CHAPTER 2

IDENTITY CRISIS

The novel 'The City and The River' projects the typical Indian dilemma caught between the traditional ethos and modernity. The spiritual and material conflicts on one side, the ideological conflicts that endanger the very existence of the people on the other side are very well portrayed. Arun Joshi has proved himself to be the master story teller with all the nuances of existential barriers which the modern man faces.

The common people are pitted against the aristocrats who constitute a minuscule minority. The common people are comprised of the boatmen who dwell in mud huts. They worship the river by which they make their living. The rulers who are bent up extending the City map by removing the huts near the river are opposed by the people. The rulers are represented by the Grandmaster designated as the king who is always guided by Astrologer. A council of ministers consisting of Education Minister, Minister for Rallies, Minister for Trade, Brigadier assist the king in administration. The king as advised by the Astrologer wants to crown his son as his successor and forces the common people to support his move blindly.

The common people do not want to subjugate themselves to the rulers. They want their identity to be kept separately and honourably. They are led by a woman leader who exercises a lot of influence among the
common people. The common people find their existence in peril. They never clamour for any prosperity at the cost of their age old customs and tradition. They get support from a professor of astronomy and a maths teacher Bhumiputhra who is called as Master Bhoma. The story is a recollection of the past incidents which are narrated by the Great Yogeswara who is considered as a great Saint. All these matters are narrated to a Nameless one who gets spiritual courses from the Great Yogeswara. Master Bhoma becomes a favourite adviser of the common people but is soon taken prisoner by the rulers. His whereabouts are not known afterwards. The leader of the boat people who is a woman is blinded and so many boatmen were killed for opposing the Grandmaster in his sinister design of expanding the city.

The Grandmaster issues so many directives to be followed by the common people but are ignored. There is an inspector Dharma who sympathises with the common people but is treated as a traitor by the administrators. The professor is charged with treason for opposing the Grandmaster and he dies in the prison due to fasting. The Grandmaster's son is crowned as the successive king. But the common people refuse to take oath in his favour. This enrages the king who orders for the arrest of the boat people. During the 'Festival of River' the boat people carry the posters depicting the picture of Master Bhoma which worsens the situation.
The common people though simple in their living have a very strong perception about life. According to them, life should be natural. Any attempt to modernise their life should be thwarted. For them, the river is God and everything. They identify themselves with the river. Like the people of Shivtarai in Tagore's drama 'Muktha Dhara' the people in 'The City and the River' extend a total surrender and, allegiance to the river. The mud people and the brick people who form the commoners find the river as their spiritual source. They get the meaning of their life only through river. The river also seems to protect the commoners. The novel is a fight between the men of nature and men of modernity. Even the much revered Grandfather who rears a rose garden is not spared by the rulers. Because he too comes from the native soil and shows his obeisance to the river. When the rulers find the commoners quite intransigent and aggressive, they order the army to destroy the mud huts and brick houses. But nature rises in its fury and brings unprecedented floods and ravage the Seven Hills, the buildings which house the rulers and their administration. As a result, not only the commoners, the despotic rulers and other aristocrats are all killed. The common people never swerve from their path of existence to take a new look for their life jeopardising their traditional life style.

Although 'The City and the River' strikes a different note from other novels of Joshi, in fact, it is a continuation of an improvement upon his major thematic concerns. Once again, Joshi has set out on a quest for spiritual commitment for a still centre amidst the turmoil and uncertainty of contemporary life. The anguished human quest for survival, and for a
better alternative in the labyrinth of contemporary life with its inescapable paraphernalia of materialism, corruption, cynicism, alienation and dividing spiritual faith has been the main idea of Joshi's fictional works. The heroes in his novels grope in the dark for a successful existence with a lot of courage on one side and soul sickness on other side. The novels invariably take the form of quest that carries his heroes through the, mazes of life and death.

"The City and the River" focusses an admixture of factors such as Hermits, Yajnas, Ultramodern lasers, helicopters, boats, videos. It is a story of great struggle and sufferings. It is a parable of human choice between allegiance to God and allegiance to man. It narrates how men, who are essentially free to choose, create by their conscious and free choice the environment they live in. It also "explores the relevance of God to man's choices and whether, all said and done, "The world indeed belongs to God and to no one else"." It is about "the quest for spiritual commitment, for an inner spirit that is beyond any religion". The two levels of the narrative - the political and the metaphysical - are inextricably woven to articulate Joshi's vision. The Karmic Principle of Gita is central here, as in the other novels of Joshi. The influence of Mahatma Gandhi also can be traced.

A close study of the novel will evince that despite its satire on the present day political situation, it transcends the realm of politics and explores some fundamental truths about human life with its spiritual destiny. It offers a vision of life. It combines the two sides of religion the
personal and the social. While other novels of Joshi were written in the first person narrative mode, the City and the River is told from the omniscient narrator's point of view. The novel significantly begins in spring "Winter passed into spring" (T.C.R. p.9). The strange, series background, the primordial symbols of the mountain, the stream and the sun the spiritual Euphoria suggested by the elixir which is given by Yogeswara to his disciple the playing of one string and the other worldly music prepare the readers for a story of vision and quest. The prologue hints at a quest for identity, spiritual identity.

The river, on whose banks the events of the novel unfold, has at once a physical presence and a symbolic reality. The river is for them, "a symbol of the divine mother; of God himself". The great river is "Time's consort and Time itself". The Festival of the River, the City's chief festival, is celebrated annually by the people for the gift of wisdom and for reminding themselves of the immortality of time and their own mortality. The river is at once a preserver and destroyer. As the life line of the city, it provides the people with physical and spiritual succour. There is a harmonious relation between the boatmen and the river who has deep empathy for her children and for all those who love and revere her. The boat people understand for the best. She speaks to those who are innocent and pure of heart. To the Astronomer, known as the professor the river had spoken when he was a student.
"He was sitting on the same granite pillar one night lost as to the purpose of his life when the river had spoken to him and told him to look. He had looked and seen, as though for the first time, the stars and the planets wheeling in the high heavens. And the river had whispered, "Isn't it this that you want?" Something like me peaceful and infinite and free".  

Even the Master of Rallies had felt the presence of God on the river when he was a child. As the anguished Master tells Vasu the journalist, on the Eve of the Festival of River : I felt His presence on the river and I do not see Him now. Has He veiled His face? (C.R.p.76). In the wake of the Grandmaster's systematic attempts to crush the boatmen's protest and destroy their way of life, the roses in the farm of Grandfather on the embankment of the river perish mysteriously (C.R.p.51). Finally the mystic river washes away the intrigues and ambitions of the rulers. The turmoil in the leads to its destruction flows on in silent unconcern reminding the readers of the significance of man in the face of the vastness of the universe. The river, thus, becomes, a source of ultimate realization and the symbolic anchor of man's transcility.

The life of men has become steel like has been well articulated by Joshi. The head quarters of the king's administration 'The Seven Hills' is the dominance of steel and glass and marble. There is total absence of vegetables and grass which symbolise the absence of human concern
around the administration. The boatmen with their anti-establishment attitude and their allegiance to the river are the most persecuted people in the regime. The boatmen have the tenacity and moral courage which they claim as drawn from the river. The attitudes of the boat people to the king are quite recalcitrant.

