CHAPTER IV

FICTIONAL TECHNIQUE

Arun Joshi’s fictional technique is guided by several factors of his development as a writer. He has acquired it from the study of his favourite authors. He has borrowed it from the American and Continent writers and has fused it with the Indian concept of the story mixed not only with myth and folklore but also with the device of a story within a story coming down to us from the puranic traditions. To R. K Dhawan, O.P. Bhatnagar, V. Gopal Reddy and others Arun Joshi’s works are signs of his mature genius, skilled narrative style and profound vision of life. Arun Joshi has paid great attention to the three important parts of the narrative such as plot, characterisation and the narrative point of view. He has taken recourse to the various devices in forgoing the technique of his fiction.

Arun Joshi has evolved a style of his own that is flexible enough to communicate the varied experience of his characters with perfect ease. The quality of his novels lies in the authenticity of his scenes and it is evident from the accurate descriptions of life of Indian students in New York and Boston, the life of District collector, the corrupt practises and manipulations of Indian bureaucrats and the photographic documentation of the tribal region in central India and of the life of its people. The strength of his narration and the superb control of his style evoke the intrinsic flavour of each place he describes. The evocative power of his narrative style is evident in his depiction of the mystical
experience of spiritual regeneration that Billy Biswas undergoes in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*.

His style is apparent. He depends entirely on the resources of his narrative style, which is apparently mending but always under control and on his evocative language to recreate the journey of the human soul into the mysterious other world. It is this narrative skill that turns *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* from a factual record of real events into an artistic restatement of the human quest for cultural identity and spiritual commitment. Again because of this stylistic excellence he transmutes the tract material of *The Apprentice* into a fictional re-enactment of the anguished search of a guilt-stricken consciousness for salvation.

The plots of Arun Joshi’s novels are related to the upper classs and even when the subject matter is drawn from the life of the poor, it has been narrated from the viewpoint of the upper-class narrator. A significant fact about his fictional world is that in his novels he is concerned with the decaying upper crust of the Indian society. He satirises the glistening flimsiness of the Indian affluent society. *The Foreigner, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* and *The Last Labyrinth* deal with the decaying crust of the Indian society. In *The Apprentice* Ratan Rathor rises to this status while in *The City and the River* there is a clash between the two.

Arun Joshi’s characters belong to the upper-class society except for the mud people in *The City and the River*. They are complex figures and as such they are seldom at ease with themselves. They go on developing and suffering
the different schism of modern life. The major characters in his novels seem to be lost in the crisis of their identity, search for meaning. His fascination for dealing with existential themes in which the characters get lost in the mazes of their existence is also in keeping with the favorite image of the maze in the post-modern literature. His novels are peopled with educated-uneducated, urban, rural and primitive figure. There are primitive, tribal characters which naturally require a different language and expression from that of educated, civilized upper-class.

The first person narrative technique is Joshi’s favorite. He employs it in his novels *The Foreigner, The Apprentice* and *The Last Labyrinth*. This omniscient narrative technique is adopted by the protagonist himself. In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* the narrative technique is that of omniscient point of view of Billy’s friend, Romesh Sahai, who knews about his strange case as an investigating officer of his past friend. In *The City and the River* it is the omniscient author who narrates the tale in the third person. He has not adopted one point of view and he has adopted one consistent point of view in the novel.

*The Foreigner* deals with the industrial world. The exploitation of the poor labourers by Mr.Khemka the miserable and heart touching condition of the poor workers and Sindi’s decision to stay back in Delhi are the situations to point out that Arun Joshi has dealt with the industrial problem in it. Sindi like his creator has grown out of Joshi’s own experience. The problem in *The Last
*Labyrinth* also verges upon the industrial world. Both Som Bhaskar and Aftab Rai are industrialists associated with the plastic industry.

The academic world also crops up in some of Arun Joshi’s novels such as *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* and *The City and the River*. Arun Joshi’s interest in the academic world has been revealed by his several characters. In *The Foreigner* Sindi is on his visit to New-Delhi. Sindi leaves his academic career in the U.S. to come back to his forefather’s land India. In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* the protagonist Billy Biswas is appointed as a faculty member in the Department of Anthropology of Delhi University. His escape into the Saal forest of the Maikala hills is for his academic mission to study the tribal world along with his students. Leila Sabnis in *The Last Labyrinth* is an academician interested professionally in philosophy and as a pastime in foreign languages. In *The City and the River* the academic world plays a dominant role. The Hermit of the Mountain, The Great Yogeshwara, the Professor and his disciple Master Bhoma are all associated with the academic world.

Arun Joshi makes his novels readable as possible and chooses a particular functioning. It is this special care and the recognition of the need to establish human contact with his readers that make his novels so extremely readable and assert the readers undivided attention.

In *The Foreigner* the narrative point of view is that of “the protagonist narrator’s point of view” (Raizada 14). Protagonist, Sindi Oberoi he himself is the narrator. It is a sort of autobiography as the narrator protagonist begins the novel as an ‘I’ character. Herein Arun Joshi deals with the hero’s physical
contact with society and his psychological developments which enables him to solve his problems. The narrative of the novel oscillates between the past and the present and vice versa. Its narrative technique is oblique, in a flash back and not straight forward. There is the combination of British, American and Indian English. There are also straight forward third person reporting and also alternations between first person narrative along with free, indirect narration. The narrator sometimes narrates the story in the mood of introspection and sometimes he takes recourse to telling the story in retrospect of again changing over to reporting the story in extro-version.

