Sheila, his daughter with “the mortal dread” (15), Sindi realizes:
The workers cringed before them as if the man and his daughter were malevolent spirits whose curse could be all consuming. My life had carried me through strange place and I had seen men act from the end of the tethers but I came across in Khemka’s office is quite new to me (15).

He feels disenchanted by the mode of the life and set of values which Mr. Khemka and his friends follow, such type of epicurean life he had experienced even in America. He is too much affected and disturbed by the shameless and immoral attempts to obtain materialistic values by Mr. Khemka. He observes Mr. Khemka’s love for materialism, he says to Sheila:

Your father loved him (Babu) like a factory. Babu was a pawn in your father’s hand with no will or life of his own. That’s why he couldn’t bear the thought of Babu marrying June. It didn’t fit in his plans. He wanted to marry Babu a fat Marwari girl whose dowry might bring him half a dozen new factories (51).

Here Sindi finds the meaning of life. Mr. Khemka doesn’t love his son as he loves his material gain.

In Mr. Khemka’s dining room there is one bronze figure of dancing Shiva. It is both ‘Rudra’ i.e. destructive power and ‘Shiva’ i.e. benign force. Sindi is the quester and now he has been undergoing a complete overhauling, in him the birth of a new man is taking place. His faith in the law of Karma is affirmed in his thought that “we think we leave our actions behind but the past is never dead. Time has a way of exacting its toll and the more you try to hold,
the heavier the toll is?” (181). This realization includes him to measure his past, he says that “It seemed that I had never done anything except wait on that narrow bed. The room dissolved in the heat and I was sitting in the middle of a desert for a prophet” (171).

He observes Khemka’s world very minutely in order to get meaning of it. He is utterly disgusted by the epicureanness and materialism of Khemka and by the exploitation of the poor people by him. He seeks to achieve total detachment in life and withdraws from all action that might cause pain. But he finds it hard to practice it. He is aware that one doesn’t choose one’s involvement. Babu and June’s deaths resulting from Sindi’s own blundering approach to life shake his confidence. A strong urge to roam about the streets of the world overtakes him and he longs to be in a place where he can experiment with himself and start a new life.

Sindi reminds us of Joseph Conrad’s Jim who moves ahead in search of a new world entirely free from his past. In a mood of despair that envelopes his being like water surrounding a fish, Sindi gets his second insight into the nature of life. In the unjust, corrupt world of Mr. Khemka, he gets an opportunity to practise what he has learnt out of his long quest-action without detachment. He offers to do something meaningful, something that could make him forget himself. Thus, in itself it is a step in the right direction. His preoccupation with self seems to be crumbling and gradually he begins to feel sympathetic toward the poor workers working for Mr. Khemka, he says:
It was a sad night. The worker’s clothes were falling of in rags and sweat poured off their back as if they had just had a shower. What was the point in all those big men like Mr. Khemka talking about God and pain, so long as half-naked men had to wrestle with a beastly mass of concrete under a scorching sun? And all for three rupees a day (166).

Sindi’s sympathies with the poor workers is a result of his realization of poor workers life. He is fed up of their exploitation by Mr. Khemka and his company. After Income Tax raid, Khemka tries to influence him with money to take the blame upon himself and save Mr. Khemka from the disgrace of arrest and imprisonment. He feels so much shocked and decides to move away from Mr. Khemka’s world. However, Muthu requests him to take over the office and to save the poor workers from starvation. He is involved in sympathetic attachment when he visits Muthu’s family.

He observes the heroic struggle of Muthu to provide food to his own family and his brother’s family, which is unemployed, the “accumulated despair of their weary lives” (189) reveals in him the real meaning of life which one finds in developing sympathetic understanding with other persons and responding to them warmly. Muthu, an almost illiterate labour, teaches Sindi, a Ph.D. holder in the Mechanical Engineering from the U.S.A., the sharp distinction between detachment and involvement as “Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved” (188). It makes him take over the management of the imprisoned Mr. Khemka’s business, he says that “I felt as
if I had been dropped on a sinking ship and charged with the impossible task of
taking it ashore” (189). All of a sudden he cancels his visit to Bombay to take
up a new assignment of working for the poor workers, he reviews his past as:

Before I went to sleep that night I took a general stock of myself.
In many ways the past had been a waste, but it had not been
without its lessons. I had started adult life as a confused
adolescent, engrossed with myself, searching for wisdom and the
place that comes with it. The journey had been long and still was
not over (185).

On his journey to seek meaning of life Sindi undergoes a sea change
which shows his stubbornness to meet life on his terms. He plunges himself
into the battle of survival which the workers of factory could not have won
without his help, co-operation and guidance. His earlier detachment with the
world has now been replaced by unselfish attachment. He surrenders himself to
the cause of others. Deeply aware of his new orientation in his way of life
which leads him to affirmation, he gives a new orientation to his name too and
instead of ‘Surendra’ or ‘Surinder’ he calls himself ‘Surrender Oberoi’ (191).
Thus, Sindi becomes a typical existential hero, the haunted anguished creature
of Sartre who is absolutely alone and free, creating himself a personal way of
life out of the void of nothingness all around him. He finds relief from his
agony when he comes to India and is satisfied with his involvement in the right
action. India makes him shift the attachment from the self of the world. The
sense of guilt which has oppressed him since Babu committed suicide is
creased by this realization that Babu’s father is a cheat. The journey from the west to East symbolizes his spiritual quest as well as his quest for meaning. His long and circuitous journey helps him to recognize the meaning and purpose of life. For him Muthu becomes the most appropriate example of an ideal man—the man of steady wisdom.

*The Foreigner* portrays the progress of a Sartrean protagonist attached only with his own self towards a realization of humanity and responsibility which brings him very close to the concept of ‘Karmayoga’ of *The Bhagavadgita* as the lord Krishna puts it:

Karmany eva dhikaraste  
Ma phalesu Kadachana  
Ma Karmaphalhetur bhur  
Ma te sango stu akarmani.

(To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction” (Radhakrishnan 119).