The others, the brick people and the mud people for instance, can be persuaded, cajoled, distracted, and, if necessary, threatened (C.R. pg.3). But it is the boatmen whom the Grandmaster finds at once reasonable stubborn and incompressible. They live in appalling conditions on "narrow fortuous streets". Though poor, they are inconvincible. They refuse to work except for themselves. They spend their time mostly on talking, singing, meditating, playing the one string. The boatmen whose Headman is a woman do not "believe in personal possessions" (C.R. p.16). They do not show any respect for the Grandmaster except to defy his authority. The Grandmaster's father had once advised him, "Boatmen are not as simple as they seem. They consider themselves to be the children of the river, and to the river and river alone do they hold allegiance. They believe, unfortunately with their hearts, and for their belief they are willing to die. And don't let their poverty mislead you into believing that they can be bought" (C.R. p.14).

In the face of all odds, they stubbornly insisted on maintaining their distinct identity and their way of life with its anti-materialistic, essentially spiritual world view. The naive and innocent are guided not only by Master Bhoma but by an old hermit who knew the secrets of the prophecy
much earlier to the Astrologer of the Royal Court. The great hermit persuades Master Bhora to guide the commoners, "You have been chosen to speak. The great river has chosen you to speak with the tongue of men what they cannot hear in her troubled lament" (C.R. p.154). He exhorts Master Bhora about the reality of men’s life and existence. He answers that men should identify fear which is the principal cause of all despondency. He says, "I learnt that nothing enfeebled man more than fear, that nothing but fear stood between him and, his liberation ... (C.R. p.155).

To realize knowledge in to action, one must choose between fear and liberation, although the choice is a painful one. The prince of making such a choice is great but the price of not making one is bondage, stagnation and despair. He reminds Bhumiputhra of the insignificance of men like the Grandmaster, who in their abominable greed and limitless ambition try to be the master of men. "This city, this world all this is the manifestations of the one and not the of the grandmaster’s ego as the grandmaster might imagine, ... and it is He who is the master of all men including the Grandmaster and it is His will that men follow in every way (C.R. p.180).

It is the Professor of Astronomy who infuses confidence in common people. After his student Master Bhora disappears, the professor takes the reins to control the rulers. The plight of the people, who are deprived of basic human rights, the shameless and outrageous demonstration of the Grandmaster’s power and authority, the increasing humiliation and
suffering of the boatmen, and finally his failure to know the whereabouts of Bhoma leave the professor depicted. The futile quest tells on his body and his spirit.

The Great Hermit opposed to the ideology of the Great Astrologer defines man's destiny against the odds. He advises people to carry out the deeds in pursuance of God's decades. He says no prophecy can change the destiny of man. "How one, reads a prophecy is the matter". "There is nothing inevitable about the prophecy. The hand that made it believes, above all, in man's capacity to change his fate. So even if it speaks of the coming of a king, men can so conduct themselves, so choose, that the king does not come. Or the king that comes is of the right kind" (C.R. p.68).

It is most pertinent to understand the significance of the Hermit's remark. It lays stress on man's capacity to change his fate, to choose the circumstances in which he must live, and also on right choice and right action. They are reminiscent of the Gita which also recognises man's freedom of choice and requires him to know what is good and what is evil, to choose good and realize it by conscious effort. As Dr. Radhakrishnan writes in his introductory essay on the Bhagavad Gita: "Our life is a mixture of necessity and freedom, chance and choice. By exercising our choice properly, we can control all the elements and eliminate altogether the determinism of nature".3

The Hermit knows that there are many impediments to this freedom of choice. Man's cowardice, selfishness, egoism, and the "Petty concerns of his petty life" - all these psychic fetters prevent him from
realizing the truth and overcome his fear and selfish desires. He must cleanse his soul before he receives the vision of truth. And what is true of an individual is also true of a nation, a country or a city. As the great Yogeswara puts it to his disciple: Cities, my children, even as men, make their own horoscopes (C.R. p.217).

The hermit's advocacy of enduring sufferings suggest Mahatma's preaching of sacrifice. The 'cure' the hermit believes like the great Indian sages, "is within one self" (C.R. p.89). No external system can deliver the people from tyranny and oppression. The remedy must be within. As Mahatma Gandhi says: the salvation of the people depends upon themselves upon their capacity for suffering and sacrifice. There is a total violation of human rights. The common people are prevented from leading a peaceful co-existence. The Hermit adds that life without honour is repulsive. For the sake of honour, one could even give up his life. "The flame of honour could be kept up only by feeding it by their lives (C.R. p.166).

The people are subjected to untold misery yet they brave it with their natural grit. There is no cure for this unheard malady and the physician's only advice is "Exercise your soul" (C.R. p.134). The remedy of this soul's sickness is to be found within the soul itself.

Bhumiputra finds the meaning of life not in renunciation or escape but in action. His experience has turned him from a timid and vacillating teacher into a dedicated man of action. He excites the demoralized boatmen by reminding them that they are the children of the sacred river,
the symbol of the divine mother and that they should not sell her soul to an ordinary man. It is a perennial conflict between the forces representing politics and religion over the issue of allegiance, "to God or to man". But there is no escape from this endless repetition, this relentless cycle, no end to this periodic disintegration of man and his civilization of Joshi deeply influenced by the age old wisdom of spiritual heritage believes in purity of thought and action.

But this purity most come through sacrifice. Solvating from tyranny and oppression and egress from the endless cycle of becoming can, thus, be found in the purification of the soul, sacrifice, compel effacement of ego, and a total surrender to a higher consciousness beyond oneself. The Divine image of God, that dwells in the innermost being of all men, including the fallen and the criminal, expresses itself in the infinite capacity for self-transcendence. Every man has the freedom to rise and fall and his future is in his own hands. He must exercise this freedom of choice consciously with full knowledge of its consequences, since whatever he does affect not only himself but also others. One must overcome the psychic fetters like fear, cowardice and selfish desire which stand between him and his knowledge of truth. For the realization of truth - the truth of being and the truth of the times - man must rise above himself. Forge this petty concerns, and have courage to translate his knowledge into action.

Many fail to understand the essence of life. The world is the manifestation of God and it is His will that man follows in every way. By regarding the world as a mere mechanical determination of nature
unrelated to God men fail to perceive its divine essence and become entangled in it. They fall victims to selfish desires and bring suffering not only on others but also on themselves. The cycle of Karma will move on until the divine scheme is fulfilled, the city and the people are purified and ascend into spiritual existence which is their destiny. Since the ideas of God are worked out through human instrumentality as the Great Yogeswara tells the Nameless "we are only instruments of the great God". His is the will, His is the force.

As the Hermit says, "The Almighty can manifest through men only what men allow Him to manifest. That is why men and cities and nations must choose. There is the upward path that leads to freedom and there is the downward path that, for the moment at least, must lead to perdition (C.R. p.158).

The struggle for perfection is painful and sometimes devastating. But there should be no room for despair, since human nature is subject to change and God dwells equally in all people including the Grandmasters. At some point in the historical process, the struggle and suffering of the people will touch the Grandmasters' souls and their lives will be transformed. The purification of their souls will lead to the purification of cities and nations and tyranny will come to an end through non-violent means. Until this happens, men must continue their efforts.

It is quite clear that when the aristocratic rulers offer pecuniary benefits to the commoners, the latter reject them. This is the total vision that Joshi offers through the ascetic. It is an affirmation of the Indian Wisdom that has taken cognizance of the ego centric predicament of man
and offered an acceptable solution. The solution may appear 'politically naive' as it provides little consolation to Joshi's boatmen or their real counterparts who are faced with an adverse fate.