The story is told in a series of flash-back narrative point of view. In it Arun Joshi craftly juxtaposes the past and the present, the real and the remembered, the world of fantasy and reality to add suspense. The narrative of the novel takes into different countries like Kenya, England, Scotland and India. Sindi Oberoi, student of the mechanical Engineering at Boston, comes into contact with another Indian student, Baburao Khemaka, and also with June Blyth who becomes the focal point of triangular love.

It is rich in the story element. In it the two plots are woven- the main plot of Sindi, June and Babu and the subplot of Khemka, his daughter Sheila and Sindi. In the course of story Joshi sketches the characters involved in the plot. He delineates characters in cross-cultural contexts. Sindi is a globe-trotter who changes over from Kenya to England and Scotland, America finally comes down to settle in Delhi, his forefather’s land.
The novel examines the problem of isolation and involvement and man’s despair as being unable to find a meaning in existence and attempts to explore its genesis, course and cure. According to K.R.S. Iyenger it is “a well plotted briskly written piece” (513). It has a remarkable degree of maturity and technical competence. The novelist tells us about the Sindi’s physical contact with society and his psychological developments which enable him to solve his problems, at least temporarily. According to O.P. Bhatnagar “It is not only a novel with a fine aesthetic vision rendering the subtle complexities of attitudes and emotions, in a language which has verve, ease, and suppleness, but it also marks a definite improvement over all other novels in English on East-West muddle”(14).

Throughout the plot, dialogue and the use of imagery and style Sindi’s character is depicted as a foreigner. Joy Abraham rightly remarks:

It gains a symbolic value in the larger context of human existence. It again portrays the protagonist’s sense of metaphysical anguish at the meaninglessness of human condition. The unreality and insecurity and transitorizes associated with the word “foreigner” from the entire edifice of the novel providing the necessary texture and structure to it. From this point of view it has a remarkable degree of maturity and technical competence well suited to its theme (77).

The fictional technique of The Foreigner is influenced by T.S. Eliot’s poetic technique used in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”. Sindi
conveys his sense of futility by using phrases from T. S. Eliot as “irredeemable
time”, “the eternal joker snickered within me”, “stood in graveyard cars” (159).

In the present novel there is a colourless cosmopolitan quality as Sindi
he himself is an embodiment of cosmopolitanism. He is an uprooted young
man living in the latter half of the twentieth century and who has become
detached from everything except himself. The narration keeps up our interest
constantly.

The structural layout of splitting chronology in simultaneous threads
running along, then merging into one, is surely a technical ingenuity of
storyteller’s craft. The three divisions of the novel are in accordance to the
progression of events. In the first is the beginnings of relationships; in the
second, growth and delay; and in the last, death and destruction.

The narration keeps moving from the recent past in Boston to the
present in Delhi. During the course of the novel, he takes us to Nairobi where
Sindi is born; to London where he studied; to a night club in Soho where he
worked as dishwasher and a barman; to Scotland where he worked at a small
village library and discussed religion, God and mysticism with a Catholic
priest; to Boston where he studied for six years and met June and Babu; and to
Delhi where he get the meaning of life and ultimately settled down.

Arun Joshi uses metaphors, symbols and images for variations of mood
and intensity of emotion. Sindi, is drawn analogues to a tree without roots. He
is an orphan for whom the only reality of his parents is a couple of wrinkled
and cracked photographs. The sudden fall of the spider from the ceiling which
aimlessly walks upside down exploring his inverted universe and the playing of
cards are the symbols of man’s deplorable position in the universe.

The title itself gains a symbolic significance in the larger context of
human existence. It portrays Sindi’s sense of metaphysical anguish at the
meaninglessness of his life. The unreality and transitoriness associated with the
word ‘foreign’ permeates the whole structure of the novel. From this view, it
has a remarkable degree of maturity suited to its theme.

The novel begins with a story interest. It opens in a morgue where Sindi
Oberoi has to identify his dead friend Baburao Khemka. Herein Joshi mixes
together imagination and reality to maximise the suspense. The reason of
Babu’s death is secret until he finishes two-third of the novel. Just like a
detective story here Arun Joshi keeps the readers engaged in a speculation. The
mysteriousness of the story is evoked by Babu’s death, finding a photo of June,
in his wallet, Sindi’s identification of Babu’s dead body and Sheila’s handing
over a ‘frayed envelope’ containing Babu’s letter. The chronology of events is
maintained though the past intrudes by the questions asked by Sheila who is
anxious about the death of her brother, Babu.

Sindi’s alienation is the result of a narrative technique. Arun Joshi
satirises the Indian economic disparity and moral code through his characters.
Except June and Sheila all other characters are satirical sketches. Babu, a
typical Indian student abroad is badly exposed to ridicule. Mr. Khemka, an
Indian businessman; Mrs. Blyth, an American snob. Babu’s innocence leads
him to death. Lacking the fighting spirit and unable to face the stark realities of
life, he commits suicide. Mr. Khemaka is corrupt so he is detained behind the bars. Sindi stands for fortitude against the onslaughts of circumstances. As opposed to them June is one who has the capacity to forget themselves in somebody’s trouble. She wants to be of use to others.

In this novel Arun Joshi uses mythical pattern of *The Mahabharta*. Here Sindi resembles Karna, as both face a crisis of identity. Karna’s problem of belonging is brought out by fate and he wants social recognition while Sindi doesn’t has that crisis because the societies are mostly friendly to him.

