CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Arun Joshi's novels have been described as novels of the interior landscape and the novels about the reflective insiders. It is pertinent to call Joshi's fiction as exploration of the inner world. It is clear that his novels represent the form of earthly pilgrimage, vocalizing the modernity of human condition.

Arun Joshi was born in 1939. He obtained an engineering degree from the University of Kansas and a degree of Industrial Management from MIT Cambridge, Massachusetts. His literacy distinction has been marked by his 'The Apprentice', 'The Foreigner', 'The Strange Case of Billy Biswas', 'The Last Labyrinth', 'The City and the River' and the collection of short stories entitled 'Survivor'. His novel "The Last Labyrinth" got him the prestigious Indian honour "Sahitya Akademy Award".

Arun Joshi died in 1993 but has left an indelible mark in the field of Indian writing in English. Though his literary achievement is small, it is remarkable for its solidity of substance and seriousness of intent. It has given a new direction to his literary calibre.

Joshi identifies himself as a true artist who could provide the required nourishment to the readers. In his, "Towards Finding an Expression" Joshi says a path from fantasy back again to reality is 'art'. 
The artist is not only one who has a life of fantasy; the intermediate world of fantasy is sanctioned by general contest and every hungry soul looks to it for comfort and consolation.

"My novels" says, Joshi, are essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and of myself ... If I did not write now, I would use some other medium to carry out my exploration.¹ The source of most of Joshi's novels is actual experience. He feels a need to shape it, a need to discover the reality which lies hidden in the actuality of his own life. Joshi does not write fiction according to a formula, rather he grapples with the moments of acute trying situations of human life. Reading Joshi's novels is not always a smooth experience; there are moments when one is assailed by doubts and questions.

A true artist has ability to understand how to elaborate his day dreams in a particular style enjoyable to the readers. In an essay titled "Books", Joseph Conrad discusses the novelist's craft, while recognizing that the genesis of the creative process is inseparable from the artist's initial perception. Conrad recognizes a reality beyond the phenomenal world, a reality which the artist could imagine and capture by giving a consistent form to the shapeless facts of actual human existence.

It is most appropriate to remark that Arun Joshi's fiction conforms to Conrad's conception of the novel.
Joshi's "fictional world" is a revelation of world where man is confronted by self and the questions of his existence. Reading Joshi's novels is not always a smooth experience, there are moments when one is assailed by doubts and questions. He seeks a process of the apprehension of reality which may lead him to the world of the core of the truths of man's life. He realizes man's uniqueness and indifference.

Joshi's novels reveal his remarkable inwardness with the language and a poise that is born of his deep insight into life. He places his characters in a multicultural situation and his language reflects the linguistic and cultural multiplicity with which they are endowed.

Art transmutes the experiences of life. By selecting and re-arranging elements from reality and composing them in to an imaginative pattern, the artist gives them a meaningfulness and a coherence. A work of art therefore, provides an imaginative recreation of reality. Of all the forms of art, the novel is regarded as the most effective medium of embodying and recreating the complex and the varied experiences of man in the modern age. Lionel Trilling considers the novel as "the most effective agent of the moral imagination of our time". The novelist has a vision and it is a vision of life around him.

Arun Joshi is not a prolific writer with a broad humanistic orientation and socialist bearing like Mulk Raj Anand, nor a novelist with philosophical profundity like Raja Rao nor even a comic genius with artistic excellence like R.K.Narayan. Yet, the five novels he has written reveal a well-defined vision of life and an awareness of the serious
problems of our time. Joshi does not write according to any set formula; nor are his novels directed towards propagating any theory or doctrine. He exposes the condition of human dilemma and offers some hints to make people think and to rouse oneself to meet the challenges of existence.

The sources of his stories are real human experiences but he transmutes these experiences in terms of fictional art. Whatever he says about human life and the world is brought out through characters and situations and not through any overt statement. It is his deft handling that transforms his vision into a fictional statement.

Joshi watches how ignorance and self-delusion, the pressure of confusing norms, the contradictory pulls of reason and impulse, foul and doubt and also the twin hungers of the body and spirit men off that hinges and lacerates their conscience. He observes how the need for integration leads men to intense soul-searching and self-questioning.

It is pertinent to remark that the act of human living is viewed by Joshi as "Walking a tightrope' between life and death, illusion and reality, commitment and withdrawal. For life and its mystery, Joshi's fictional signifier is 'labyrinth'. It is an inclusive metaphor that stands for various levels of awareness, including human life, human soul, death, and the mysterious world of spirit.