But the problem, as Joshi views it, is not political so much as a spiritual one. He has never offered any facile solutions of external systems to the human predicament and has stressed instead, the need for self exploration and soul searching. Faced with the disintegration of their lives, Joshi's characters realize that the external systems are inadequate and that the truth must ultimately be sought in an understanding of the self and its relation to the world.

They seek a perception which is deeply personal; they are concerned about an internal system of order. They search for the clue to the intricate labyrinth of life in the mysterious and unfathomable recesses of their souls. The quest for perfection and truth is difficult, including suffering, loss, bereavement and sacrifice, but it is not impossible.

It is quite needless to point out that the novel 'The City and the River' despite its weight of metaphysical truth, is not a philosophical tract recording the utterances of its characters and vocalizing the abstruse doctrines of ancient tradition. Joshi's success lies in the fact that the philosophical observations are presented so naturally in fictional terms that the book never ceases to read like a novel. Its appeal lies in his deft handling of the material - the eternal conflict between men and power and the human quest for perfection. The novel unfolds the power of human emotions that could without the onslaught of evil forces which try to endanger the happiness of human life.
As John Milton put it the happiness of an individual lies in one's own hand. "It is the mind that makes good out of bad and bad out of God". Every individual tries to project and guard his identity. Joshi's novels underline the fact that Indians try to uphold their ethnic values. They do not compromise their cultural ties with any factors. As it is said of Romans, 'Romans prefer death to dishonour', it is palpable with our cultural roots, the ethos dominate the material gains.

The existential outlook is guided by ethos insulated by spirituality and simplicity. The novel "The City and the River" projects this image beyond any doubt. The novels of Joshi portray that the character of Indian existentialism is delineated by stoicism and spiritual binding. Joshi never leaves any stone unreturned in depicting the total helplessness in which the commoners are living. These people have utter hopelessness. They do not know how to live in the sordid city. They curse their fate for having been born as underdogs.

A noteworthy aspect in the novel for the amelioration of the sufferings of the poor people is the emergence of the Professor of Astronomy who identifies himself for these people. There is a divergence in the existential outlook among the characters. When the poor common people have utmost concern for their roots and cultural bondage, the upper class alienate themselves from the ritualistic tradition for their personal gains. The Professor and Master Bhoma make tirade against the self centred bureaucrats who have no morals or scruples except leading a comfortable and luxurious life.
The Professor tries to unmask the people of the powers that be. The cowardice of the intellectuals and the bureaucrats whose hands are tied or who mortgage their conscience to the Seven Hills (The Administrative Head Office) for self-advancement. Though all the novels deal with human foibles and the consequent impact in the lives of the characters, the novel "The City and the River transcends the human dilemma for furthering the scope for existence. The creation of characters in this book who represent the lower strata repose a lot of confidence in them which they have acquired through their strong lineage with the native soil. They resolve not to be rootless. They oppose tooth and nail every move of the rulers to modernise their dwellings and their perception of life.

Though some critics brand 'The City and the River as a political novel, the political theory explained in the novel determines the hapless condition of the people who are psychologically, morally and physically harassed, for, they are identified with the land and the river. They cannot imagine a life without being near the river. It is a parable of a political society - the endless variations of the relationship between men and power. This metaphysical dimension has enhanced the interest of the book and saved it from being a mere political satire.

The novel receives its dramatic tension from the opposition between the city and the river which are the two opposing symbols. It is an irony that the two disciples of Great Yogheswara, the Hermit of the mountain the Astrologer of the city are poles apart. While the Hermit works for the continuance of age old rituals and heritage, the Astrologer spares no effort
in bringing a total change in the physical look of the city. While the former exhorts the people for purification of souls through suffering, the latter wants all the established norms of ancient system to be revamped in the name of modernity.

There is juxtaposition of nature on one side and modern gadgets on the other side with which the people have to live. In all their earnestness, the people have developed an aversion to the modern gadget as they fear that they would annihilate the ethnic undertones. The contrasting characters dramatize the central contradiction between this city and the river and the values and attitudes that they embody.

The identity crisis is discernible not only among the underdogs but seen quite palpable among the elite rulers. The rulers want to be identified themselves as the architects of a new city. They want to metamorphosise not only their lives but the city itself. It is interesting to note that the hierarchical structure of the people is divided into three sections: the squalid mud-quarters inhabited by the boatmen who are also known as the nameless ones because outside their own habitations no one knows their name the brick house people who provide the city with administrators and intellectuals; and the actual rulers of the city who dwell in the 'Seven Hills' the administrative buildings. The nameless boatmen may be called the non-descript or anonymous proletariat and the brick house people the bourgeois in political parlance.
Even there are internal rivalries among the Council of Ministers. But the intriguing and politicking advisers are firm in their allegiance to the Grandmaster. The sole aim of this coterie of fawning councillors is to remain in the limelight and improve their hierarchical standing in the administrative ranking system. The army is the most affected part of administration in corrupt practices. It shows allegiance to Grand Master for a share in everything, power and the spoils of power. It wants a share because it is "tired by being honest ... and of being poor" (C.R. p.186) and believes that "he who has the gun has the control" (C.R. p.189).

The Grandmaster is said to be the master of ambiguity. He speaks one thing and acts another. He is a creative of the dark. He sets to work only after sunset and works till dawn. He never sees the coming of dawn because wherever he is, the first rays of the sun are never allowed to reach. A good looking and courteous man though he is, the Grand Master has an aversion to music "It is well known that the Grand Master dislikes music" (C.R. p.48). This antipathy to music is all the more surprising in a man like the Grand Master who possesses, "the sweetest, the most hypnotic voice in the city" (C.R. 48).

It is because of this dislike, he orders his men to destroy the simple musical instruments of the boatmen with laser weapons. He worships various aspects of the sacred and the mysterious and is given nightly meditation. A man with changing attitudes, he has shifted his favour from one aspect of the mysterious and the sacred to another according to his need. His palace houses antique idols of bronze, ivory, stone and wood.
This utilitarian attitude to the deities which betrays his selfishness and greed, marks his contrast with the boatmen who are firm in their allegiance to the mysterious river. But "the Grand Master had not always held the sacred and the mysterious in such awe. In fact, his awe had grown in step with his realization that he was a man of destiny" (C.R. p.56).

But the Grand Master is driven by a frivolous dream floated by the Astrologer. His intention to become the city’s unchallenged ruler and lead it to unprecedented heights of greatness, which is stoked by the Astrologer, comes in to focus with the dream. The dream—that he was seated on a throne atop a hill surrounded by the waters of a river, with a full man in the sky and the music of the boatmen’s one string in the background ends in a nightmare.

The Grand Master's elation was followed by panic as he watched a vast host of naked men rising from the river and climbing the hill towards his throne, their nakedness tightening, ‘like a noise’ around his throne and choking him to death. The dream highlights the Grand Master’s egotism and possessiveness (‘This his is mine’) as well as the rising of the naked boatmen from the river to defy his authority. While most people, in such cases, would simply have driven the dream out of their mind, the suggestion is that some evil power seeks to upturn the ‘precarious balance of harmony’.
The Grand Master who always considers himself fit for better things, thinks otherwise. His determination to become a king is reinforced by a prophecy. But he is not sure who would become a king. Man's fortitude turns in to a shambles when he is not guided properly. The Palace Astrologer cajoles him to act upon the dream to become the king in which process, he slowly loses his identity.