Sindi’s life can be viewed as a yatra, a pilgrimage from meaningless to affirmation through knowledge. He undergoes a long conflict between the saint and the lusty beast in him, reaches a solution to his problem. Almost all the incidents in the novel like academic success or failure, love and friendship, suicide or death and downfall of Khemka’s empire are touchstones to test his moral principles and wisdom. The events of life, however, are uncontrollable and one gets easily trapped in them. The deaths of Babu and June completely drain-out his confidence. He comes to realise that involvement without undue attachment is a key–note to affirmation. Babu and June’s death promote Sindi to analyse the validity of his attachment and the necessity of love and involvement. This Journey from East to West helps him to achieve affirmation. According to Mathur “Having become a karmayogi he finds his equanimity and salvation in the land of his ancestors” (107). Hari Mohan Parsad quotes that “From Boston to Delhi has been a journey from alienation to arrival, from
selfishness to sacrifice, from an anomic responsible to himself to a member of mankind, from being to becoming” (435).

Boston is not only a city but a state of mind. Joshi’s use of motifs to strengthen the central design shows a great deal of craftsmanship. Twice in the novel he recapitulates the juke-box song to deepen the existentialistic appeal in life experience of Sindi Oberoi who saunters in the hopes to migrate to India. There is another path of the journey as well as an inner path. The dawn breaking the darkness indicates the emergence of light within him. Sindi comes across a bronze figure of dancing Shiva in the luxuriously and tastefully furnished drawing room of Khemaka. The god ‘Shiva’ is the confluence of both the destructive and constructive forces. The purpose of the dance is to release man from illusion.

The action in the novel has a definite movement despite the fact that Arun Joshi has used the techniques of flashback and perceiving the things through the eye of the hero, Sindi Oberoi. After his coming back to India, Sindi looks back at his life and events in Boston and London. Thus, the present grows out from the past, and the past directs the present. Further, the qualities the novelist attributes to his characters determine the action and the action in turn progressively changes the characters and thus the story is carried forward to the end. Thus, it has a well beginning, a well middle and a well end.

The language used in the novel is well suited to it. Narrative imparting seriousness to the novel. Most of the images in it are related to death and are
from technology. Sindi describes June Blyth to Sheila just as he describes an automobile “Tall and slim, with blonde hair and large blue eyes” (57).

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is a sort of biography of the protagonist, Billy Biswas. The narrative point of view of it is that of the witness-narrator. In it the narrative follows both flash-back and flash-ahead technique. It is told from the point of view of Billy’s friend, Romesh Sahai (Romi) who is an omniscient narrator. He is an officer of IAS cadre posted at Jhansi. The Saal forest of the Maikala hills falls within his administrative jurisdiction. He was Billy’s roommate in America. He was the very intimate friend of Billy and yet could not know the secretive and the mysteriousness in his friend’s mind.

In his use of narrative technique Arun Joshi owes to Joseph Conrad, R.K. Dhawan writes that “Arun Joshi’s fiction conforms to Conrad’s conception of the novel. Joshi recognises a reality beyond a mere phenomenal world, a reality which the artists could imagine and capture by giving a consistent form to the shapeless facts of human existence” (17-18). Conrad’s narrative technique in Lord Jim has great influence upon the witness-narrator’s point of view in the present novel. Like Marlow in Lord Jim, “Romi performs the task as an involved friend and as a detached narrator. Both become more and more involved as the novel progresses. Both follow a tale to the end. And they have another feature in common”(29). In the similar vein here in the present novel Romi narrates the story. It resembles The Heart of Darkness.
Like Kurtz, Billy forsakes the civilized human society and adopts himself to the primitive and has a native mistress.

The novel is divided into two parts: the part I is up to 98 pages and the part II from pages 99 to 244. From the point of view of Harish Raizada, it could have been divided into three parts as: “The Civilized World”, “The Primitive World” “The Impingement of the Civilized on the Primitive World” (175-176).

The part I 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 the ground for his rejection of the values of the civilized society so much so that whatever he says and does in this section is sailing in that direction.

The part II is the long account of what exactly happened during the ten years of Billy’s absence from the civilized society is partly given in the first person by Billy through his memory monologue, partly gathered from Dhunia, the tribal headman, and partly summarized by Romi.

The two worlds presented in the novel and they represent two distinct cultures which these geographical locations embody. The novel reveals to us the falsity of the so called refinement of the Indian upper class society. According to Prempati it is obviously anti- bourgeois in taste and “testifies a loss of confidence in the anglicised Indian tradition of high culture” (175). The novel depicts the spiritual realization in contrast to mundane entanglements. One observes this when the novel opens in New York’s Harlem, the black ghetto of America which is against some posh American
localities and ends in Satpura Hills which stands as contrast to New Delhi’s smart set. These two geographical locations tellingly suggest the quality of life which they represent along with their hazards or otherwise. The complexity of the novel is substantially based on parallelism and contrast.

The story of the present novel has been unfolded in the flash-back technique. Romesh Sashai recounts Billy’s life in America much before the time of his disappearance into the Saal forest of the Satpura hills that “I first met Billy (Bimal Biswas) in New York where for one brief summer we roomed together” (8). Romi recounts everything about Billy and his love for the primitive life and his marriage and other affairs. At the very opening of the novel he lays stress on the point that it is difficult to know the mind of Billy:

As I grow old, I realise 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 I propose to relate Billy’s story, it is not so much because I claim to have understood him as it on account of a deep and unrelieved sense of wonder that in the middle of the twentieth century, there should have lived a man of such extraordinary obsessions (7).

Romi carries a sympathetic outlook for Billy Biswas. He is sure that Billy’s disappearing into the woods is not “a stereotype childish escapade” (8), but a thing of greater significance beyond the ken of people of humdrum life. Romi considers the end of the story of Billy Biswas “the most difficult part of this narrative” (225).
He justifies the title as:

*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* had at last been disposed of it. It had been disposed of in the only manner that a humdrum society knows of disposing its rebels, its seers, its true lovers.

Sitting there, watching the shades of evening settle on the drab little town, it seemed to me that nothing but blind blundering vengeance, howsoever camouflaged, awaits all those who dare to step out of its stifling confines. It is as certain as the end of solitary boats beating against a maelstrom (240).