At the end, Sindi, who for the first time in his life concentrates on a decisive action, he feels that “The fruit of it was really not my concern” (191). He turns to his duty not with a selfish mind but with self-knowledge. His illusions are shattered, his doubts are cleared. He gives up all pretences and evasions and commits himself whole heartedly to a cause. For the first time he is doing something selflessly, something in which he is not interested personally. He feels a new strength to go through with the difficult task ahead.
The strength comes from within, from his readiness to rise above himself for the sake of others, this self transcendence is rendered possible in terms of the tradition of his ancestors, a transaction that recognize the problems which man in his ignorant pursuit of worldly pleasures encounters, and suggests acceptable solutions, with the reorientation of his life, he even changes his name. Indeed he had surrendered his will to the will of God and learnt to work for the larger interest of the people. He has obeyed the call of his soul. The novel ends with Sindi’s settling down to life and with a vague suggestion of a new relationship between Sindi and Sheila who discovered each other amidst suffering. The ‘random absurdity’ of life, which has caused intense suffering to him, now becomes a source of amusement.

*The Foreigner* records the spiritual odyssey of a confused individual a withdrawal from life to a return to and participation in it. His return to life is made possible only by his search for meaning so long as Sindi was lost of ignorance and besieged by doubt, error and cowardice, he could not see himself in his inner mirror and consequently, he suffered from a sense of alienation from his true self. He feels unfulfilled and imperfect. He could not come to grips with himself and failed to come to grips with the world. But with the fuller perception of the self and the world that comes in the wake of Babu and June’s death, he feels reintegrated and achieves a new kind of relatedness to the world. As his earlier delusions are destroyed and he finds his identity in a spontaneity of love and unselfish act. The withdrawal from the world is only a part of his quest. It is followed by a return. It is like a conversation, a new way
of living, a matter of becoming a new man. This revelation of the value of living as against his initial obsession with sickness, morbidity and death comes with the stock of conversation. And at that moment Joshi hits upon the terms for repairing the tragic loss. This new orientation to the values of life is something achieved by Sindi through desperate struggle and intense suffering while seeking meaning. The basis of this transformation is his companionship with the suffering mass of humanity and his willingness exist as a conscious, responsible being.

Arun Joshi’s second novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) revolves around the crisis of self, the resultant agony, man’s quest for affirmation and search for meaning. It is another version of man’s quest for understanding his self by shunning the world (maya) through knowledge (Jnana). It has been motivated from Jnanayoga (The way of knowledge). According to Sujata Mathai the novel attempts to explore “the mysterious underworld which is the human soul” (8). The quest motif permeates the whole narrative as Arun Joshi admitted in his interview “My novels are essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and of myself” (Bannerjee 3).

The novel suggests that life’s meaning doesn’t lie in the world outside but within. The magnetic, mysterious forces of the universe took Billy to Bilasia’s world where he felt free to express his own individual self unhampered by those ties which were limiting him while he was in the midst of the upper crust of society. He is driven to death by the mad, absurd world
when he tries to retrieve his soul from the labyrinth. Billy tries to liberate himself from the normative demands of the money-worshipping social context and diagnose the malady-the worstness of the world. He exercises his choice of freedom and dedicates himself to the fulfilment of inner needs.

The novel is about the strong determination and decisive action of the protagonist, Billy Biswas. At once it is a sever indictment of the meaningless trivialities and spiritual up-rootedness of the Post-Independence, Anglicized Indian society. The novel is about a ‘mystical urge’ that makes Billy Biswas, a scion of the upper-class Delhi society, to abjure his family and friends and to go into the primordial forest in the central India for spiritual healing and for achieving the highest form of self-realization. In other words, he is in the search of meaning of himself as well as of life. The present fiction depicts a metaphysical quest and is concerned with a deeper exploration of the human soul. The irresistible inner compulsion that makes Billy renounce the comfort and security of an apparently happy and successful life is reminiscent of Siddhartha’s renunciation of family and kingship. It has been remarked that Billy’s strange case represents the “Universal myth of the primitive in the heart of man ever alienating him from the superficial and polished banalities of modern civilization” (Mathur 3).

_The Strange Case of Billy Biswas_ is a brilliant satire on the modern civilization like Thomas Moore’s _Utopia_. It successfully portrays the old idealistic mode of life. Billy has an urge for the primitive life like Matthew Arnold’s ‘Scholar Gypsy’, Thakur Guruparsad writes that the novel:
Is another variation on the paradigmatic pattern of the doomed existential quest for values in a mad, bad, absurd world. It holds forth the added attraction of the dark, mysterious forces of the universe that magnetize the protagonist and drive him to the doors of death, the last labyrinth that life holds for man is the existential vision (62).

According to Lionel Trilling, it “is a novel being a perpetual quest for reality and the most effective agent of a moral imagination” (205). Meenakshi Mukherjee says that “It is a compelling novel about a strange quest, drawing upon myth and folk-lore to reiterate it’s elemental concerns” (82). Jasbir Jain states that “Billy of the *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* like Sindi of *The Foreigner* is in search of human world of meaningful relatedness, which he cannot find either in white America or in the upper class Indian society” (142).

The novel is an existential protest against the superficialities of a grossly materialistic civilization. It is a study in the total estrangement of Billy Biswas, the protagonist from the upper crust of the Indian society with its material concerns, spiritual shallowness and blind imitation of western culture in utter defiance of its traditional values and beliefs. Joshi uses Billy’s strong primitive urge to look critically at the inner decay and sterility of the society. Side by side, there is an endorsement of an anti-materialistic, essentially Hindu worldview. The traditional Hindu ideal of simple life with its few needs; total disregard of money, lack of ambition and its harmonious relation with nature. The story mediates between New Delhi and Maikala Hills, between two
identifiable cultures. The juxtaposition, and also the conflict, of these two cultures reveal the spiritual uprootedness of the Indian upper crust and the utter falsehoodness of its superficial glamour and refinement. It brings into focus the spiritual decay of the westernized Indian society.

Billy’s problem is the authentic problem of a perceptive young man belonging to the westernized Indian society that has lost its spiritual anchorage. He suffers from discontent, a sense of irrelevance of life and a constant blurring of reality. That is why he engages himself in a search which is directed to meaning.