The various measures which the Grand Master declares on the advice of the Astrologer shows his fear psychosis with regard to the fulfilment of the dream. The existential orders which provide cover for the king and the rulers never seem to convince the people. "The Triple way or the Way of the Three Beatitudes" of a new era called The Era of Ultimate Greatness (C.R. p.23) a euphemism for state emergency is declared to clothe the rulers in safety. But these plans are met with stiff resistance by the people.

Bhumiputra who is called as Master Bhoma Wages a relentless battle against the rulers for he does not want to change his identity. Unlike other teachers working in the same University, Master Bhoma keeps up his identity, while other teachers, like typical intellectuals, change colour with the changing political scenario to ensure the blessing of those in power, Bhoma goes on preaching messages against the rulers in general and the king in particular. He narrates to the students the parable of a 'Naked king' and succeeds in his mission. The story of a 'Naked king' comes from a fable in which a king orders the finest delicate cloth to be woven for him and when he wears it, he would look to be naked. Bhoma attributes this tale to the king of the city in order to create an awareness about the misdeeds of the king.
Bhoma is warned of serious consequences by the university authorities for such a propaganda and assures them to discontinue his recital. But his cowardice makes him feel ashamed and he is moved to tears. His attempt to surrender to the authorities pain him very much as he is made of such stuff who could oppose anything for the sake of sovereignty of the individuals. But it is the Hermit who extols in him a lot of good sense which makes him realize the potential in him to protect the honour of the people. The Hermit tells him,

"You have been chosen to speak. The great river has chosen you to speak with tongue of men what they cannot bear in her troubled lament ... Having spoken, you will feel lighter. The weight shall dissolve, the shackles fall" (R.p.153-54).

The Hermit admonishes people who have the feeling of fear against man made establishment. He says that the rulers are nothing but ‘the shadow of the evil that lurks beneath the Seven Hills, Any fear looked straight in the eye will vanish and man becomes free. Bhoma does not allow fear to sow confusion in his heart. He remembers that what he is doing is the will of God in whose hands all men stand and that "Whatever happens the Lord will not for sake (him) not will (his) work be fruitless (R.p.157). He decides to continue to preach the parable in the hope that his words will touch the hearts of the ‘slumbering’ citizens and awaken them. The words of the Hermit which echo the words of Lord Krishna in Bhagawad Gita stir up a conscience in Bhoma and refer to action. He gets
the lost peace and initiates his all out attack against the king. But in his recitals, the Grand Master sees a formidable threat to his authority, and a possibility of revolt.

The Astrologer is also quite different from the Astronomer. The astrologer tries to seek fortunes through misinterpretation of astrological facts and thrives on it where as the Professor of Astronomy calculates the position of different celestial bodies that would bring prosperity to the people. The delay in the prophecy's fulfilment and the growing anger of the people make the headstrong Grand Master unpatient. He suffers from a crisis of trust and grows suspicious of his own advisers. Left to himself he does not trust his own self. He says "who is there in the wide world that I can trust? Who can I trust even on the Advisory council? (C.R.p.57).

The Grand Master is particularly aggrieved at the obstinacy of his disobedient boatmen who continue to defy his authority and frustrate his plan. Becoming the city's unchallenged king turns in to a one-shot obsession and he brooks no protest, no obstacle on the way. Together with the Astrologer, he devices a nefarious plan to use the 'Conspiracy of Master Bhoma and his propaganda against a king to secure the citizens' unquestioning allegiance to the prophecy's goals.

The music which the boatmen produces through their one string instrument is all pervasive. It is actually a life force for them. They get rejuvenation once they listen to it. It is true that this music binds them. The haunting fear of isolation from their soil is temporarily suspended because of the music.
One's sense of belonging to this world is attributable to many factors. The folk music of the boatmen makes them possess a sense of pride and the sagging morale is reinforced them. There is harmony that finds expression in the music of the boatmen's one string the soothing melody of the river. The river becomes the symbol for their life. The boatmen know that this melody permeates the universe. While the music alarms the Grand Master who fails to grasp its meaning, it brings a sense of peace and liberation to those like the Astronomer, the boatmen and the Hermit. The Grand Master cannot hear the divine voice, the celestial music as he is self willed and intractable.

The emotional set backs for the boatmen are caused by the machinations of the Astrologer and the Grand Master. ‘The Festival of the River’ is an occasion of re-affirmation of the allegiance of the boatmen to the river. But the boatmen are deprived of the spontaneity and emotional bearings which they derive from the river. With a view to disrupting the harmony of things and imposing his own standards on the city, the arrogant Grand Master desecrates the Festival of the River with the help of the Astrologer. In what appears to be a brilliant satire on the disposition of human nature, ‘The City and the River’ unfolds opportunist tendencies that bring personal gains forsaking the much respected identifies. This identity crisis traverses every walk of post independent India.
The sacred strings which the astrologer brings with him become null and void. It may well be said that the Astrologer has no identity of his own. He is an archetypal megalomania who transfers every possible way into his favour. People do not tolerate when the sanctity of the Festival of the River is polluted by the scheming Astrologer who expects people to switch over to praising the king instead of reciting solemn hymns. The perversion of the rulers reflect the general trend where virtues are given a go by.

It is only the poor and underprivileged who pine for posterity of values and customs. Bhoma’s narration of the ‘Naked king’s Tale’ stimulates the urge for restoring the rights from the king. It is an indirect way of fighting against. Though this psychological warfare enervates the spirit of the rulers, their might simply crushes the defenseless commoners.

The various moves of the people such as setting a lottery stall for the benefit of the commoners, the preaching of ‘Naked king Tale’, the postures featuring Bhomas’ pictures etc., only add to the misery of the people. Everything is smashed by the vengeful attitudes of the rulers.

The astronomer’s interpretation of the galaxies never bring any solace to the people. Nothing seems to provide any succour to the people. "He was astonished that the great galaxies had never given him a hint that places such as this existed on the face of the earth; or, that men who worshipped the planets and stood in fervor of them, had the audacity to bury other men in dungeons of unending light" (C.R. p.163).
The death of the Professor sets in motion, the various moves on both the fronts. The boatmen under the leader of Headwoman vow to fight the establishment. The rulers unleash all kinds of terror tactics including use of helicopters, machine guns. But the note worthy aspect of the common people is that they are not swayed nor put down. The Grand Master and the his men never try to understand the reality of the situation. They forget their 'dharma' and, instead of being slaves of the city and protecting the helpless and the poor they choose only to crush them under their heels. Inspite to knowing the truth of the times, the truth that a reign of terror has been let loose to secure the people's allegiance to a 'naked king' and evil ruler and that an 'empire of false hood is created so someone can become the king' (C.R. p.112) they dare not uphold the truth.

They do not defy the Grand Master and destroy the falsehood at its very roots for fear of humiliation and persecution. But they know that compromise with falsehood would generate as total alienation of the established values. It is a strange disease that spreads like an epidemic among the administrators who enforce unquestioningly the repressive measures of the grand master and maintain the reign of terror. They begin to detect holes in their reflection on the mirror.