In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* Arun Joshi moves from New Delhi to Satapura hills in Madhya Pradesh. The two geographical locations represent two different cultures- the sophisticated and the primitive. Billy’s unconscious self drives him to renounce the monotonous respectability of his high middle class society and seeks his roots in the company of a primitive tribe.

The case of Billy from the administrative point of view is strange. Romi suggests the viewpoint of a psychoanalyst and psychiatrist. The uneasiness in the heart of Billy leading to the crisis of his character has been brought about in episode juxtaposing each other. The dialogues in their crisp and carefully wrought forms and it have also magnificent use of humour and irony. The dialogues involving the tribal, especially Dhaunia, are full of the sense of myth and folklore. Meenakshi Mukherjee has very aptly describes it as “a compelling novel about a strange quest drawing upon myth and folklore to reiterate its elementary concerns” (203). Billy in his quest for finding an answer to the
crisis of character in a civilized world escapes into the primitive life to find the ultimate reality, in a concept “something like that of God” (169).

In fact, the entire novel is an attempt to discuss Billy’s instinctive yearning for affirmation. Romi not only narrates the events of his life but also he tries to find the truth hidden behind them. So, instead of straight forward narration of events in their chronological order, the narrator deals with the introspective memories, in most thoughts and feelings, intimate human relations, personal letters, discussions. The discussion with Rima Kaul, with Balasia, with the little fellow from Patna, all serve this purpose. The discussions with Dhunia, the tribal headman explains the psychological impact made by Kala Pahar on Billy which forms the foundation of the novel “you see what you can when. You are awake, and what you can’t see when you are awake comes to you in dreams. It is all the same” (150).

In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* the story of the narrator, Romesh Sahai and Billy’s story concurrently forms an interesting structure of parallelism and contrast. This contrast which is generated primarily by character and individual nature is maintained throughout in all the actions and events too. At the same time the two stories are linked to each other because most of the events in the life of Billy have a direct bearing on that of the narrator, whose prime purpose itself is to expose Billy Biswas.

The title is very apt and suggestive, the words “Strange” and “Case” in the title have serious implications. Billy’s case is strange because in a world where everyone is running after materialistic pleasures or comforts Billy,
though belongs to upper strata of the Delhi society, opts out of it to achieve affirmation and meaning in his life. He is very much similar to the sages and “rishis” in the past who had renounced civilization for the primitive life as a means of realising the truth and God. His predicament is peculiar and his search is a search for hidden meaning behind his existence. The title also suggests the civilized world’s comment on Billy’s behaviour which to the conformists might look as “strange”.

The action in the novel has definite movement. The narrator, Romi looks back at his life and events in America and India in juxtaposition. It is Billy’s resolution to flee the civilized world and go back to a world where he will be free to obey his primitive instincts and impulses which lend force to the plot of the novel and again it is his death at the hands of the humdrum world that provides pathos to the story. Though he is regarded as a mythical king by the tribal, his death is a loss only to his immediate relatives and Romi who tries to understand him. The second phase of the novel begins with Billy’s appearance in front of Romi about ten years after his disappearance and hence forward the novel moves steadily to a purposeful end.

The tone of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* has a combination of concern, disinterestedness, casualness but all under superb control. There is a conspicuous change of tone in the second part. The language in this part is more direct, unpretentious and urgent. It is in conformity with the earnestness of the narrative. The correspondence between the language and content becomes perfect and artistically satisfying. It is a dramatic presentation of the
complex character of Billy who, though his values are profoundly human, is aspiring to get beyond this advertised world. Even this aspiration of Billy is blended naturally and spontaneously with his primitive instincts. The fact that Billy’s reappearance is only accidental and that he has already lived like a tribal for ten years signifies the undramatic manner in which the most dramatic act of Billy is presented. In fact Arun Joshi does not depend for the success of his narrative art on devices of dramatization or use of symbols or images. Without recourse to any of these devices, he is able to produce a totality of effect which is dependent purely on the forces of his narrative which again is objective and free from all sentimentality of subjectivity. Arun Joshi is able to handle his narrative art in such a way that without being excessively sentimental or emotional or dramatic he can make situations credible and convincing. We see all the events and situation filtered through the consciousness of a narrator who is detached and objective and it is here that we find the technique of first person narration proving helpful.

The use of various symbols provides the novel with the beauty. Once Romi, Billy and his uncle stand watching the kites and one of them is cut off from its root and falls somewhere in the big city. This might be taken to symbolise Billy’s disappearance from the civilized world. “Bongo drums” and “ghungroos” stand for the inner instincts in Billy Biswas. Billy’s disappearance is not an escape from the realities of life but an escape from the sordid, inept, meaningless existence in the civilized materialistic world into the real life. His escape is a journey from darkness to light, from restlessness to equanimity.
Bilasia is the strange woman who had crossed Billy’s dream and again the Devi mata of the tribal folk-lore. 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. Thus, Bilasia symbolizes the primitive ethos, its subterranean resources of psychic energy. The union of Billy and Bilasia can be taken as the human soul’s longing for reunion with the divine as symbolized by Krishna, the union of “Jeevatma” with “Paramatma”. The folklore of the king Chandatola. Dhunia narrated a number of miracles performed by Billy as a magician like Billy drives away a roaring tiger in the forests; Billy brings Dhunia’s grandson back to life, restores health of Bilasia, cures migraine of Situ and even predicts the rainfall.

Arun Joshi uses imagery in the present novel to its perfection. The imagery of dogs of large teeth and furred paws show Billy’s utter dislike for the elite class and its character. He finds civilized societies hollow with preference of money and material progress over the personal fulfilment.