The novel is undoubtedly positive about the need for a guiding vision, whether mystical or moral, to encounter the contemporary confusion of values. It is this vision that ignites the imagination of his non-conformist hero and enables him to look critically at the root of the decay that corrodes our culture from within and without to see what has been lost and how it can be regained.

Arun Joshi continues his study of the human predicament in the pretentious, ostentious, morally and spiritually barren modern world, a step further in the present novel. It is an attack on the corruption of the civilized modern life. The industrial and technological advancement has created predicament in the society and in the individual. Man can’t realize happiness through mere materialistic possession. Eternal joy and happiness can be achieved only through self–realization and spiritual enlightenment. But unfortunately modern man under the materialistic influences forgot his culture, morality or traditional values and attaches himself to the materialistic world, he
is totally ‘epicurean’. The central weakness of our civilization is being the
defeat of man by the material; merely he is puppet in the hands of materialism.
In short, it is a severe indictment of the meaningless existence, mechanization,
urbanization, discontent, changing values and spiritual up-rootedness of the
society in the modern civilization. In such a society Arun Joshi puts his hero on
search for meaning.

*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is divided into two parts, the first one
consisting of about ninety-eight pages and the second one of another one
hundred and forty-six pages. Both these parts maybe named as “The Civilized
World” and “The Primitive World” respectively. These two worlds represent
two distinct cultures which these geographical locations embody. The fiction
reveals to us the falsity of the so-called refinement of the sophisticated Indian
upper class society. Obviously it is anti-bourgeois in taste and testifies a loss of
confidence in the anglicized Indian tradition of high culture.

The first part gives us the glimpses of restlessness of Billy’s soul in the
midst of the upper class Indian society which is lost in the superficialities of
life. The cause of his restlessness is the loss of traditional values in the
materialistic pursuits by people in general.

This section is an attempt to establish the character of Billy as well as
the spiritual decay of his environment, and make his strange case appear
convincing. It prepares a ground for his rejection of the values of civilized
society so much so that whatever he says and does in this section is a swing in
that direction. Throughout this section, Joshi suggests Billy’s rich inner world
and his concern with the secrets of life which lie under the veneer of civilization. Billy is aware of the reality and his occasional glimpses of the primitive world, which impelled him to leave the civilized world. The second section concentrates on the transformation of Billy through his contact with the organic life in the primitive world of the central India, his new life as a primitive, his renewal contact with Romi and the final disaster.

The narrator Romesh Sahai (Romi) is an intimate friend of Billy Biwas. As the novel opens, Billy is depicted as a man of intellect, profound sensibility and unusual obsessions. He is the son of a judge of Supreme Court of India which shows his richness and upper crust. His grandfather had been the Prime Minister of a famous Princely State in Orissa and his father had practiced law at Allahabad and Delhi. His father had also been an Indian ambassador to a European country. His father sends him to study engineering course, but he keeps his father in the dark and starts Ph.D. in Anthropology as it is his first love. Although Romi is his intimate friend but he finds Billy’s character to be an enigma as he says in the beginning of his narration:

As I grew old, I realize that the most futile cry of man is his impossible wish to be understood. The attempt to understand is probably even more futile. If inspite of this is I propose to relate Billy’s story, it is not so much because I claim to have understood him as it is an account of a deep and unrelieved sense of wonder that in the middle of the twentieth century, in the heart of Delhi’s
smart society, there should have lived a man of such extraordinary obsessions (7).

At the opening of the novel Romi confesses his inability to comprehend the mysterious urge that prompted Billy to leave the civilized society. Romi feels that “What happened to Billy was, perhaps, inevitable” (10). Billy specializes as an anthropologist and studies the tribal attitudes and customs. His library indicates his interest:

Two of stacks were devoted exclusively to anthropology. The third presented a mélange that to my mind, made no sense at all. It contained everything from old copies of the National Geographic Magazine, to the latest pornography that was being peddled in Times Square: from learned treatise on black magic and witchcraft to critique of the theory of reality. What struck me most was a series of nearly forty biographies including several on Van Gogh whose turbulent career, I learnt later, held considerable book-cases were piled at least a hundred albums of jazz music. Those were played almost non-stop when he was in the apartment(11-12).

Although Billy belongs to the upper crust but deliberately he chooses his destination place in Harlem, the Black colony in America. About the reason behind it, he tells Romi, he finds it “the most human place” (9). He stays at Harlem to realize his self to the full. As per his views Harlem is the only place where he may nurture his sense of belonging by wholly preserving his identity.
His constant want to identify himself with his environment is reflected in his aberrant behavior, his way of living, eating and dressing and even thinking. For this the American host describes Billy as an “anarchist” and “thoroughly crazy even by Indian standards” (5). He tells Romi of Avocambo, a play running broadway which gives an insight into the working of his mind:

It is quite an odd play, really. This chap from New York quite educated and all that goes to the cargo and is so incensed by the head and the light and the primitive music that he goes just out with his shotgun and starts killing everybody. What is fascinating, of course, are the workings of the deranged mind, what he says between each shot (6-7).

Billy likes to play Avocambo because “one can quite imagine something like that happening to oneself” (7). He was too much impressed by anthropologist Van Gogh’s turbulent career as Romi says that “it held considerable fascination for Billy at one time” (9). Once Billy tells Romi:

Before the eye of each one of us, sooner or later, at one time of life or another, a phantom appears. Some, awed, pray for it to withdraw. Others, ostrich-like, bury their heads in sand. There are those, however, who can do naught but grapple with such faceless tempters and chase them to the very ends of the earth. The last… run the most terrible of perils that man is capable of (7-8).
He belongs to the category of rebels and visionaries and lovers of humanity. Like his creator he believes that “Life’s meaning lies not in the glossy surfaces of our pretensions but in those dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish forever, hidden from the dazzling light of the sun” (8). It is his deep concern for his soul that prompted Billy to abandon himself so recklessly to its call and desperately pursue “the tenuous thread of existence to its bitter end” (8). He sets out in search of life’s meaning.