The boatmen’s revolt together with the intrigue of his Advisers that seems to threaten his position, shakes the Grand Master out of complacency and prompts him to take expeditious action. When things are not favourable for the boat people, the wheel of fortune has its initial blessing on the Grand Master who becomes the king and appoints the
Minister for Trade as the new Grand Master. The prophecy comes true as the Hermit’s effort to make the head strong and vainglorious king sees himself and choose the truth fails.

While the Seven Hills the seat of administration celebrate the Grand Master’s ascension to the throne - Celebrations that seem to have contextual roots unrelated as they are to the ancient city or to any event connected with it, and announce the power and the glory of the mortal king denying the presence of a "One - without-a-second" and the "immortality of Time" (C.R. p.234). In the encounter that ensued, Master Bhoma and his supporters die leaving very little resistance to the army. The Hermit performs last ‘Yajna’ of the "Immortal Time" and his consort, the river, to increase the blasphemy committed by the Astrologer. And he is blessed with a vision: "Just as the Hermit ended his yajna, the sun rose lighting up the vast expense of the river ... High above the place, the pyramids, the Seven Hills, the peak glowed pink and yellow and, finally blinding white that no human eye could stand" (C.R. p.249).

When the river rises in its fury it destroys all the inhabitations including the Seven Hills the pedestal of administration. The authoritarian regime ends not with a bang but with a whimper as the awe struck king notices in the fiery reflection of the frothing waters of the unforgiving river ‘his own shadow and the shadows of his father and grandfather and painfully realises that these shadows are all that time would permit him to leave behind’. Only an illegal child of the boatmen escapes from the deluge to lead another resistance at another point in history.
The Wheel of Karma, the human cycle of birth, the disintegration and death, unrolls relentlessly. "On the ruins of that city, as always happens, a new city has arisen. It is ruled by another Grand Master, which of course need not always happen. In the new city is another Professor another Bhumiputra, another tribe of boatmen. There is also another council and another set of councillors. The men have other names, but the forces they embody remain unchanged.

The boatmen's revolt was directed to the purification of the city and the compulsion of the Grand Master to see himself in the eyes of his subjects. Firm in their allegiance to the river, the boatmen stood up against the tyranny. In a sacrificial spirit to uphold their identity, they dedicated their life for the sake of river. The attempts to redress the sickness that affects the city are in fact numerous. The ideology that the Hermit preaches for the purification of the souls could be gone through self sacrifice. At some point in the historical process the struggle and suffering of the people will touch the Grand Master's souls and their lives will be transformed.

Though there is an infusion of a religious fervour into the uncertain secular - political world and the reiteration of an unwavering hope that meaning and order can still be constructed upon the chaotic foundation of our time are central to its overall meaning. The book carries the inconclusive quest of Som Bhaskar in "The Last Labyrinth" beyond the intellectual effort to find an equation and an internal system of order implying that such an order not only demands total commitment and
acceptance of personal and collective responsibility but also offers a hope of redemption. Indeed, as a re-affirmation of Indian Wisdom and as an experiment of the parable as a fictional mode to convey mythic truths and political satire, 'The City and the River' is a remarkable landmark in contemporary Indians English fiction.

The Grand Master's rootlessness in 'The City and the River' stems from his disjuncture or separation from the river populace and all that they stand for. As a ruler, he is utterly alienated from his community. He is not the leader of the people; he is something totally out-landish in terms of the interests, the concerns and the values of his people. Their foreignness is caused not by any 'metaphysical loss of established order or a shock to the traditional mode of thinking but by their failure to identify themselves with their environment and by their lack of self-knowledge and right adjustment of conduct.

Through their encounter with the labyrinth of life, Joshi's protagonists try to arrive at an altogether new awareness of self and the world. Joshi feels that the quest for truth is a lonely business', and that one has to take such decisions alone with no help from man or god'. The Hermit says to Bhumiputra : "In such matters all men stand alone" (C.R. p.157) and the failure of the Fourth Estate to reveal truth and voice of the people's grievances against the despotic rule of the Grand Master all serve the cause for their individual existentialism. The plight of the people, who are deprived of basic human rights, the shameless and outrageous demonstration of the Grand Master's power and authority, the increasing humiliation and suffering of the boatmen add to the annui of the commoners.
The city and the River is the finest example among Joshi's fiction where the post Independent Indian is set in a situation where his freedom of self decision is let loose by the post modern anathema. But the cultural strands of the common people never allow the modern attraction to be sullied. The Grand Master declares 'Era of Ultimate Happiness' through some of the Council Ministers who have a close proximity with the mud people and brick people. But his attempts are thwarted by the common people as they find danger not only to their calm life but to the very existence of the river to which they show allegiance next only to God. Initially some of the boatmen succumb to the luxurious existence that would follow after the king's commands are observed.

It may well be said that the whole gamut of mental, physical and ideological conflicts stem from the point of identity crisis. The mud people and the brick people who gave rise to ethnic stalwarts such as Master Bhma and the Professor of astronomy struggle very hard to retain the self and identity of the people which they have inherited from their past legacy.

Arun Joshi can definitely be compared to the Nigerian writer Chinna Achebe where the latter tries to uphold the traditional and cultural bondages in his novel, 'Things Fall Apart'. Joshi's novels testify to the fact that Indians in general are not to be taken for granted with the promise of western attraction. Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha and non-violence find an effective role in 'The City and the River' which shows the strong forte of the people against the might of the rulers.
Almost all his major characters face the identity crisis. Whether one will submit to the monotony of meaningless life and suffer from anxiety, boredom and purposelessness or make one's life meaningful by taking a deliberate decision with full knowledge of its consequences is left to oneself. The characters find themselves in a fix to identify themselves with some decision or choice. But it is the success or the failure to take decisive action that determines the course of their lives. It is his ability to take decision at the right moment that distinguishes his major protagonists Billy from Sindi, Ratan and Som Bhaskar who are always wavering and afraid of making a choice which is at once painful and consequential.

"The City and the River" is a grim parable of human choice. It narrates how men, who are essentially free to choose create by their conscious choice the environment they live in. While the Palace Astrologer reads in the prophecy, the work of a fate that determines human life and human action, the Hermit of the Mountain finds no such blind fatalism in it.

"The prophecy ... did not subscribe to such inexorable laws of fate and left the matter open. It had been drawn in fact by a hand that only believed in the great law of Karma under which man and cities by their own land, survived and died" (C.R. p.65).
Sindi in 'The Foreigner' is devoid of any system of morality and clear-cut frame of reference. His is a disinherit ed mind, a mind which is deprived of the laws and structure, the value-system and the social customs which held the lives of his ancestors together. In an outburst against his boss, Mr. Khemka, who ridicules his purposeless life, Sindi says, "You had a clear-cut system of morality, a caste system that laid down all you had to do. You had a God; You had roots in the soil you lived upon. Look at me. I have no roots. I have no system of morality (T.F. pp.135-36).

Consequently, he suffers from an identity crisis which grows out of his fluid situation and his spiritual condition. The unrelieved experience in the chaotic world induces a state of withdrawal and inaction in Sindi. He withdraws himself from the world into the night side of life, into a detachment from life. This explains Sindi's horror of life and his pointless motives.

And yet, Sindi's quest for identity as well as meaning and purpose of life does not end in despair. Arun Joshi, rooted as he is in the ancient wisdom of a life-affirming tradition, never accepts absurdity and estrangement as the ultimate conditions of life.