The image of the faceless god suggests the imperfect nature of art. The sculptor- king, with all his dedication to his work, could not make the face. Also it implies the hopeless and futile attempt to achieve perfection. The God’s image, itself is a symbol of perfection and wholeness, and appears faceless in their highly subjective vision. The tribal king’s failure to chisel the face of the god maybe regarded as a symbolic expression of Billy’s own failure to complete the quest he had started by forsaking civilized society. Romi’s character and his role as a narrator achieve an added significance. He is at once
a representative of the sick and disoriented society and recipient of Billy’s confidence and his vision of primitive life, a sort of mediator between two diametrically opposite ways of life. Romi starts as a passive observer and a dispassionate narrator. But with the progress of the novel he becomes more and more involved and at the end when Billy is hunted down by the police, he totally identifies himself with him.

In the present novel much of the strength lies in the authenticity of its scenes. The exchange at a party in America, the interview with Rima Kaul and the conversation between the narrator and Billy have the naturalness of the spoken dialect. The dialect of Dhunia has a regional flavour.

It makes a complex and interesting piece of narrative structuring which is based on principle of parallelism, of contrast. There are two narrative streams which not only run parallel to each other but also set each other off through contrast and ultimately run into each other. Into this complex narrative structure are interwoven myths and legends which add a new dimension to the meaning and significance of various events and characters. These myths and legends tend to add an allegorical dimension to the novel. There is of course no strict adherence to the chronological order in the novel because the narrator who is interested in the deeper meanings hidden behind every event explores them through dream and introspection and also through letters and discussion. The narrative method of the novel combines detachment and objectivity on the part of the narrator with his involvement in and concern for all that happens in
the novel. In short the narrative method controls very effectively the action, the meaning and character of the novel.

Arun Joshi’s third novel *The Apprentice* is a real masterpiece and a most compelling work of art. In it fictional technique adopted by Arun Joshi is surely one of the primarily motivations of uniqueness. It is cast in the form of dramatic monologue to that of Albert Camus’ *The Fall*. It follows the novel narrative technique, which, however, has been a very favourite device which poets use in dramatic monologue. Ratan Rathor, the protagonist narrates everything in his career. It is very orginal novel in its structure, so that V.V.N. Rajendra Prasad classifies it as “a fictional experiment”(122). Ratan narrates the facts of his life to a listener, who is a National Cadet and a student. Here what is relevant is that of the imaginary dialogue between both of them, the novel only records the voice of the protagonist.

Ratan Rathor like Sindi Oberoi in *The Foreigner* and Billy Biswas in *The Strange of Billy Biswas* is another reflective introvert. The present novel probes deeper into the inner consciousness of the individual with a view to express the mysterious under-world which is the human soul. Ratan is the victim of his memories and events that take him out of village.

Ratan is thoroughly an existentialist, wise and practical character who exemplifies the doctrine that man’s salvation depends upon the course of life he chooses to lead. Like S.T. Coleridge’s the Ancient Mariner, who wants the wedding guest to listen to the whole story, Ratan also insists his silent listener on listening him out. He is modelled upon the character of Marlow, the first
person narrator in Joseph Conrad’s *Youth* who narrates the story of his youth in retrospect to a group of listeners. As in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, also here are occasional flashbacks in the sustained dramatic monologue of *The Apprentice*.

The novel shows a similarity to Albert Camus’s *The Fall* in respect of its exposure of Ratan’s hypocrisy. He like Jean-Baptiste-Clamence, the narrator of *The Fall* discloses the secret of his existence as his conscience exhorts him to expiate his sins of cowardice and dishonesty by exposing his own character in a mocking manner. In retrospect, he looks at his own fall and finds that he had willingly allowed himself to deteriorate and had no reason to find the fault with the world. Also he discovers that there can be no playing truant with life and there is no salvation outside it and he takes the responsibility on his own to affirm the meaning in life.

It relates the story of the feverish pursuit of a career by Ratan Rathor, a senior officer at the Ministry of Defence, during the Indo-Chinese conflict. Starting from the arrival and the hard beginning in Delhi up to the attainment of a leading role, the reader follows the protagonist’s climbing of the social scale achieved through the recurrent use of manoeuvres. By the same token, the portrait of the various strata of the society which he happens to deal with, becomes gradually gloomier and gloomier, depicted as they are with quite a pessimistic tone. In fact, Ratan remains entangled in a sordid business with catastrophic consequences. He accepts a huge bribe to clear a defective supply of war material from Himmat Sing, who ultimately reveals himself as a sort of
Ratan’s alter ego. Even though all the documents which materially prove Ratan’s active involvement in the deal are destroyed. The protagonist has to face problems with justice. His stubborn ostentation to deny every accusation on his part leads him out of jail; yet, he remains defenceless in the face of his conscience. The substandard lot of weapons he has cleared, in fact, once on the front, is the cause of a massive defeat of the Indian army which, in terms of human lives, counts many losses. Among them there is the Brigadier, Ratan’s old best friend, who deserts to avoid death, an act that Ratan’s confession that a defective lot of war materials had been sent to the front would have surely avoided, proving as it would his friend’s innocence. The protagonist undergoes a deep crisis which he finally resolves to overcome by rescuing his soul; everyday he now goes to the temple to wipe out the shoes of the devotees and becomes an apprentice of God, hence the title.