The emotional and intellectual convolutions, 'the going forward' and backward and sideways of the mind", comprise yet another labyrinth. Again, the mysterious world of the spirit symbolised by the enigmatic God
Krishna appears to be a maze that ever tantalizes man with its inscrutability and wholeness. The endless repetition of things the relentless cycle of birth, growth and disintegration also suggest an intricate maze. All these facets of labyrinth are closely interwoven and they present an intricate pattern that embraces the entire span of human life from birth to death.

Joshi's obsession with them is a reflection upon his profound concern about these aspects of human existence. Life, soul, death and divinity are fundamental human preoccupations. But their treatment by Joshi, his degree of involvement with them, is unmistakably Indian.

In Joshi's works, the mysterious in life symbolized by the labyrinth is a reflection more upon the hero's comprehension than upon life in which they are involved. Joshi's heroes get entangled or deadlocked with life because of ignorance and delusions. Their quest is directed towards the realization of the meaning of life and the attainment of self-knowledge. So long as they suffer from self-seeking pride, selfish desires, illusions, intellectual doubt and ego-centricity, they fail to see reality in its proper perspective. They are baffled by life and its problems.

Their lack of knowledge and spiritual blindness together with the pressure of their material concerns and of conventional expedients of the age lead to disintegration and anxiety. Their lives appear bleak and devoid of meaning and purpose. They grow uncertain of their identities and are faced with the danger of getting lost in an intricate maze. They feel restless and truncated and withdraw from life.
Arun Joshi's chief concern has become evident to describe loneliness in an indifferent and inscrutable universe.

It is widely considered that Arun Joshi has drawn inspiration from so many existential writers. A number of literary influences have also worked on Arun Joshi. He has been influenced by Albert Camus and other existentialist writers. Joshi claims,

"I did read Camus and Sartre' admits Joshi. "I liked The Plague and read The outsider. As for existential philosophers like Kierkegaard; I have never, understood anything except odd statements".3

More importantly, Joshi has also been influenced by Gandhi and the Bhagavad Gita. He strongly believes that individual actions have effects on others and oneself. One cannot therefore afford to continue with an irresponsible existence but has to commit oneself at some point. Hinduism, believes Joshi, is highly existentialist - oriented philosophy since it attaches so much value to the right way to live to exist. He does not have right opinion about Modern Indian Society and The Modern Indian woman.

The peculiar dilemma stuffed with purposelessness marks the modern man. A certain awareness of man's rootlessness and consequential loneliness and anxiety is the keynote of Arun Joshi's unique vision of modern man in contemporary Indo-English fiction. His awareness is also focussed on the evils of man's material concerns. He is more emphatically concerned with the search for the essence of human living and the need
for the man to establish him back to his roots, self and peace. His novels delineate more of human problems. His condemnation of the industrial, the civilized and the materialistic world is guided by a genuine faith in the integrity of the primitive values of sensuousness, passion and action. His technique of self-introspection intensified by self-mockery opens a new dimension in the art of Indo-English fiction.

Joshi himself admits that his personal observation of people around formed the basis for his novels. The material selected from life is creatively reshaped by him by the power of imagination and lent new associations and implications.

Joshi draws a line where he can impress with similitude. The serious type of modern fantasy as found in surrealist literature and art, draws its inspiration from Freudian psychology, the emergence of which seems to have given it a new lease of life. The queer, instinctive, irrational and neurotic acts in which characters in these fantasies find themselves involved owing to the drives of their sub-conscious and unconscious urges, surprise us by their mysterious strangeness. Joshi weaves his stories around psychic imbalances and impulsive actions of his characters.

Joshi makes an intensive autopsy of human mind for its regressive tendencies. He deviates from the realistic method of portraying characters which have individual traits, typify the relevant, essential and decisive characteristics of environment, the social milieu to which they belong. Their behaviour is incompatible with the natural laws of everyday reality.
It may quite fitting to quote what Lionel Trilling says of the novel, "It is a perpetual quest for reality". Indian novels in English are now an integral part of Indian reality.

Indian Literature is quite distinctive and specific in its demarcation of ethical values. Robin White maintains: "If anything is to distinguish Indian fiction .... It would be the varied literary attempts to portray the conflict of the contemporary Indian.\(^4\)

The novel in India, has acquired a new significance in the light of psychological bearings. It is quite imperative that Arun Joshi is one of those modern Indian novelists in English who have broken new grounds. In his search for new themes, he has renounced the larger world in favour of the innerman and has engaged himself in a search for the essence of human living.