There are moments in the novel when the author seems to suggest that Sindi's rootlessness, purposelessness and consequential sense of loneliness are not his problems alone. They are the symptoms of a malaise that affects an entire generation. Sindi says, "That is the loneliness of our times ... Strangers promise to see you without even knowing your name.
You are a king in deck of kings, shuffled and reshuffled, meeting fifty-one similar kings but never saying anything sensible, never exchanging names." (T.F. p.185). Indeed, Sindi is not alone. There are Karl, Arun, Babu, June and a lot of others who are as much lonely and 'fed up' with their lives as Sindi. There are men and women like him groping and fumbling their ways, while they are caught up in the endless flux of life. Sindi's is the predicament of many young people of his generation, irrespective of the country they belong to, East or West. 'The Foreigner' suggests one way, which is in essence an Indian way, of solving this dilemma of modern man.

Alienation is something to be overcome, and not to be cherished. He never revels in alienation for its own sake. He turns it into an analytical tool for the discovery of genuine choices. Unlike many existentialist characters in the West, Sindi shows a tremendous capacity for transcendence. He succeeds from his unsurmountable problems to find a way out of the labyrinth where his experiences lead them. Sindi comes out of the impasse after intense suffering and anguished soul-searching. The novel records his movement from illusion to reality, from darkness to light and from death's twilight kingdom to the new shores of life.

The series of compromises Ratan Rathor in 'The Apprentice' had made with the decadent values of the unprincipled society, his ever-increasing sense of discontent as well as the whole business of living in a middle generated a confusion in him. He was reduced 'to the status of those leaves of autumn that are blown here and there, at the mercy of the
wind. Why be surprised if one of them falls into the sewer?" Apart from this inner confusion, there were two other reasons why he had committed the crime - his complacency and his sense of insignificance. Like most of his countrymen, who fed on the dreams brought out by ivory-tower politicians, Ratan believed that China would keep faith and that there would be no war. Even if, by any chance, a war broke out, India would never be defeated because Indians 'were a chosen people ... immune to defeat and humiliation.'

Moreover, he looked upon himself as an insignificant element in the giant government machinery where his small act would in no way change the course of things: "And if there was to be a defeat, I had thought, then it was bound to be so irrespective of what I did or did not do. How could my little act matter one way or another". This feeling of his own insignificance in the scheme of things resulted in anonymity and loss of individuality: "I was a nobody, a nobody. Deep down I was convinced that I had lost significance: As an official; as a citizen; as a man" (T.A.p.73).

Som in "The Last Labyrinth" encounters Anuradha first at a meeting of the Plastic Manufacturers' Association in Delhi's Intercontinental Hotel where he goes with the ostensible purpose of grabbing Aftab Rai's company. At the very first sight, this pock-marked, tall, handsome woman with her antique costumes and jewellery, stirs Som's passion. This strange woman with the 'features of women one say in Moghul miniatures', 'look[s] like a medieval courtesan around whom wars might have been fought'. She fascinates Som and he determines to
wrench her away from her husband along with the shares of his dwindling company. Anuradha becomes more and more the centre of his existence, the crystallization of the meaning of his life, his ideal fixation who, Som feels, could be his ultimate salvation. His pursuit of Anuradha and his quest for identity become inseparately blended.

Similarly Billy in "The Strange Case of Billy Biswas" revolted against civilized society is motivated by an urge to realize the meaning and purpose of life and to recognize his true identity in the context of a reality which alone is considered authentic by him. It is a transition from disorder to order, for Billy's life as a primitive reveals a kind of order and stability which the so-called civilization deplorably lacks. And to call Bilasia only 'a native mistress' of Billy is to ignore her important role in his life and her contribution to his self-realization.

The novel reflects some important facets of India's religious thought as it presents with unfaltering candour and intelligent wit a grim commentary on the country's political reality with its corruption, horror and authoritarian tendencies. But it will be a mistake to read the book simply as a political novel. Politics becomes in Joshi's hands a useful means of presenting a vision of life which is, by all means, a spiritual one. Joshi has not written a thesis novel or merely dramatized 'the story of an ambitious dictator desiring to be king and opposed by the people'. The City and the River is not a political satire on regimentation and totalitarianism like George Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty" Four or Aldous Huxley's "Ape and Essence".
But in Joshi's skilful treatment this tract material is transmuted into a fictional representation of the eternal conflict between good and evil and an artistic restatement of the anguished quest of a guilt-stricken individual for redemption. The difference is that while "The Apprentice" focuses on individual predicament, "The City and the River" is concerned with an entire generation or rather an entire race. It turns out to be "an allegory of Indian history and its mythic truth", and it can very well be described as "a parable of political society - the endless variations of the relationship between men and power". This metaphysical dimension has enhanced the interest of the book and saved it from being a mere political satire.

The novel receives its dramatic tension from the opposition between the city and the river which are two 'opposing symbols', even though in the totality of Joshi's vision they are not irreconcilable. Both the palace Astrologer who is the mentor of the Grand Master and de facto ruler of the city, and the Hermit of the Mountain who identifies himself with the river and the river populace, are disciples of the Great Yogeshwara. But the different choices they make turn them into adversaries. Again, the prophecy about the advent of a king that sets the wheel of action in motion, is interpreted differently by the two, each according to his nature. The precarious balance between the city and the river is disturbed by the different choices made by the Grand Master and the boatmen. In fact, it is the city's estrangement from the river and all that it stands for that leads to its destruction and the death of its rulers.
Although they carry the city on their backs and the accumulation of the city's wealth depends on their labour, the boatmen refuse to be absorbed into the hierarchical social structure of the city. In the face of all odds, they stubbornly insist on maintaining their distinct identity and their way of life with its anti-materialistic, essentially spiritual, worldview.

'A master of ambiguity', the Grand Master is a creature of the dark. He sets to work only after sunset and works till dawn. He never sees the coming of dawn because wherever he is, the first rays of the sun are never allowed to reach. A good-looking and courteous man though he is, the Grand Master has an aversion to music: "It is well known that the Grand Master dislikes music". This 'antipathy to music' is all the more surprising in a man like the Grand Master who possesses 'the sweetest, the most hypnotic voice in the city'.

It is because of this dislike he orders his men to destroy the simple musical instruments of the boatmen with laser-weapons on the night of their blockade in the river. He worships 'various aspects of the sacred and the mysterious' and is given to nightly meditation. His palace houses 'antique idols of bronze, ivory, stone and wood'.

This latent ambition to become the city's unchallenged ruler and to lead it to unprecedented heights of greatness, which is stoked by the Astrologer, comes into focus with the Grand Master's dream. The dream - that he was seated on a throne atop a hill surrounded by the waters of a river, with a full moon in the sky and the music of the boatmen's one-
string in the background - ends in a nightmare. The Grand Master's elation was followed by panic as he watched 'a vast host of naked men' rising from the river and climbing the hill towards his throne, their nakedness tightening, 'like a noose', around his throne and choking him to death. The dream highlights the Grand Master's egotism and possessiveness ('This hill is mine') as well as the rising of the naked boatmen from the river to defy his authority.

While most people, in such cases, would simply have driven the dream out of their mind, considering it as 'the froth of over-weaning ambition, the suggestion indeed of some evil power seeking to upturn the precarious balance of harmony', the Grand Master, who always considers himself fit for better things, thinks otherwise. He feels that after the long and distinguished service that he and his ancestors have given to the city, the city owes him 'total and unquestioned allegiance.