Billy differs from other heroes of Arun Joshi such as Sindi Oberoi or Ratan Rathor. He makes no dastardly compromise, ever fumbles and suffers from self-pity. Despite his anxieties he is not a drifter. He is a man of conviction and has the courage to translate his vision into reality. As a result he is capable of facing the crisis of his life courageously and with absolute self-confidence.

From his childhood Billy is interested in the primitive life, it is his first love. Talking to Romi he tells of his glimpse of the other side “Most of us are aware only of the side on which we are born, but there is always the other side, the valley beyond the hills, the hills beyond the valley” (15). This other side concerns the primitive life untouched by sophistication and restraints of the civilized world.

Right from the very beginning, his life is dominated by his visions and hallucinations. He ponders at length on the typically human handicap:

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

His mysteriousness or enigma has been presented by the Bhuvaneshwar episode. He tells Romi how at the age of fourteen, he had experienced the primitive urge. He remembers that “It was as though a slumbering part of me had suddenly come awake” (20). He tells Romi about the Konark sculpture which impressed him very much, according to him it was the spirit of life—primitive and ancient, older even than the time. He tells Romi about his experiences of the Konark:

But I know it wasn’t the exoticness of the sculptures that appealed to me; as a matter of fact, even though I hadn’t had any training in the matter, except for a few pieced I found most of the sculptures rather unaesthetic. No, what appealed to me were the shades of the same spirit that I spoke although I knew them, As I know now, that the spirit was a much, much older force, older than the time when man first learned to build temples. If anyone had a clue to it, it was only adivasis who carried about their
knowledge in silence, locked behind their dark inscrutable faces (123-24).

The world he had known till then seemed meaningless to him and he woke up to the disturbing knowledge he says that “It was as though a slumbering part of me had suddenly come awake” (120). It seemed to him that the sculptures at Konark give him a solution to his questions about the problem of his anguish and identity, he asks “Who was I? where had I come from? Where I was going” (122), “Something has gone wrong with my life. This is where I belong. This is what I have always dreamt of” (123).

Romi returns back to India as he gets the shocking news of father’s death. He enters into the Indian Administrative Service. Billy finds himself itching to be back to India after the completion of his Ph.D.; even on his return him remains thirsty, dissatisfied, a sense of nothingness prevails him. He suffers from a sense of loss of socio-cultural ethos. He explains his wretchedness when he is standing in a temple at the time of evening prayer:

I stood before the idols, my hands folded, my head bowed, in cense of dhoop tickling my nostrils. I stood there while the pious voices of men, women and children rose and fell about me like little waves of a benevolent sea. What I had hoped to achieve by my visit I do not know… As I stood there, my eyeballs restive behind the quivering lids, it suddenly dawned upon me that it as all a great waste, that the god who awaited me now I realizes was fate (93-94).
It proves that he is trying to adjust himself socially but finds that it is just wasting his time by living in a materialistic or Epicurean civilization.

According to Tuula Lindgren Billy is an extraordinary person and feels inside him a strange force “A great force, unkraft, …a primitive force. He is afraid of it and tries to suppress it… But it is very strong in him, much stronger than in you or me. It can explode any time” (18). She finds him “obsessed with a latent quest” (176). Romi describes Billy’s urge for the primitive at a music party at George’s apartment. As Billy plays a pair of Bongo drums for nearly quarter of an hour, a hush descends on the atmosphere of the room.

Romi and Tuula are unable to find an explanation for Billy’s erratic behavior. Even during the long walks with Billy, Romi finds his talks “… revealing not only the mind of the speaker but also the dark unknowable layers of the mysterious world that surround us” (20). Tuula with whom Billy discusses about his strange dreams, tells him “in a very mild form such hallucinations occurred in everyone, all art in a way flowed out of them”, but she advises him not to “encourage them too much” (179).

Billy is misfit in the civilized America soon he finds himself “itching to be back” (21) in India. After completion of his Ph.D. he returns back to India. Even in Indian society or at his own home he remains thirsty, dissatisfied in search of something more which sophisticated society lacks. He joins Delhi University as a Lecturer in Anthropology where he starts undertaking numerous expeditions for coming closer to the primitive people in hills and forests. His fed-upness and apathy in life is reflected through his letters to
Tuula. In his letters he reveals himself as a man in search of meaning. In one such letter he writes that “I see a roomful of finely dressed men and women seated on downy sofas and while I am looking at them … They turn into a kennel of dogs yawning or snuggling against each other or holding whisky glasses in their furred paws” (92). In another letter Billy says that “… The so called thinkers and philosophers and men like that … are hired to find solution, throw light… On complications caused by this making and spending of money” (92-93). Yet in another letter he reveals his search for meaning, he tells that “We are swiftly losing what is known as one’s grip of life. Why else this constant blurring of reality? Who am I? Who are my parents? My wife? My child? What accident of creation has brought us together” (93).

These statements refers Billy’s craving, dissatisfaction or thirsty nature. He is craving for the deeper things in life which he could not found either in white America or on the Anglicized Indian society and which represent in the primitive people of the central India. He thinks that there is no difference between American and the upper crust materialistic Indian who are spiritually barren, dead, emotionally empty, artistically and intellectually dry or barren only interested in materialism having no traditional values. In Delhi he feels like a fish out of water. In India he becomes more conscious of his journey towards cosmic selves. There is a beginning of a new existence as a ‘conscious’ being. He is in the search of meaning in life, the source of existence.

He thinks that marriage would give him a new anchor to cling and would lead him to an affirmation in life. He searches meaning of life in
marriage. He marries a pretty young daughter of a retired civil servant, Meena Chatterjee. He marries hurriedly because his strange hallucinations and constant awareness of the meaninglessness of life leave him depressed and he was grown terribly afraid of some part of him. He feels that something terrible may happen unless he does something drastic and his marriage is like “Taking out insurance on normalcy” (182). In Delhi he feels himself “Pinned down there, like a dead butterfly” (35) and his sense of disgust at the civilized society finds expression not only in such Hamlet like outburst “Oh!, how dreary, how dreary, how dreary” (47). He begins to lose his grip on life and experiences a blurring of reality.