There is no doubt that Joshi has earned a distinction in the portrayal of human emotions. An outstanding novelist of human predicament and meaninglessness, the most besetting problem that man faces today, Joshi has charted in all his four novels the inner crisis of the modern man. As Edmund Fuller remarks in "Our Age".

"Man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but from inner problem ... a conviction of isolation, meaninglessness in his way of existence".\(^5\)
The power to withstand any onslaught slowly gives up its grip. The problem of meaningfulness is so pervasive that it threatens to corrode every sphere of human life. Its treatment by Indian novelists like Arun Joshi is no less interesting.

He evolved a style and thematic approach uniquely his own and World Literature Today (Oklahoma University) hailed him as

"One of the very few Indo-English novelists who holds mirror to the subtleties and complexities of contemporary Indian life".

The Times Literary supplement says,

"In Arun Joshi's hands we are swept into the unknown...".

It would be most appropriate to append the remark, "The work of Arun Joshi reads like the spiritual Odyssey of the twentieth century man who has lost his spiritual moorings". Joshi's heroes, according to Jasbir Jain, are "men engaged in the meaning of life".6

Arun Joshi delves deep into the minds of the weak and vulnerable. He is certainly a connoisseur of souls divided against themselves. The reason for this is that after he had finished his education, he worked in a mental hospital in the States where his uncle was a psychiatrist and dealt with chronic Schizophrenics. This experience was bound to create a strong impression on his young and sensitive mind. It is quite natural that the chief protagonists in all his notable works describe an inner life within the
underworld of the soul divided against itself. The novels 'The Foreigner', 'The Apprentice' and 'The last Labyrinth' are all written in the confessional mode, apart from all of them having a Schism in the soul.

There is semblance of facts, when Joshi describes the characters and their motives. Arun Joshi generally begins his novels like plausible pieces of reality but soon after exaggerates them to the point of fantasy or introduces a set of flame buoyantly irrational associations typical of a powerful fantasy. Owing to this fusion of fantasy and reality, his stories keep the eagerness of the reader on tiptoe and maintain his undivided interest in the novels.

One infers after reading the novels that a pervasive sense of meaninglessness is thus the most dominant feature of the human condition in the contemporary epoch. Frank Johnson calls this as 'fractionated functions'.

The modern man assumes that he is defenceless, alien to himself and to the world. Joshi's protagonists, like Conrads' are singularly individualistic and self-centred. They are constantly engaged in exploring the meaning of life. An outstanding novelist of human predicament, Joshi has delineated the inner crisis of the modern man. His writings reveal an unambiguous influence of Camus, Sartre and other existentialists. Joshi's fictional world is characterised by frustration, disintegration and disillusionment. Like Conrad, Melville, Graham Greene and Naipaul, Joshi is preoccupied with the themes of alienation, of rootlessness of individuals and purposelessness of existence.
To many of the protagonists of Joshi, the question of existence is in peril. An existential awareness betraying an implicit influence of the Western Existentialist thinkers is at the root of the novels "The Foreigner" and "The Apprentice". The principles of 'Detachment' and 'Action' taught in the Bhagavad Gita are also operative there. In "The Strange Case of Billy Biswas", an almost Conradian novel, Arun Joshi voices a Laurentian longing for the essence of life in the dilemma of Billy who leaves the civilized world in search of a great force.

But from the observations made, one may come to conclusion that the modern man is very much divided in his thinking and action like that of Arnold's Scholar Gipsy. Arun Joshi is a writer who has probed the inner life meaningful to the modern Indian readers. The novels of Arun Joshi are a treatise on current social, political and psychological aspects and yet read like a novel. To break the monotony of the narration, Arun Joshi has used the device of an imaginative companion whom the narrator addresses now and then. The use of the first person narration in past tense, and the story being told in retrospect, lends a peculiar objectivity to the tone of the narration. It is rather in the form of a stream-of-consciousness, Joshi has a vast range and makes the novels out of the wide variety of scenes.

INDIAN ENGLISH PERSPECTIVE

Lord Macaulay did not envisage that Indians would one day try their hands at the novel when he presented his famous minutes. But it suited his plan for the Westernization of Indians through the use of English language. Still, neither the European forms nor the European languages could remain unaffected when they came in contact with the
native languages and cultures of the colonies. The novel, which is characterised by its lack of any rigid norms and its comparative flexibility, found it easy to adapt to the varied cultures and modes of expression in different European settlements.