The Grand Master's determination is reinforced by the existence of a prophecy that speaks of the coming of a king. The prophecy, which is used as the epigraph to the novel, is an old one that refers to a king but does not speak who exactly will be this king. It leaves the matter open. The Palace Astrologer, who takes the prophecy literally, brushes aside the ambiguous and unsavoury elements of the Grand Master's dream and encourages him to act upon it.

To bring about the fruition of the prophecy and to ensure the people's allegiance to the Grand Master, the Astrologer carries the message of 'the Triple Way or the Way of the Three Beatitudes' to the
people. A new era called 'the Era of Ultimate Greatness' - a euphemism for state emergency - is declared to discipline the people and to drum the fear of the palace and its laws into them. It enjoins the people to beware of the enemies within and without the city and follow the Astrologer's Three Beatitudes. The Grand Master's plans, however, meet with stiff resistance from the boatmen, who find it an insult to be asked to swear allegiance to any human being, and defiance from men like Bhumiputra - a 'scrawny', bearded mathematics teacher who hails from the mud-quarters. A grim silence descends upon the city which is followed by general anger.

A dread descends upon Bhoma and he assures the secretary that he will discontinue his recital. But his cowardice makes him feel ashamed and he is moved to tears. While sitting by the river in the evening, he realizes why he had 'burst into the parable' (C.R. p.154) the first time: "there was a weight on his chest. For weeks he had felt the deadly oppression. ... In proportion to his helplessness his anger with himself had grown until it had spilled out that morning in the form of a children's story. He had immediately noticed the release that it brought him." (C.R. p.154-55)

But Bhoma's fear seems to get the upper hand and compels him to surrender to the authorities when the Hermit of the Mountain meets him. It is the Hermit who helps Bhoma-realize who he is, and his role in the scheme of the Almighty, and finally moves him to action with full knowledge of the consequences. The great Hermit tells the scared and vacillating Bhoma that it is not for himself but for the people that the
latter should continue his recital: "You have been chosen to speak. The
great river has chosen you to speak with the tongue of men what they
cannot hear in her troubled lament. ... Having spoken, you will feel lighter.
The weight shall dissolve, the shackles fall." (C.R. pp.153-54). If men do
nothing but tell each other the parable, the cloud of fear will lift from their
hearts, he tells Bhumiputra. The secretary, the Astrologer, the Grand
Master, and the New Era are nothing but 'the shadow of the evil that
lurks beneath the Seven Hills. And if men free themselves of the fear of
the shadow, and look it straight in the eye, it will 'shrivel and creep back
into the dungeons from where it came' (C.R. p.155).

Bhoma, therefore, determines to thwart confusion from his heart.
He should remember, what he is doing is the will of God in whose hand
all men stand, and that 'whatever happens the Lord will not for-sake
[him], nor will [his] work be fruitless'. He must continue to preach the
parable in the hope that his words will touch the hearts of the 'slumbering'
citizens and awaken them. The words of the Hermit, which contain
reverberations of the Gita, touch a 'vital spot' in Bhoma who, like Arjuna
at the end of Lord Krishna's advice, chooses to act for the larger interest
of the city: He was at peace now. There was no choice for him except to
go on preaching the king's story. But in his recitals the Grand Master sees
a formidable threat to his authority, and a possibility of revolt. Bhoma is
arrested but he manages to escape and abscond to the consternation of the
authorities.
Dharma's father, known universally as Grandfather, is a famous rose-grower who lives alone in his farm on the embankment of the river. The Professor spends his days by teaching astronomy to the city's youth and at nights he tracks through his telescope the galaxies and the planets. Unlike the Astrologer and men of his ilk who compute from the planets the fate of mankind, or those who are mortally afraid of them, the Professor has earned 'complete freedom' in his 'twenty years of friendship' with the stars. He is totally detached from the world outside, the world of politics, and as such he is unaware of the recent development in the city, of the Astrologer's Three Truths and the New Era.

The delay in the prophecy's fulfilment and the growing anger of the people make the headstrong Grand Master impatient. He suffers from a crisis of trust and grows suspicious of his own advisors: "Who is there in the wide world that I can trust? Who can I trust even on the Advisory Council?" (C.R. p.87). He is particularly aggrieved at the obstinacy of the disobedient boatmen who continue to defy his authority and frustrate his plan. Becoming the city's unchallenged king turns into a despot who brooks no protest, no obstacle on the way. Together with the astrologer, he devises a nefarious plan to use the conspiracy of Master Bhoma and his propaganda against a king to secure the citizens' unquestioning allegiance to the prophecy's goals.

The 'hypnotic voice' in which the young man, a former student of Bhoma, relates the children's story as though it were a ballad out of the city's hoary past and he an ancient bard who had emerged from out of the
depths of the Great River to remind the city of a long-forgotten truth, leaves the crowd of naked boatmen spell-bound. And they react with spontaneous laughter and unconcealed derision for the Grand Master and his sycophants. After months of humiliation the boatmen feel in the young bard's recitals some of their self-respect restored. The fear that the tide of derision will continue to swell until it overwhelms the palace itself, moves the Grand Master and the Astrologer to take action. The Professor, Shailaja's brother, and the Headman are arrested and sent to the Gold Mines. The lottery stall, a symbol of protest and defiance of authority, is smashed to the ground. A 'dragnet' is set in motion to subdue the resistance of the boatmen who refuse to take the Astrologer's oath and transfer their allegiance from the River to the naked ruler.

Indeed, the city could have averted the tragedy if the Grand Master and his men rose to the occasion, tried to know the truth and see themselves with the eyes of the citizens. But they are afraid of facing the truth and of seeing in Bhma's parable a mirror for their own thoughts. As the disheartened Rallies Master says to Vasu the journalist: 'A great city is preparing to immolate itself because its Grand Master and his council dare not lose face. So be it. It is better that the city is destroyed than the Grand Master lose face' (C.R. p.170). The ancient city faces its final humiliation at the hands of the ego-maniac Grand Master as the Rallies Master and men of his station become his instruments. They forget their 'dharma' and, instead of being 'slaves' of the city and protecting the helpless and the poor, they choose only to crush them under their heels.
In spite of knowing the truth of the times, the truth that a reign of terror has been let loose to secure the people's allegiance to a naked and evil ruler and that an empire of falsehood is created so someone can become king, they dare not uphold the truth. They do not defy the Grand Master and destroy the falsehood at its very roots for fear of humiliation and persecution. But compromise and submission to the external authority in defiance of the dictates of their true selves, result in degeneration, corruption and self-estrangement. The sense of security they seek to derive by submission and abject flattery is bought at the price of the integrity of the self. This is evident from the dejection of the Rallies Master, the nervous breakdown and 'metamorphosis' of Dharma in the wake of the massacre at the boat-works and the 'Three Truths Syndrome' that bureaucrats like Dharma's father suffer from. It is a strange disease that spreads like an epidemic among the government officials who enforce unquestioningly the repressive measures of the Grand Master and maintain the reign of terror. They begin to detect holes in their reflections on the mirror. The discovery results in an abnormal mirror-phobia and gives rise to the troubled thought that their insides are rotting.