Billy has a bizarre approach as he defends before his father the conduct of a clerk who has sacrificed someone else’s child to appease the goddess for the recovery of ailing son, he says that “Similar cases have been reported from Africa, Indonesia and Japan from even country like Sweden. As far as India is concerned, there are enough such cases to fill a thousand page volumes. Lookup the court records of any of the tribal agencies, and you will know what I mean” (40). Even he asserts “There are worlds at the periphery of this one, above it and below it, and around it, of which we know nothing until we are in them”(40).

Although Billy marries Meena for the affirmation in life, but it results into a miserable failure as Meena is a product of the money minded, materialistic epicurean civilization. She is worldly wise who wants nothing but money and glamour of the world which Billy hates. She doesn’t even bother to
understand his situation and establish a rapport with him. He expresses his outburst as “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 become” (183).

The domestic dispute results into his ingrained alienation and he lose temper even at minor issues, quarreling all the time, snapping at everybody, remaining in a dark mood, always making fun of Meena, etc. Meena complaints Romi, about Billy as “Things fall apart” (54) and “Billy is getting stranger and stranger with every passing day” (54), further she tells Romi that “you see, I just can’t handle the situation any more… It is all probably my fault. Perhaps I just don’t understand him as a wife should” (55). She spies on Billy to blame him “Tell me Romi, do you think he is having an affair” (56). Rather than understanding him she suggests him many solution to get rid of her “Go to your cannibals, if you find me so intolerable”, “I will go away if that is what you want” (58).

He is depressed and his effort to find a refugee and anchor goes waste. Romi describes him as wasted or finished when he meets him three years later as “Sniffed out like a candle in the rain”, “Gone was the staggering intelligence, the spectroscopic interests, the sense of humor” (51). It seems to him that the Delhi society has begun to get on his nerves, Billy tells Romi:

What got me was the superficiality, the sense of values. I don’t think all city societies are as shallow as ours. I am, of course, talking mainly of the upper classes. I didn’t really get to know the others. I don’t think I have ever met a more pompous, a more
mixed-up people. Artistically, they were dry as dust. Intellectually, they could no better than mechanically mouthed ideas that the west abandoned a generation ago. Nobody remembered the old songs, or the meaning of the festivals. All the sensuality was gone. So was the poetry. All that was left was load-mouthed women and men in three-piece suits dreaming their little adulteries (178-179).

Billy’s this dialogue shows the moral confusion prevailing in the Post-Independence Indian society, and is more important, his attempt to seek the meaning from it.

Billy is totally frustrated, neither in the society nor at his own home he gets the satisfaction or peace of mind. He feels himself as a fish out of water. He thinks his life as well as the world around him as useless, meaningless and wasted. Now he is gripped by strange hallucinations as he tells Tuula “A strange woman keeps crossing my dreams. I have seen her on the streets of Delhi, nursing a child in the shade of a tree or hauling stone for rich man’s house” (93). Romi considers Billy’s mental condition “closer to madness, the terrible madness of a man who after great sin and much suffering finally finds himself in the presence of his God” (140). Even at the age of twenty when Billy was in America he suffered from such abnormality, he had seen visions “of being in a place other than where I was, in a place very, very old, at times a wilderness, at other times, full of strange primitive people” (123). Always he is haunted by hallucinations. When Billy goes to the central India for expedition,
he hears an irresistible call from the hills he traverses on. In one of his letters to Tuula he writes that “When I return from 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 wildness to the masts of the big city and not the other way round” (96).

In a mood of frustration he seduces Rima Kaul and it becomes a turning point in his realization. He considers himself a misfit, misplaced and doesn’t enjoy the role he has earned for himself by virtue of his qualifications. He seems to be misbegotten in a world which he doesn’t seem to fit in. In fact the most shocking experience of loneliness comes to him when he is in the midst of many. As he realizes that all his efforts to integrate with society are futile, these are simply enhancing his restlessness. He listens to his inner self. He comes to known that even his wife, Meena has failed to satisfy his soul to know his inner self. He tries to find his identity in Meena but fails “I tried very hard to communicate with her” (185). The tricks that work on others will not work for Billy. After marriage what is still lacking is a sense of the unity of existence. A refined feeling ultimately rejects what initially appears. At the moment of decision a deeper insight lacks in him and therefore the happiness or solace he seeks betrays him. The urge to live like a man in a primitive world has becomes stronger. To calm his frenzy he goes on anthropological expeditions. His anthropological expeditions are his attempts at finding meaning to life; going to back to root for it.
Billy’s thoughts remind us of Wordsworth, who in his sonnet “The World is Too Much with Us” expresses a deep sense of sorrow at people’s sheer money-mindedness and thereby leading to the degradation of their soul:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste out powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon! (38).

He decides to participate in reality which itself is the truth, namely his ‘true being’. He wants to detach himself from the illusory situations as he has experienced his freedom in anguish. There was no method by which he could hope permanently to establish a community of ends with other human beings. Since he was locked in inevitable conflict with others. The only remaining option was to choose his freedom.

Billy seems to be transported to a different world and when he comes back to normalcy, he seems to have “returned from a long and difficult journey” (21). Romi Says that “there were many things … Which Billy saw and which step by step, led him to the only end that awaits those who see too much” (39-40). Billy differs from Sindi Oberoi although he stayed for a long time in America but he has not lost his roots and doesn’t “Suffer much except for passing spells of loneliness, from that alienation that many other Indians burdened with” (25). Billy retains his roots in the tradition of society and draws his strength and sense of purpose from his inner vision consequently; he is not bothered about cultural roots that men like Sindi desperately seek. He is
concerned with deeper and far more serious problems, with the question of his spiritual identity with mysteries of life. His entire life is attuned to that mysterious, primitive urge which finds occasional expressions in incidents already referred to and in his informal talks with his confidants like Romi and Tuula. Which reveal “not only the mind of the speaker but also the dark unknowable layers of the mysterious world that surrounded us” (26).

He is constantly engaged in his search for meaning to life. He wanders through the labyrinths of the civilized life and finding a dead end in it he goes to seek the simple ways of life of the primitive people. As an anthropologist he has an urge for travel, a little bit in America, but mostly in India, to explore fascinating societies existing there. The interest in the primitive man is the quest of his existence.