The writers of the colonised countries began to use the language of the colonizers as well as the European form, but they spoke in their independent voices. They made the novel a vehicle for their indigenous experiences and cultures. The Indian English novel is, thus, a product of the creative mutation of Indian content and Western form. It is an intrinsic part of Indian reality and is deeply rooted in the Indian soil.

The development of this genre can be roughly traced from its experimental stage. The historical romances written in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries like S.K. Nikambe's "Ratnabai" (1895) S.K. Ghose's 'The Prince of Destiny' (1909) S.K. Mitra's Hindupur (1909) and R.C. Dutt's "The Slave Girl of Agra" (1909). The National Movement for Independence under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi offered the Indian English novelists both inspiration and material.

K.S. Venkataramani's "Murugan the Tiller" (1927) and Kandan, the Patriot (1932) are examples of the social and political ferment caused by the Gandhian movement. The most remarkable event of the period was the appearance, on the literary scene, of the great trio of Indian English fiction - Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. With sustained creative effort, each of them outlined the possibilities of Indian English fiction. It was largely due to their efforts that Indian English novel stood on a solid ground and achieved an identity of its own.
The novels of Mulk Raj Anand, Untouchable (1933) Coolie (1936) and Two Leaves and a Bud (1937) depict the social and economic oppression of individuals with the author taking a broad humanitarian stance. R.K. Narayan remained aloof from the burning socio, political issues of the time and engaged himself in the exploration of the South Indian middle class milieu in his Malgudi tales. 'Swami and Friends' (1935) 'The Bachelor of Arts' (1937) 'The Dark Room' (1938) and 'The English Teacher' (1946) 'The Guide' (1958) and 'The Man Eater of Malgudi' (1962) picturise the transitional values clashing and coalescing together in a society deeply rooted in its tradition.

It is apt to say that Narayan explores "the staying power of the society whose hundred ills have not destroyed the moral and spiritual trace of the individual" (C.D.N. 1928) Raja Rao's "Kanthapura" and "The Serpent and The Rope" throw light on mythical and philosophical moorings. Other writers of fame who followed the steps of these writers are K.A. Abbas, N. Nagarajan, Manohar Malgonkar, Bahani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal have excelled in their narrative techniques.

The East West cultural encounters are very well portrayed in the novels of Anita Desai's "Bye-Bye Blackbird" and Raja Rao's "The Serpent and the Rope".

The rapid industrial and scientific development, the Westernization of life in the urban areas of the country and the increase of consumerism, added comfort to the superficial life of man. But his inner self continued
to be corroded by discontent, despair and lack of faith in the traditional values that had sustained an entire generation before independence. The deluge of materialism brought in its wake a growing sense of loneliness, purposelessness and drift. It was as Ratan Rathor, the hero of Arun Joshi's third novel "The Apprentice" says, a generation "Of frustrated men sailing about in a confused society, a society without norms without direction, without even, perhaps, a purpose".

There is moral inertia and flashiness. Alienation has set in the cities Bombay, Madras and Calcutta. The inevitable result of this confusion was introspection, the turning inward, to find out what had gone wrong. As the Indian English writer discovered himself as an individual he came to realize that his primary concern as a creative artist was to deal with persons and not groups with individual sensibility rather than class consciousness.

The moral confusion and the spiritual depression that the writers, like their fictional creations, suffered from, were further intensified by the literary impact of the West, particularly the influence of European authors like James Joyce, D.H.Lawrence, T.S.Eliot, Franz Kafka Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre and Virginia Woolf. It resulted in a new literary phenomenon, the emergence of the anti-hero in Indian English novel.

Arun Joshi probes deeper in to the crises - moral and spiritual of contemporary Indians. His novels express the anguish of sensitive individuals resulting from their spiritual uprootedness and the confusion of values in the society they live in. The books deal with their
estrangement from society and the concomitment restlessness and drift as well as their desperate attempts to find ways out of intricate labyrinth of contemporary life. At the same time, they explore, in the Indian context, some fundamental questions of human existence and delineate "the search for the essence of human living".8

In this context Arun Joshi may be regarded as a stormy petrel in the delineation of characters against their own fallacies. He has succeeded in the history of Indian novel in English in his powerful exploitation and sustained treatment to a very potent theme of his time namely a maladjusted individual pitted against a lopsided society which is unhinged from its cultural and spiritual moorings and his uncompromising search for identify.