The narrative of *The Apprentice* has a wide span. It covers the period from the Quit–India Movement to the Chinese debacle in NEFA in 1962. During this span of about two decades Ratan grows from a boy to kingpin in the corrupt official hierarchy clearing war purchases. According to Prasad Hari Mohan:

> The novel enacts three stages in the human divine comedy of Ratan. The pre-Independence period is the dawn, the period of idealism, the phase of innocence, the post-Independence India is the broad-daylight of experience, the inferno of corruption, the last part the area of expiation, is the door to the purgatory (60).
The novel is a self analysis by Ratan of his own crisis and consciousness. In it the confessional note is the central concern. Thakur Guruprasad remarks that “the narrator in this novel is an insistent confessionalist; confession is a factor in his redemption” (162). Ratan’s confessional mode is also an affirmation of his real quest of identity which had been a sort of abominable crisis which tempts him on to act as dishonourably as he could with his other accomplices in the official hierarchy. Ratan’s confession makes it evident that the novel as a sarcastic hymn to corruption is also a satire. Through the narration Ratan exposes duplicity in the India.

An important aspect of Ratan’s character, as that of his confession, is his candour and sincerity. He never dithethers to mention the basest motives behind his acts and never tries to avoid blame, even when it appears that someone or something else might actually be at fault. Srinath rightly observes:

It shows a remarkable self-awareness in ruthlessly exposing his over–subtleties, frauds, self–deceptions, preoccupations, ego and boredom of the dark phase of his life. It is this along with his present strength to laugh at his meaningless past that gives a kind of complexity to the character of Ratan (129).

The characters of *The Apprentice* are, in fact, the Superintendent, the Secretary, my wife, my daughter, the two Mirzapur brothers, a government engineer, the M. P., the S. P. Not even his best friend has name, we come to know him as a Brigadier. The only exception to this rule is Himmat Singh, whom Arun Joshi hastens to define “a man without a name.” The listener is a
National Cadet and a student. He is young, well-mannered, sensible, generous, an idealist, proud to be a National Cadet. Always he pays a great attention to every detail he is told, so that if Ratan gets confused while digressing and forgets what he is relating, he helps him to find the thread of his thoughts. His questions are wise and sharp so that Ratan calls him “young inquisitor” (58).

The narrative, however, is not straightforward, as it keeps on swinging between the past and the present. The tone of the narration is that of self-mockery and the narrative impresses us in the end to be a kind of Horatian satire upon the abuses of position and power in the context of the Indian political system. It may be read as a cynical hymn to corruption which has a biting and corrosive edge. According to H.M. Prasad “The tone is almost Pascallian. Through self-mockery he exposes the world; self-remorse will rehabilitate him. The fall contains recovery; it is a necessary process of his individuation” (77). It is through his vein of self-mockery that Ratan exposes hollowness of the Indian political and social systems. To V. Gopal Reddy the mock-heroic tone of the narrative of it comes “out of an acute sense of alienation and a quest to understand the meaning of life” (222). The narrative has an ironical intention. The mock-heroic intention of the narrative is very explicit as the message in it is a bitter commentary on Post-Independance India. V.V. Rajendra Prasad writes that the narrative technique of it is “a fictional experiment—a confessional novel which employs psycho-narration” (127).

The title of the novel The Apprentice is very apt and suggestive. It has social dimension and depicts, in a sense, modern man’s crisis of faith in
ordered universe and in God. Ratan realises that humility is a first step towards
devotion or Bhakti and by deciding to take up the unpleasant job of wiping
shoes of the devotees at the temple doorstep he initiates himself in the process
of redemption through devotion.

In it Arun Joshi uses two major devices such as mirror and contrast, and
irony. The mirror symbol is employed to convey the hero’s relation with others
in terms of self–discovery. It reflects certain aspects of the hero’s nature and
thereby accelerates his self–animation. Himmat Singh is Ratan’s mirror. He
becomes more and more entangled in Ratan’s struggle to understand himself
and leads him to his final horrible vision of himself. Ratan’s father, the auditor,
the Brigadier, and the young officer in Ratan’s department whom he
maliciously outmanoeuvres, are his contrasts. Together they compromise the
measuring rod of his degradation. Irony is one of the controlling devices in the
narrative employed to maintain the author’s detachment from his hero and to
enable the hero to destroy self-delusion or any romantic notion which might
lure him away from the central purpose of his confession. It is this irony,
directed at himself, and his self–mockery together with his uninhibited self–
revelation that add a complex dimension to Ratan’s character.

Thus, the narrative concentrates upon the brainwashing of Ratan’s
mentality . It is an extended dramatic monologue in which Ratan confesses his
guilt of being an accomplice in the crime with the corrupt administrative
machinery.
The narrative strategy in Arun Joshi’s *The Last Labyrinth* is the
protagonist- narrator’s point of view. Som Bhaskar, the protagonist tells the
story of his life in a flash–back to Dr. Kashyap or Dr. K. who is not only a
silent listener but also interacts with him as he narrates some part such as
Som’s surviving from the heart attack because of the miracle performed by
Anuradha and Gargi. The novel’s narrative refers to a vast sweep of the
problems of life of Bombay and those of life and death, materialism and
spiritualism. The philosophical problems dealt with touch upon the labyrinths
of life and death.

The novel follows the pattern of “Truncation,” “Withdrawal” and
“Return” in life of its protagonist, Som Bhaskar who passes from ignorance
and its resultant agony to affirmation which however at times far–fetched. The
novel opens with the vow of revenge and closes with Som’s abortive suicidal
gesture as Geeta, his wife intervenes.

Its structure is extremely complicated. So much so that the book itself
reads like a labyrinth. Arun Joshi here employs a more intricate technique of
narration. The diary form of it reminds Jean–Paul Sartre’s *Nausea* is combined
with introspection and flash back as well as little bits and pieces of the brain as
they collide in the skull of the protagonist. The narrative sometimes mutes
distinction between memory and cerebration, between the recording mind and
the context of objects around that mind. There is no unity of time and over
several places. The narrator constantly switches from one level of time to
another and the locale shifts as quickly as his fast moving thoughts. He tries to
relate the several episodes through a process of association. The way he zigzags into his memory resembles a maze and is a reflection on his inner turbulence and restlessness. Moreover, Som’s serpentine and inconclusive quest is worked out in terms of parallels and antithesis, characters and places are set against one another.