He is on the expedition near Maikala Hills. The search that had begun at Bhuvaneshwar was ended in Maikala Hills which was his destination, his journey’s end. All of a sudden he disappears from the face of the earth into the Saal forest. His disappearance is the termination of the pseudo self and an initiation into the deep, mysterious, real primitive world. He attains a state of watcher on the hills and all the problems in the valleys. Billy departs in the relaxed manner which shows his acceptance of the verdict of his state, and magnificently straddled the gap between knowing and being. Billy withdraws from trivialities of life in the sophisticated society, which fails to sustain him and fulfill his urge for a meaningful life. This withdrawal is for the search of
meaning, realization of his true identity. It is an effort to integrate with the real primitive self. He is determined to carve out his destiny.

On his last expedition he goes to a tribal village, to the house of Dhunia, the headman who becomes his Mahaprasad (an intimate friend). Billy saves life of Dhunia’s niece, Bilasia by giving her anti-biotic on his earlier visit. Dhunia invites him to come next day to watch their dance. On that night he sees a vision in his dream and he says it that “a dream so erotic, the like of which I didn’t know could still be conjured up by my unconsciousness” (118).

Billy is conscious of his being since he feels concerned with external question of his identity which has been upsetting him since the age of fourteen when he could realize that “something has gone wrong with my life” (125). Now he is fully realized. Unable to resist the call of his inner self, he goes to the forest the next night. The call pricks him incessantly:

Come, come, come, come. Why do you want to go back? 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 (121).

There in the villages Billy watches the tribals dance, joins them, drinks with them and finally decides to give up the civilized world and join the tribal’s world forever, to find out not only his roots but his identity, to fulfil his soul and its urge. Thus, his visit to the tribal village becomes his search for meaning of life. His disappearance isn’t sudden; it isn’t a decision taken on a
sudden impulse. With the approach of attuning himself to a meaningful life and realizing his true identity which constantly gets blurred in the debasing contact and debilitating infection with the materialistic and emotionally barren society, that he makes the tremendous leap into the dark, mysterious primitive world. His disappearance is in fact, the termination of the first phase of his life-long quest, the end of his sojourn in civilization.

According to him tribals are very civilized. It is Post-Independence pseudo-western values that he rejects. Always he is critical of the organized society and its so-called measures of civilization. According to him it is a peg of money upon which everything rests. The problem hinted by him is that of the existential problem of reality, identity and absurdity of the human creation. He represents the predicament of the seeker ‘who am I? Where am I from?’ He oscillates between the modern and the primitive. Although he couldn’t attain the stature of mythical heroes Lord Rama or Buddha but undergoes significant transformation in his response to life and relationship to other human beings. He is oversensitive having intensity of feelings and his mind is constantly under stress and pressure. His major concern is with his inner world, the world of the soul and its source. He consciously give up the modern civilized world as he feels suffocated within his society. In his own society and house he suffers, but his suffering is a purifying process leading towards the self-awakening rather than disillusionment. His problem of communicating with the fellow beings disappears, because he is seeking communion with the ‘very centre of man’s existence’. He has a positive vision in the newly found world.
The second part of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* begins about ten years later the disappearance of Billy, with his accidental meeting with Romi, the district collector in the central India. While visiting the worst hit areas, Romi comes across him, a thoroughly tribalized, wearing a lion-cloth. Romi takes him to his bungalow and informs him about the news from his family like his mother’s death which didn’t affect Billy. Billy narrates Romi the circumstances leading to his disappearance, the strange mystical experience he has undergone, and his life as a primitive man.

Billy’s meeting with Bilasia in Dhunia’s cottage on the night prior to his disappearance becomes the turning point as it has brought a vast change in him, He says that “It was as though, during that half hour, it wasn’t Bilasia I had been waiting for but my future, my past, indeed the very purpose of my life” (113). Then he wept like a child. The call of the primitive world which he had been listening within him, since his childhood days began, now he became more articulate and strident. The entire forest, the moonlit night and the living nature were calling him to join them, to explore them and to merge into the primitive world. It was a strange process of regeneration in which “layer upon layer was peeled off” (121) until nothing but his primitive self was left.

Billy tells Dhunia about his fed-upness in the civilized world as that “I am fed up of those slimy bastards who are camped across that river, and I am fed up of the millions who surround me in the wretched city where I come from” (144). Billy was very much impressed by Bilasia’s beauty, he says:
Her hair was loose. Just behind her left ear there was a red flower. The necklace of beads glowed a little in the darkness …

Come, come, come, she said and Billy Biswas, son of a Supreme Court Justice, went… It was closer to madness, the terrible madness of a man who after great pain and much suffering finally find himself in the presence of his God (140).

About the sexual satisfaction which he gets after mating with Bilasia was never given to him before in his life he tells about it that 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. He says that “Bilasia at that moment was the essence of that primitive force that had called me night after night, year after year” (140). Bilasia is, as if, his missing self and the union with her made him whole. Billy’s union with her suggests his communion with ‘prakriti’ that enables him to find his true self, achieve the fullest perception of reality and realize his own potentialities, and his search for meaning.

Billy leaves the artificially civilized world where he feels very hard even to take free breath; he describes it as he feels as if he is ‘pinned down like a dead butterfly’ (47). He joins the tribal’s world because there he finds his affirmation of the essence of human existence. His act of searching for meaning leads him to the tribal world. Billy does it preplanned as he moves out of civilization so mysteriously that he leaves no trace behind it. He realizes that
it is wise to accept the life of which he dreamt regularly rather than continuously running away from life in search of the real meaning of life. He comments that “why he had afraid, afraid of foolish, squandering the priceless treasure of his life on that hoop, of tinsel that passed for civilization” (139).

People think that he may have been eaten by a man-eater, which symbolically represents the breaking of bonds between the civilized world and Billy. He prefers to live in the tribal’s world because there he realizes that “nobody here is interested in the price of food grains or new seeds or roads or elections and stuff like that” (111). He settles down in the primitive society which was characterized by innocence, peace and a vital personal relation with the natural world. He tells about his experience as “We lived at the subsistence level what kept us happy… Where the earth, the forest, the rainbows, the liquor from the mahua… A lot of dancing and love making and, more than anything else, no ambition” (198).