Although Joshi has portrayed the dilemma of modern man in the face of a crises and the evils of materialism, cynicism, escapism and defeatist alienation in an objective, almost clinical analysis, his distinction lies in the fact that he never winds up in a mere "pathological study of his characters".

His novels almost invariably suggest a remedy for the blighted life that his characters find themselves in Realism in his hand becomes the consequence of psychological elaboration. It is on the basis of this reality Joshi's novels demonstrate that the edifying lessons of our spiritual heritage have not been totally irrelevant with the growth of materialism and the rapid westernization of life in our country. They still hold the key to the besetting problem of our time.
It is no doubt that many critics have acclaimed Arun Joshi's creativity. He must be examined within his specific context of situation and his works must be assessed with the help of criticism that takes into consideration those contexts. His fiction is the articulation of a distinctly Indian voice and in it one finds the richness of Indian heritage and the complexity of the Indian Experience. In an interview with Sujatha Mathai a research scholar, Joshi Confesses that "his ethos is essentially Hindu". At another occasion, he says he has been greatly influenced by "Indian religious thinkers".9

Joshi's novels primarily deal with human problems such as loneliness, estrangement from one's cultural and spiritual heritage, crises of faith, the dehumanizing effect of materialism and the concomitant restlessness, discontent, sense of emptiness, despair and anxiety. The Existential problems in his novels attract a wider attention. The pull exerted by Joshi's native ethos is invariably rendered in deeply human terms and is never grafted superficially onto the texture of his works.

Arun Joshi does not make an exhibition of the India he writes about since he does not aspire after that literary Chimera, the Western Patron of Indian English fiction - a fact confirmed by the publication of all his works by Indian Publishers. His fiction expresses his native sensibility even though he does not claim any superiority for it. Joshi is able to detach characters from their cultural scaffolding, and to respond to the realities of the country without cross-cultural predictions - provided certain conditions of taste that speak of liberated unself consciousness. Arun Joshi is that rare species among us today - the unself conscious Indian, the sort who is neither ashamed nor boastful of his culture-scape.
Joshi does not take anything for granted not even himself. One seldom fails to notice his serious concern about the "here and now" about the conditions as he views it. He probes the truth about Indian life with all its degradation and glory and presents to the world a close knowledge of his country as he has arrived at. He does not idealize to mystify India like some of his native counterparts and deny the value of critical self-assessment. There is in his novels a strident criticism of spiritual and cultural degradation of the country since Independence side by side with the endorsement of the age-old wisdom of the country of its rich cultural heritage. This double vision informs and sustains his novels.

It is imperative to say that though Arun Joshi has made English a vehicle for his thoughts and he has been exposed to Western influence, he has not lost his cultural bindings. He taps the resources of an alien language, with which he has acquired a remarkable inwardness, to express things that are Indian. What Ramesh Sahai, the narrator of "Strange Case of Billy Biswas" says about Billy is equally applicable to Joshi: "(his is) an English voice uttering thoughts that (are) not clearly English". But Joshi's 'Indianness' does not, in any way, delimit the scope and wider relevance of his fiction. To the extent he has availed himself of the cultural heritage of his country and transmuted it in terms of art, Joshi can be said to have a significance not only in the Indian context but anywhere in the English speaking world.
A large number of Joshi's critics have attempted to analyze his novels in terms of Western Existentialist thoughts and concepts. His novels have been labelled variously as dealing with the "theme of alienation", "anxiety and alienation and the predicament of modern man", "inner crisis of modern man and the problem of meaninglessness" and "crisis and conquest". Dhawan's analysis of Joshi's fiction describes thus, "His writings reveal an unambiguous influence of Camus, Sartre and other existentialists. Joshi's fictional world is characterised by frustration, disintegration and disillusionment. Like Conrad, Melville, Graham Greene and Naipaul, Joshi is preoccupied with the theme of alienation, of rootlessness of individuals and purposeless of existence".