The prophecy comes true as the Hermit's effort to make the headstrong and vainglorious king sees himself and choose the truth fails. While the Seven Hills celebrate the Grand Master's ascension to the throne - celebrations that seem 'to have cut their contextual roots', unrelated as they are to the ancient city or to any event connected with it], and announce the Power and the glory of the mortal king denying the presence of 'a One-without-a-second' and the 'immortality of Time' - a Pitched battle rages between the boatmen and the king's army. In the unequal encounter the boatmen, Bhumiputra, and all those who side with him, perish.
The Hermit before his death performs his last yajna for the retrieval of the troubled souls and purification of the river which is polluted by the Astrologer. And he is blessed with a vision that strengthened his deep rooted wish for the good of the people.

It is the river that triumphs in the end. The deluge that follows the destruction of the river’s embankment and the unrelenting rain turns the river into an ancient sea, like the sea that had first condensed on the whirling planet a billion years ago. It sweeps away in its ‘churning whirlpools’ the entire city including the Seven Hills and the pyramids, the symbols of the outrageous egotism of man and his stupidity. Those who wanted to be king and force people’s allegiance as well as those who, unshaken in their loyalty to the river, fought tooth and nail to resist it, are dead. The authoritarian regime ends pathetically, as the awe-struck king notices his doom in the ‘frothing waters’ of the unforgiving river.

The wheel of Karma, the human cycle of birth, disintegration and death, unrolls relentlessly. In a historically authentic ending, the cycle begins again: "On the ruins of that city, as always happens, a new city has risen. It is ruled by another Grand Master, which, of course, need not always happen. In the new city is another Professor, another Bhumiputra, another tribe of boatmen. There is also another Council and another set of Councillors. The men have other names, but the forces they embody remain unchanged" (C.R. p.262).
Deeply influenced by the teaching of the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*, Joshi looks upon man's life on the earth as pilgrimage, an apprenticeship in soul-making. Man is necessarily a 'foreigner', an alien here and his life's mission is to search for his real home. Homelessness or rootlessness, thus, becomes a dominant motif in Joshi's novels. His characters suffer from cultural as well as spiritual decimation. They are foreigners to their immediate environment and also to themselves. Sindi Oberoi in 'The Foreigner' is a foreigner in the truest sense of the term. He is a 'nowhere man', an uprooted cosmopolitan without a true identity or authenticity of soul that one achieves by being true to the original self of childhood and to family or cultural tradition. Billy Biswas is a stranger to his society because of his failure to identify himself with its counterfeit values and its hollow shams. Ratan Rathor in 'The Apprentice' whose foreignness results from his estrangement from the values of his ancestors and from his authentic self. Som Bhaskar in 'The Last Labyrinth' whose cynicism and costinate rationalism leave him spiritually anchorless. The Grand Master's rootlessness in *The City and the River* stems from his disjuncture or separation from the river populace and all that they stand for.

As a ruler, he is utterly alienated from his community. He is not the leader of the people; he is something totally out-landish in terms of the interests, the concerns and the values of his people. Their foreignness is caused not by any 'metaphysical loss of established order or a shock to the traditional mode of thinking' but by their failure to identify themselves with their environment and by their lack of self-knowledge and right adjustment of conduct. Through their encounter with the labyrinth of life, Joshi's protagonists try to arrive at an altogether new awareness of self and the world.
Estrangement from self and the world, despair and sorrow, and the darkness of the soul are, Joshi's novels suggest, essential steps towards spiritual progression. Most people go through the monotonous routine of life without facing the ultimate questions. It is in rare crisis, when a man's delusions are completely shattered and when he realizes with remorse and heartfelt agony the terrible mess he has made of his life, that he asks fundamental questions about his identity and the meaning and relevance of his life. Cut off from his spiritual moorings and from his authentic self, man feels an urgent need to be restored to them.

He is faced with a struggle that results from contradictory pulls within him. It is through this struggle that man realizes himself and his relation with the world. Withdrawal from life and evasion of responsibility will not solve his problems. The world is a stage of action, where man must work out his 'karma' and fulfil the purpose of soul-making.

Joshi draws upon certain situations which are essentially individual and yet they have wider implications and general relevance. His fiction reflects a deep undercurrent of the contemporary Indian mind through the experiences of individual characters. Though Joshi's protagonists represent only a small minority of Indian society (they belong mostly to the Indian upper-crust), they nevertheless reflect distinctly and honestly some of the important issues of their times. The quest of these sensitive and maladjusted individuals for survival in a materialistic and largely mixed-up society which is unhinged from its own cultural moorings, mirrors the desperate struggle of man to come to grips with reality.
But his fiction is devoid of pseudo-profundity and orientalism. It is written with a keen eye on the object without any attempt to pander to the national self-esteem. Indeed, none of his protagonists is particularly conscious of being Indian as such, although their internal problems are worked out in the Indian setting. They take their Indianness for granted. This distinguishes Joshi's works from the Indian English novels like Raja Rao's 'The Serpent and the Rope', Kamala Markandaya's 'Possession' and B. Rajan's 'The Dark Dancer' that deal with the theme of East-West cultural confrontation. Ramaswami and Madeleine in 'The Serpent and the Rope', Valmiki and Caroline in 'Possession', Krishna and Cynthia in 'The Dark Dancer' are representatives of two different cultures which do not admit of compromise or mutual understanding. But in Joshi's novels, characterization is worked out mostly in human terms rather than through the issues of cultural or political encounter between two countries.

The individual like Sindi or Billy or Som Bhaskar is engaged in an incessant quest to understand the meaning and purpose of his life as well as his identity. But he seeks to apprehend them more through a study of his own emotions, feelings and responses than as a product of any particular education or culture. The protagonist's conflict is presented as a private affair rather than as a conflict between two opposing ideologies or cultures.

Joshi has used almost all the central characters in his novels as narrators. The centrality of their truth being essentially subjective, it can be best rendered through their own consciousness and in their own idiom.
The authorial silence in all the novels is remarkable. But this exclusive concentration on the central consciousness often results in insufficient concretization of other characters in the books. We know of them what the protagonist or the narrator cares to inform us. We know very little about Ratan’s wife and daughter in ‘The Apprentice’, about Rima Kaul and Situ-Romi’s wife-in ‘The Strange Case’. There is no remarkable female character in ‘The City and the River’. The Headman of the boat people is a woman but she lacks feminine grace. Again, the novels are invariably narrated from the male point of view. The opposite point of view is conspicuous by its absence.

Thus the common populace in "The City and the River", Sindi Oberoi in ‘The Foreigner’, Billy Biswas in "The Strange Case of Billy Biswas", Som Bhaskar in "The Last Labyrinth, Ratan Rathor in The Apprentice" testify to the fact that they suffer inexorably from an inexplicable identify crisis. Important characters like Bilasia and Anuradha in the ‘Strange Case of Billy Biswas’ remain mere shadows before the overwhelming presence of their respective heroes. They are always in the background, even though they impinge on the men’s lives and at the crucial moments they perform the vital task of catalyzing the discontented heroes’ progress towards self recognition. But they too are relegated to the background in their existence for they have partially lost their identity. They vanish as camphors in the struggle for existence against all odds. Only June Blyth in ‘The Foreigner’ succeeds in emerging as a self-asserting individual with her youthful vivacity, self-effacing passion for Sindi, and her ultimate despair and suffering. Joshi’s major women characters, particularly Bilasia and Anuradha, appear to assume symbolic dimensions. They stand for the life-spirit in women.
WORKS CITED


3. Radhakrishnan, S. "Indian Philosophy" (George Allena and Unwin: London, 1923) p.76.
Theme of Alienation