His earlier restlessness was replaced by a serenity which itself was a measure of the great change that had taken place in him. But all his process of becoming a primitive is, for him, only a means to an end. He is concerned with the quest for something beyond simple primitivism. It is a search for the realization of potential divinity in man, search for meaning. He seeks like Indian sages, a god-head and “Becoming a primitive was only a first-step, a means to an end” (189). He is in the search of divinity, like the seers in the Indian legends and scriptures who also went in the forests to heal themselves spiritually and to attain the highest state of self-realization and sainthood.
Billy’s escape from the civilized society to a primitive world is not for the sake of becoming a yogi, but because the phoney atmosphere of the modern society which is nothing more than “the making and spending of money” (96). His escape is a journey from darkness to light, from restlessness to equanimity. The primitive world holds forth immense promise of a life that would nourish him and would soothe his otherwise restless and frustrated soul. It was to flee from the corrupting influence and moral confusion of the civilized society and to lead an intensely rich and meaningful life in a sanctuary of peace that Billy, like Matthew Arnold’s ‘Scholar Gypsy’ decided to join the company of ‘wild brotherhood’. His abandonment of ‘the civilized world is an effort to free himself from external distractions which debar man from attaining detachment from the fruit of action. While stressing on such inner and outer liberation Joshi Says that “… Inner liberation without detachment is not possible and selfishness is always stopping you from getting liberated. Loneliness is the state where you become aware that you are not liberated and you also do not know how to get liberated” (Piciucco 91).

About Billy’s departure Jasbir Jain comments that “Long before his physical disappearance into the Saal forest of the Maikala Hills, he had ceased to belong to the world” (54). Materialism and suspiciousness is responsible for it. Billy feels himself at ease in a world devoid of rat race and its resultant miseries. According to him living among simple people you can “look through their hearts”. He tells Romi about the happiness that “The earth, the forest, the rainbows, the liquor from the mahua, an occasional feast, a lot of dancing and
love making, and, more than anything else, no ambition, none more than anything else, no ambition, none at all” (146). Here he is very right because it is ambition which causes anxiety and rivalry and makes people snobbish which destroys man’s values and drives a man to miseries. Tribals are without any ambition, it is this friendly, simply and pure atmosphere that new vistas of knowledge are opened before Billy.

After undergoing the regenerative process himself, he comes out in a new role, that of a healer, a priest, a magician who cures dying children, wards off tigers, and helps the primitive people with their worldly problems and spiritual troubles. To the primitive people he appears “like rain on faced lands, like a balm on a wound. These hills have-not seen the like of him since the last of our king passed away” (157-58). The tribals consider Billy not only as their king but also a great magician having the supernatural powers also. Dhunia says that Billy sends away a tiger who was in the position of attack their cattle. He had brought back Dhunia’s grandson to life who had been dead for about two hours. Romi realized Billy’s power of profound faith and unfathomed knowledge when Billy does some improbable things. He predicts rain when there is no sign of relief from the scorching sun. Dhunia and other people consider him as the reincarnation of the tribal king, who had passed away thousands years ago, and upon Bilasia as that of his wife, Devi Mata.

Billy narrates Romi the legend of the mythical king who was an excellent sculptor, an ideal lover, a magician and a saint. That king wanted to build a temple that would excel all others in the world. He employed the best
sculptors of his country to build a temple, and decided to make the chief idol himself. He worked day and night, adjured his kingship and neglected his duties and health he struggled to chisel the hard granite into the desired shape. On the last night of the last year, under a full moon, the king produced an idol so beautiful that the God decided to enter it. The idol became alive. So pleased was God that He told the king to ask for a boon. As the saintly king had nothing to ask for, God gave him a day to think over it. The jealous brothers of the king came to know of this divine benediction and out of jealousy they poisoned him. The kings wife immolated herself on his pyre, prophesying that she would return when her husband will return to the forest and that her return to and reunion with her husband, Chandtola, the White Cliff, would glow again on moonlit nights. Dhunia and other people convinced that Billy is their dead king after whose return to forest and meeting with Bilasia, the White Cliff has started to glow again. When Romi asks him why Billy had made that decisive leap, Dhunia says “when the Kala Pahar calls you, Collector Sahib, there is nothing you can do but go. The first time I heard his drumming I knew the Rock had called him. It is like a woman calling you. You become blind” (160).

In the narration Billy narrates Romi slight different story. According to him the mythical king worked day and night without any rest. He grew emaciated, his hair become long and white, and he turned mad. But the chiseling didn’t stop. One morning the people found him dead at the feet of idol. It was an exquisite piece of sculpture that “No artist have ever infused
such life in a stone figure… But the figure had no face… The king could never
make the face of his god” (171).

The image of the faceless god, perhaps, suggests the imperfect nature of
art. The sculptor king, with all his dedication to his work, could not make the
face. It implies the hopeless and futile attempt to achieve perfection. Joshi’s
heroes suffer from a sense of discontent and imperfection and make sincere
endeavour to attain fulfillment but none of them, the partial exception of Billy
notwithstanding, succeeds in completely satisfying this hopeless longing. The
God’s image symbolizes perfection and wholeness. The king’s failure to make
the face of God may be regarded as a symbolic expression of Billy’s own
failure to complete the quest he had started by forsaking the civilized society.

Billy discards familial obligations and filial extractions to answer the
call of his soul. It is a moral conviction that leads him to ignore the commonly
accepted standards of right and wrong. It is a call of his conscience addressed
to his inauthentic self that is dominated by the accepted standards of his society
and entangled in concerns that had come to determine it instead of being
determined by it. It reflects his own deepest self awareness. What is at stake is
his self, his struggle to exist as the individual he knows he ought to be. He does
this in order to be himself.

To the question of Romi about his desire to become primitive Billy says:
I don’t want to sound too pompous, Old Chap. Becoming a
primitive was only a first step, a means to an end of course, I
realized it only after I ran away. I realized them that I was seeking something else. I am still seeking something else (187).