No less a person than the great Indian English critic M.K. Naik remarks on Joshi, "One of the leading recent novelists, Arun Joshi is preoccupied with different facets of the theme of alienation". Another noted Indian critic Madhusudan Prasad commends, "Not being able to escape the infections impact of Kafka, Camus, Sartre and Bellow, Joshi dramatises in his novels some thought - provoking existentialist themes such as rootlessness and detachment (in the Foreigner), quest for better alternatives in this ostentation, materialistic world in "The Strange Case of Billy Biswas") and guilt-consciousness and self realization". According to Guru Prasad, "The terrible existentialist vision of Joshi is "only too often to be found in the modernist and post modern literature of his time".
The existential thinking of Arun Joshi cannot be better explained by any one than one of his heroes Ratan Rathor in 'The Apprentice' who says

"Life is zero ... You can take nothing away from a zero ... of late, however, I have begun to see a flaw in the argument. ... You can take things out of a zero! You can make it negative ... Life might well be a zero, for all I know, but it seems to me it need not be negative. And it becomes negative when you take out of it your sense of shame, your honour".

All his protagonists are haunted by the vision of a perdurable reality that transcends the world of "Karma", where man is bound by ignorance, illusion, vanity, greed and possessiveness. Joshi's novels are concerned with the exploration not only of the meaning and purpose of life but also of soul's spiritual reality. There is Indian strain in Joshi's fiction. Mathur remarks that Joshi's novels "seems to restate in modern contexts the eternal quest for self-realization and fulfilment and for spiritual, and cultural identity which has distinctly Indian overtones".

H.M.Prasad again says, "Joshi's consciousness is steeped as much in Indian Ethos the teachings of the Gita, of Mahatma Gandhi and Indian religion as in Western education and thoughts". It is pertinent to note the meaning for existentials as explained by Dr.S.Radhakrishnan. He writes,
**Existentialism** is a new name for an ancient method. The 'Upanishads' and Buddhism insist on a knowledge of the self: "atmanam viddhi". They tell us that man is a victim of ignorance, 'avidya', which breeds selfishness. So long as we live our unregenerate lives in the world of time 'governed by"Karman" or necessity, we are at the mercy of time. The feeling of distress is universal. A sense of blankness overtakes the seeking spirit, which makes the world a waste and a vain show. Man is not the final resting place. He has to be transcended. Man can free himself from sorrow and suffering by becoming aware of the eternal - This awareness, this enlightenment is what is called "jnana or bodhi".²⁰

It is to be noted that some of the basic tenets of existential thought are present in Indian philosophical discourse. But the mode of perception and the approach to the problem of human existence that one finds here, differ largely from those in the West. Man's quest for self-knowledge, meaning and purpose of life as well as his identity in the world where he is ever an alien a foreigner has been the preoccupation of Indian Philosophy.
The demarcation of existential outlook by Arun Joshi with regard to Indian way of life is both specific and critical. Joshi's novels call for a recognition that for the Indian it is still possible to preserve some respect for tenderness to realize the need for relatedness and find ways and means to come out of the ego-centric isolationism and attain a wholeness of being. They affirm that the chaotic present, with all the degradation that has come upon it, still holds possibilities of survival.

The isolation of the protagonists heightens their sense of loss in the presence of modern depravity. Their minds nurtured the native ethos assume the general more than the particular, the visionary more than the historical. This brings in Joshi's novels a more universalised spiritual concern as against the specifically humanistic concern that characterises the novels of Camus and Sartre. His protagonists, thus, move from alienation to communion, from fragmentation to wholeness of being.

But there is an exception. Som Bhaskar in "The Last Labyrinth" remains alienated till the end. But the novel clearly suggests ways through which form could come out of his ego-centric isolation and resolve his spiritual dilemma. His alienation is due to his wavering, his obstinate refusal to sacrifice his rational approach and intellectual pride and his failure to accept the beliefs of his community. It is, thus, the failure of the individual and not of the novelist's vision.

More than anything else, alienation is never accepted by Joshi as the ultimate condition of life. It is a transitional phase in the protagonist's quest for self-knowledge. The failure to recognize this leads to an eminent
critic like M.K. Naik to regard the endings, of both "The Foreigner" and "The Apprentice" as "hatched up", 'the upshot being a sudden slackening of artistic control". Where as, any discerning reader would notice that both the endings are in keeping with the imaginative logic of the novels.

Joshi has not transplanted the Western man's alienation from society and self to the Indian context. For, it goes to the credit of Joshi that his westernised protagonists from the elite of the society are quite as plausibly Indian and as firmly rooted in the authenticated local context as other character in Indian English novels.