In the novel there is an intriguing juxtaposition of not only themes but also locales. Som leads us to various spheres of time and space through his narration. The narrative has been woven with the descriptive details of the labyrinths of not only Lal-Haveli but also of Benaras with its labyrinthine streets. Along with it we are taken into the haunting world of life, love, God and death which is the last labyrinth.

Som Bhaskar, through his complex narration shuttles between past and present, Bombay and Bensras, life and death. Also he shuttles from his inside to outside and vice versa. At once Som becomes philosophical and cynical and he reveals not only the boredom of life but also its reflected glory.

The narrative of the novel is mostly a tale of two cities represented respectively by Aftab and Bhaskar. Aftab is the child of Benaras while Som is that of Bombay. On the another hand Anuradha is “a city without name, a city set in an Oasis, plundered a thousand times and waiting to be plundered again” (37) by men like Aftab and Bhaskar.

Everything about Lal-Haveli and its inhabitants seems to be a fantasy to Som. The antique beauty of Anuradha is as much a mystery as her relations with Aftab. Coupled with the intricacies of the city, the building is the presence
of the experiences of voids and spirituality. Gargi’s cottage on the other side of the Ganga, the burning ghats and the bulls in the narrow alleys produce a picture of the complexity of life itself. While Bhaskar’s life in Bombay has simply a matter, the life in Benaras has both a matter and a spirit.

Som psychoanalyses his own character in the context of his family background and his upbringing. The character of Som as revealed is that of the turbulent inner world of an industrialist. He is the fusion of two conflicting human faculties, instinct and reason. This blend of two distinctly separate sides of human faculty corresponds with the basic thematic background of the novel. The women characters such as Anuradha, Geeta and Gargi are the persons who know it. Even Aftab has deep faith in spiritual matters.

The title *The Last Labyrinth* can be operative at many levels. At the symbolical level, the Lal-Haveli stands for the maze of life and the last labyrinth of the title is death itself which is even more mysterious than existence itself. The title is very significant as it stands for the great mystery that hangs about the book’s deep structure, and itself is a matter of great inquiry. Som Bhaskar is the battleground between the two hungers, hunger of body and spirit. Anuradha is the force that makes Som a captive in the Lal-Haveli. She represents a constellation of stars, Som stands for the moon, for a creeper, from which medicinal juice is extracted, and the moon is believed to be the giver of the medicinal juice. Som is, again, the Sun, that gives light and enlightens others. Their relationship therefore is one of the moon, the stars and the Sun. The hidden meaning of the novel can be worked out by studying
the novel in terms of these symbols. Another symbolical meaning of the
labyrinth is associated with sex. The attraction of Som and Anuradha leads to
their being sexual partners.

The sight of Anuradha and her mehandi revives his latent passion or
physical hunger kept repressed for years. To him sex is mystery, and he wants
to know what is in the last sexual labyrinth. His lust after sex is symbolized by
the peacock with unfurled tail woven into the carpet of the room which is given
to him and where he sleeps with Anuradha. Lal-Haveli is the central metaphor
of the novel. It symbolizes all those questions which keep Som tormenting. It
symbolizes human life, death and the understanding of God. In essence Lal
Haveli is microcosm of the labyrinth of life and death, the endless drama of life
and death. Gargi is the embodiment of both the physical and spiritual power
that Som seeks. The entire setting of Benaras and its ghats, the holy Ganga, the
Lal-Haveli and the image of peacock and characters such as Anuradha and
Gargi evoke the archetypes of love and death. High flame in the temple
symbolises burning of all desires, cravings, yearnings and frustrations. Again
Gargi symbolises the Great Mother while som symbolises the rational Man.

The dreams are structured very systematically in the novel. The first and
the last part of the novel contain two dreams in each and the middle one
consists of only one dream. Symbolically used, dreams act as reflective insiders
where God, man, love death sprawl before him. His inherited culture and
values, his desires and yearnings in his life crying for fulfilment otherwise are
given an expression in the form of the dreams. The language of the dreams
becomes the language of the inner of Som. Each dream looks like deformed and distorted.

Arun Joshi’s *The City and the River* differs from his previous novels in regard with the point of view of fiction. In his *The Foreigner, The Apprentice* and *The Last Labyrinth* the plots develop through the confessional mode of narrative in which the protagonist himself relates the story of his life. *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is in the witness narrator’s point of view. His last novel *The City and the River* differs from all the preceding novels not only in its theme but also in its structure. The very title words of the novel are joined by ‘and’ which indicate the clash of two different opposing symbols.

It is a political strife in which Arun Joshi imparts to the tale a universal and eternal significance and raises the novel to the level of great literature which has an all-time appeal. In it Arun Joshi has used various myths, legends and archetypes to suggest the value of an authentic life, faith and right action the barest necessity of modern man. The political scenario of the city is used as backdrop of the novel which helps in presenting a contemporary problem with the metaphysical overview of creation and disintegration, sristi and pralaya dealt in Indian myths. The canvas of the novel is very vast and encompasses within its range time, God, man and nature.

The fictional modes incorporated in it cuts across many forms of prose fiction, such as fable or parable, fantasy, science fiction and political novel. The clash in it is between the two ways of life: those represented by brick
people and mud people who speaks of the political reverberations of them. But the narrative pattern of the novel affords it many other layers as well.