When Romi asks him what he was seeking? Was it God? He reluctantly replies that it was not God but a thing similar to God. Here it is clear that he is in the search of meaning in life, for salvation and affirmation of his self in life. Billy though born and brought up in the same culture builds his own glass castle because his soul is yearning for affirmation and he cannot compromise with forces opposed to it. The path chosen by him is the way of Jnanayoga (the way of knowledge) that takes him to liberation at the end. It is different from the way of karma (action). It requires us to renounce action and achieve wisdom through meditation, intuition and righteous living. It propounds that man is bound by karma and is saved by knowledge. It, therefore, advocates sanyasa in which the seeker is directed to eliminate his ego, attenuate his desires and removes his ignorance (vidya) which is impediments in his affirmation. As S. Radhakrishnan puts it “To get existential experience of the self, we should get free from the diversity of objects, external and internal. Which impedes and prevents the direct or intuitive vision of the essence of self” (57). We find these traits in Billy which makes him true seeker for affirmation through the way of knowledge. His life among the tribals is free from desire, anger, ego, ambition and deception that grip the city life. It has purity and peace that seldom comes in the way of the civilized world.

Billy and Romi meet for many times. Once Billy cures Romi’s wife Situ’s migraine with some herbs. Romi promises him that he will not disclose
or expose the fact about his existence. But Romi became victim of his wife Situ’s pressure and tells her about Billy. Situ opens the secrets to Billy’s father and his wife, Meena who rush to seek him again. Romi tries his best to calm them but they insist to meet Billy. Billy’s father reports the whole matter to the Chief Secretary who later on threatens Romi and the responsibility of finding Billy is kept on Mr. Rele, the Police Superintendent. None of them understand Billy’s problem and the operation to find out Billy starts. They go to the village where Billy resides with his wife, Bilasia and his two sons. Although the police forced very much but none of the villagers gave any clue about Billy. One another news was spread that Billy killed a police constable. Then, the police carries out the combing operation and ultimately Billy is killed by a hasty bullet of a constable. Here in the irony is that not withstanding his appreciation, Romi is after all, a part of that corrupt, unprincipled society and becomes its instrument in the final tragedy.

Romi says when Billy was on the verge of death, “Billy” I cried “Billy”. He opened his past glazing eyes for a moment and appeared to look at me. ‘You bastard’(233), he said hoarsely, then he died. This is Billy’s final verdict on the civilized society which is not natural but ‘bastardly’ and which has put an end to his quest. Only a handful of ash in a mud-pot is all of Billy that reaches the civilized world, and his ‘strange case’ is “disposed of in the only manner that a humdrum society knows of disposing its rebels, its seers, its true lovers” (240). This is Romi’s view. The problem with Billy is that none tries to
understand his problem even after his death. None from the civilized world realize that Billy is indulged in a “search for truth or meaning” (175).

The ‘humdrum society’ is afraid of Billy Biswas who holdsup before it a mirror on which it sees its destroyed image. Billy with his vision of a glorious and meaningful life could never rest in the dwindled stream of existence. So he made the difficult and painful choice with full knowledge of its consequences. Instead of getting lost in the labyrinths of reason and loop-holes of compromise and contemplation, he is guided by the logic of his soul. Romi suggests that the result of those who revolts “… Nothing but blind blundering vengeance, howsoever camouflaged, awaits all those who dare to step out of its stifling confines... It is a conformation whose outcome is as certain as the end of solitary beating against a maelstrom” (238).

Billy was also “aware of the impossibility, in the world that he had abandoned, of saving men from themselves, when he stepped out of the sanctuary” (241). To save the soul of his only friend in the civilization. This is exactly what makes him tragic hero and wins out heart as well as sympathy for him.

In this respect Billy’s case doesn’t resemble Buddha, who too left his wife and son but he didn’t lived in any tribal world. Yet the Buddha is a kind of archetypal figure upon which Billy has been moulded in some respect in the context of the urban society versus the tribal world. Romi, the dearest friend of Billy is deeply grieved by the unbearably tragic end of Billy, he reflects that “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 our civilized world had no equivalent. It was as though, we had killed one of the numerous man… God of the primitive pantheon” (236).

Billy, who dared “to step out its stifling confines” (240) ultimately had to pay price with his life for not conforming to the norms of the so-called civilized society, which destroyed him. Billy’s case is terribly pathetic and it criticizes to insufferable suffocation caused by the present modern materialistic society.

Billy a “refugee from civilization” (140) feels established in the primitive world where he finds his identity, his roots, his search for meaning. When the people from the civilized world try to take him back, he prefers to die rather than succumbing to their black and deep desires. Billy’s end was “as certain as the end of solitary boats beating against the maelstrom” (240). Arun Joshi in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* reiterates the tyranny of the forces of the phoney civilization that crushes man’s desires for self-realization and kinship with nature. Billy’s character represents the dehumanizing impact of modern life on the individuals. However, Joshi says that the modern civilization can be saved by love of truth and beauty, sympathy with the oppressed and beliefs in the brotherhood of man, justice and mercy. It is another variation of the doomed existential quest of man for affirmation in the absurd world. Billy’s outward journey is symbolic of his relentless search for meaning in life. His spiritual concern highlights the meaninglessness of our prosperity and civilized society.
The title of the novel is very apt and meaningful. The words “strange” and “case” in the title have serious implications. Billy’s case is strange because in the materialistic world everyone is running behind the materialistic world, behind the materialistic pleasures like money and power, Billy though belonging to the sophisticated or the upper crust of India, opts out of it to achieve affirmation and meaning in his life. He is very much similar to the ‘sages’ or ‘rishis’ in the past who had renounced civilization for the primitive life as a means of realizing the truth and God. His predicament is peculiar and his search is a search for the hidden meaning behind his existence.

**The Strange Case of Billy Biswas** deviates slightly from **The Foreigner** in the end as Sindi Oberoi finds his meaning in the civilized world itself and learns to live like a ‘karmayogi’ whereas Billy derives his meaning only after renouncing his civilized life and joining the primitive world for pure and righteous living. The modern civilization is presented as a great usurper of souls and Billy strives to find out viable alternatives for “the most futile cry of man, in smart society” (3).
Works Cited