The example of Ratan Rathor in 'The Apprentice' will suffice to hold Joshi's view of existentialism as different from the westerness. Son of a Gandhian patriot who laid down his life for the country's freedom, Ratan Rathor discovers that the values which inspired the people to fight against the foreign rule, have become obsolete in the country where people now thrive on corruption. The fact that he is the son of a martyr does not help him in any way. Out of sheer desperation to get a job, Ratan makes compromises with the counterfeit values and corrupt practices of the society.

Joshi again reiterates his position very clearly. He affirms, "Hinduism is highly existentialist - oriented philosophy since it attaches so much importance to the right way to live to exist". The basic cause of human suffering and sorrow is here traced to ignorance, dilution and ego-centric predicament of man. The fundamental purpose of Indian thought has been to learn the secret of this entanglement and find out modes of transcendence.
"The Upanishadic hymn ‘Asato ma Sadgamaya; Jamaso ma jyotivgamaya; mrityoramaritamgamaya’ (lead me evil to good, from darkness to light, from death to deathlessness) which is the theme song of Joshi’s fiction highlights man’s profound urge for transcendence. The ‘Upanishada’ and the ‘Gita’ give emphasis on choice, responsibility to oneself and to others, rightness of one’s action commitment to something outside oneself and non-involved devotion to the world where one can perform one’s duty with a spirit of detachment and without the atrophy of one’s attached identity”.

The Karmic law seems to be central to the Gita "There is no intervening agent between you and God. What you sow you reap". They stress ethical discipline, suffering and sacrifice as the inevitable price for attaining perfection, wholeness of being and self-knowledge.

What Joshi has done is to integrate these fundamental human preoccupations into the contemporary context without losing the human voice and ignoring the primary concern of a novelist, i.e., delineation of life in terms of art. Joshi’s heroes muddle their way through the mazes of life to comprehend its meaning and try to reach a spiritual oasis amidst the contemporary confusion of values. But Joshi has done this "within human possibilities and against all the problems of human life".22

Many critics have applauded Joshi’s efforts to fix the Indian attitude to life in an inimitable style. His novels are structured in the immediately socio-cultural situations and are concerned with the moral and spiritual problems of contemporary Indian. Most of the problems that they
articulate are the authentic problems of Post-Independent Indians with the "Western Education". The dual forces of native ethos and Western training generate complex stresses and strains in the sensitive minds of his heroes. They suffer from spiritual uprootedness, cynicism, evils of materialism, loss of faith and crisis of identity.

In short, Joshi's books point to the growing extent of alienation that is appearing in contemporary India among the youth, the intellectuals and the artists. To some extent, his fiction is a voice of this alienated group. It brings to expression a deep undercurrent of the contemporary Indian mind. Joshi responds to the challenges of his time and the problems resulting from the bi-cultural situation of the country from his Indian anchorage.

Joshi seeks a wholeness of vision which is attainable not by giving way to heterogeneity but by going into the cultural and spiritual problems of his own community. Indian writing in English is indebted to European forms in which it is expressed. But it is Indian in spirit. The approach to Indian English Literature must, therefore, be based on an understanding of the cultural context of his literature. Arun Joshi is a serious writer and his works need a serious and critical attention.

He must be examined within his specific context of situation and evaluated with the help of a criticism that takes into consideration this specific context. To isolate some thematic and structural aspects of his works to evaluate his achievement will be doing injustice to the complexity of his imagination. His novels demand an informed appreciation of the
sensibility that shapes his materials and transmutes diverse elements into works of art. It is necessary also to see how he synthesizes the western narrative forms with indigenous context. Through a close reading of Joshi's novels, I have tried to interpret the existential undercurrents that run deep in his novels. I have tried to short that Joshi's novels deal with the human quest for survival in the intricate labyrinth of contemporary life.

The process of his regeneration through his mystical communion with the elemental forces of nature is wonderfully rendered in a language which is at once poetic, hallucinatory and evocative. The call of the primitive world, which Billy had been listening within him, though faintly, since his days began, now became more articulate and strident.

Joshi's novels reveal his remarkable inwardness with the language and a poise that is born of his deep insight into life. The language successfully carries the weight of his Indian experience. He uses English with a rare deftness and turns it into a keen device to probe complex psychological states. He employs it to devise an interior speech for achieving what Devinder Mohan calls it, "A linguistic transformation of the inner subjectivity of his characters".