In *The City and the River* there are nine chapters between prologue and epilogue. The Great Yogeshwara educates his disciple, the Nameless-One in the prologue. Both tell nothing palpable or concrete about the narration, but these prepare us for the interpretation of the novel as whole.

The omniscient narrator recounts the Grand Master’s dream of becoming king and its confirmation on the basis of an old prophecy by the palace Astrologer. The narrative goes on to relate the Grand Master’s council and the councillors which are all his yes-men and confirm every proposal of the Grand Master and in the festival of the river he wants the boatmen to owe their allegiance to the king. A few of the educated people like Bhumiputra and Professor rebel against the regime. Master Bhoma relates a parable about the naked king at a lottery stall. In the new regime, the administration is tough on dissenters who are all join in the Gold Mines and persecuted. When the injustice and suffering reach their height of persecution, Nature had its revenge with the unprecedented flooding of the river which devours the entire city including the Seven hills.

The Great Yogeshwara after giving an account of the fate of the city and its destruction with the devastating flood of the river sends his disciple, Nameless-One on his quest and mission to the city to prevent “The endless repetition, this periodic disintegration”(262). R.K Dhawan comments that in *The City and the River* “The streak of autobiography has been left aside. Nor it
is a story of personal, private lives. The novel is an ample evidence of ‘Road Not Taken’, for in this work it turns his focus from the private to public” (34).

The novel works on three distinct levels: mythic, primitive and modern. The mythic elements are represented by the Great Yogeshwara, the Nameles-One, the Hermit, the Little Star, and the river; the primitive forces are signified by the boatmen, their rites and rituals; the modern components are illustrated by the weapons, the laser and other engines of war which are, infact ultra-modern. These three factors unite the structure of the novel. Mythical parallels, woven with the lined reality, raise certain controversial issues and give the work an existential depth. The repeated sound of music and drums adds mythic perspective whenever something crucial happens in the novel. This music is heard at the beginning and ending of the novel.

Herein Arun Joshi has used the puranic pattern of relating story within a story. Also he has made it dramatic with his befitting use of dialogue and descriptive patches. Also there are some humorous and ironic elements. The Councillors debasing themselves at the dictates of the Grand Master is laughable. The references like gagging of the press and organising rallies, persecution during the emergency are ironical.

The circular movement of the plot suggests the endless variations of the relationship between men and power and it is in keeping with the thematic concern of the book. The correspondence between the theme and technique is perfect. The use of the allegorical mode, the metaphysical pattern and the archetypal symbols like snow-capped mountain, the river which is the eternal
source of physical and spiritual sustenance, the fire that purifies, and the deluge
that wipes out sin and evil and prepares the ground for a new beginning, impart
to the book a wider significance centred on a particular moment of Indian
history. The novel transcends the realm of history and politics and ends as a
parable of the eternal human quest for meaning, perfection and spiritual
commitment.

*The City and the River* has a vaster span in its action than Arun Joshi’s
earlier novels. The focus is shifted from the personal to the public, the hostile
world runs as an undercurrent of the socio-political and existential crisis of the
individual still persists and even the Grand Master is not free from it.

In it Arun Joshi uses various meaningful symbols. Both city and river
are used as symbols of the two ways of life. The city represents the city state
governed by the Grand Master, who runs it with the assistance of a council of
advisors. The river passing by the city symbolizes the endless flow of life.
Human continuity is communicated to the reader through various archetypal
symbols. The Hermit is the ‘old wise man’ who is saviour of the human race.
‘yajna’ is a symbolic act of purification by fire. The Great yogeshwara is the
‘Purana Purusha,’ and his pupil the Nameless-One, is symbolic of Manu on the
raft, on the day of the Great Deluge- pralaya saving the Vedas. From another
angle Great Yogeshwara is Lord Krishna telling his pupil the gospel of duty
and revealing to him the mystery of existence and of the cosmos. The
Nameless-One is also a Christ figure. He is an illegal child but he is the chosen
one. All these archetypal symbols, though different in their origin and appeal,
become communicable images and unify the literary experience. The Great Yogeshwara, the Nameless-One, and the Little Star stand for divine activity; the Professor and Bhoma represent the human spirit and the parrot signifies the spirit of nature. The river symbolizes the divine mother, the life-line of the city.

The novel has a parable within a parable which is there in the narrative pattern. The parable is one coined by Master Bhoma and after his disappearance it is retold by Shani to people gathered at the lottery stalls. The novel follows the technique of fantasy which E.M. Foster treats to be one of the aspects of the novel. In it there is deliberate mixture of the real and the imaginary.

In it Arun Joshi takes his characters into no-man’s land, the past as well as the future. The significant thing in it is that the characters in it have a sort of anonymity about them. The characters are mostly known by their positions and very few of them love their first names. Even the city and the river are anonymous. The city in which the action of the novel takes place is “a nowhere city” and the river is the symbol of the continuity of life, is also nameless. The ageless Yogeshwara has a disciple known as Nameless-One. The Grand Master, the Astrologer, the Police Commissioner, the Minister of Trade, the Professor and the boatmen have no personal tags attached to them. Even those who are known by their personal tags have rather connotative names typical to the humorous characters. Bhumiputra, a symbol of rebellion, means the son of soil. The General of the Army is called General Starch for his stiff attitude. Nevertheless, the characters represent not only types but also individuals. The
Grand Master is a character to represent the collusion of the businessmen with politicians for their sharing profits. Being a fantasy novel it has some hazy characterization, Anup Beniwal affirms that “the characters do not develop spontaneously and lack psychological depth” (Dhawan 276). This is to say that most of the characters in it are flat ones and lack in the rotundity of the great fictional characters.
Works Cited