Joshi's English is at once free from the vulgarity of Mulk Raj Anand's language, the coarseness of Khushwant Singh's, the excessive verbosity and pedantry of B.Rajan's, and the self-conscious mannerism of Anita Desai's to create rhetorical effect. It adequately catches the underlying current of meaning in the speeches of both the urban elite and
the primitive tribe. It is used to carry philosophical discourse on evolution and convey the anguished self-questioning of a remorseful person, the soul-searching of an erring individual weighed down by tragedy, the frenzied outcry of a tormented inner consciousness with equal ease and resourcefulness.

Very often, Joshi places his characters in a multicultural situation and his language reflects the linguistic and cultural multiplicity with which they are endowed. British and American colloquialisms like 'mumbo-jumbo', 'half-assed rigmarole', 'pissed off', 'ass-breaking', 'he could go and stick it', 'stuffed shirt', 'flunked' and 'flushed off' co-exist freely with Sanskrit, Hindi and Urdu words and phrases like 'Dharma', 'Karma', 'adharma', 'Maryada', 'Yajna', 'ahuti', 'mehndi', 'dargah', 'haqiqat', 'inquilab', 'shamiana', 'aarati', 'sarangi', 'pajeb', 'ghunghru', 'pujari', 'sone ka dil' and 'mati ke putle'. Again, snatches from Pascal, Descartes and Kierkegaard flow in the same way as Sanskrit 'slokas', Upanishadic verses, Vedic hymns and songs of Begum Akhtar or Sehgal. American jazz co-exists with tribal songs.

But such an uninhibited display of cultural multiplicity is not simply decorative. It is used as functional item in the novels. In 'The Last Labyrinth', for instance, Som's father recites a verse from 'The Rig Veda' to show his perplexity in the face of the vague, indecisive answers that Indian mystics provide to the mystery of creation.
Joshi ‘takes for granted the music, the dance, and the hedonistic ethic of the Lucknavi Hindu-Muslim culture ... [with] its mixture of the erotic and the melancholic’ about which he writes in the book. (Review of ‘The Last Labyrinth’, Indian Literature, Nov. - Dec. 1981). In chapter two of ‘The Last Labyrinth’, Joshi uses the motif of the mehndi-designed hand of women to suggest the eroticism and enchantment mounting up between Som Bhaskar and Anuradha:

I noticed ... the tracery of mehndi on her pink palms. A little hot wave, tinged with sorrow, travelled down my spine. The delicate curlicues, golden arabesques, road signs of fate, wound and unwound, turned upon themselves. I had seen that hand before: as a child, as a boy, in my fantasies of lust. I stared at her not quite understanding what was happening to me.

Mehndi-designed hand of women is, as a reviewer has pointed out, ‘a traditional motif for establishing shringara’ or erotic sentiment. Ineptly used it could ‘become decadent baroque’, as it very often does in a medium like dance. But Joshi uses it with a novelty of perception and a lightness which is largely accountable for the ease of his style. This is how culture and cultural rhetoric fuse, ‘breathing fresh air into old concepts ... renovating them, and presenting them as perfectly usable ... and functional items’.24
Joshi's novels always move at different planes, sometimes simply narrating a story and sometimes penetrating the facade of reality in search of hidden secrets. He has acquired a depth and a maturity born of sympathy and compassion. But, unlike many other Indian English novelists, Joshi has no self-image as a writer and is not 'hung up about [his] Indo-Anglian status'. He believes that the purpose of reading and writing a novel is 'to make human contact'. If that contact is established, the language bar will be forgotten. He thinks that in a novel 'creating the right sort of atmosphere or even the illusion of one is more important' than language. He takes special care to make his novels as much readable as possible and chooses a particular structure in a novel 'primarily to facilitate its handling and internal 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 arrest the readers' undivided attention. But the most compelling quality of his novels can, perhaps, be ascribed to his profound concern for, and direct involvement with, the issues he explores in them. Instead of realistic portrayal of socio-economic problems, cold and cynical analysis of human predicament or cliched rhetoric about East-West cultural clash, one discovers in Joshi's fiction a writer who is seriously concerned with some fundamental metaphysical questions that have relevance in our time. This marks the significance of Arun Joshi, the unself-conscious Indian who is always a 'stranger' to his books.
Joshi proves himself to be a successful physician of the soul for the ailing modern men. Relying much on the precepts of Mahatma Gandhi and Bhagawad Gita and Upanishads, Joshi offers solutions to the ethical, moral and social problems which confront the modern men. The present study is an attempt to analyse Joshi’s observation of the modern society which is torn apart in many ways and his solutions for the retrieval of the troubled souls.
WORKS CITED


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