CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Arun Joshi, as a clinical pathologist, has brought out the inner conflicts of the modern man who reels under the cobweb of social, psychological and cultural erosions. His protagonists are indeed, archetypal characters who represent the Schizophrenics in general. He does not stop with the diagnosis of this peculiar illness that affect the modern man but prescribes a practical solution by taking recourse to the precepts of Mahatma Gandhi and Bhagawad Gita.

Joshi's "Fictional World" is a revelation of a world where man is confronted by the self and the questions of his existence. This effort of his makes him a great artist of psychological insight. Joshi delves into the inner recesses of human psyche where he finds instincts and impulses at work. He seeks a process of the apprehension of reality which may lead him to the world of the core of the truth of man's life. He realizes man's uniqueness and loneliness in an indifferent and inscrutable universe.

Joshi has carved a niche in his skill to demarcate the human strength as well as his weakness. He marks a definite departure from the general run of Indo-English novelists in many ways. His novels delineate more of human problems than issues arising out of regional loyalties. His condemnation of the industrial, the civilized and the materialistic world is not guided by a sentimental extolling of Indian philosophy and values of life but by a genuine faith in the integrity of the primitive values of sensuousness, passion and action.
It would not be an exaggeration that from the psychological point of view, many readers would sneakingly admit that they identify themselves with some of Joshi's protagonists in their demeanour. Joshi's protagonists are singularly individualistic and completely self-centered though highly educated - some of them having studied abroad - their behaviour is incompatible with the natural laws of everyday reality. They violate norms of social life and indulge in actions which are instinctive and irrational. Alienated from the sinister, materialistic life around them, they try to work out their destiny in their own way. Though successful in freeing themselves from the restraints of their external environment, they remain subjected by the urges of their sub-conscious self.

Arun Joshi cannot be assailed for his frank expression of his observation. He 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".¹

The vissicitudes of life as explained by Joshi find a conviction in the contemporary society reveals Joshi's concern for the society. Joshi has also tried to present in his novels solutions to problems arising out of one's awareness of the lack of the purpose or meaning of life. The most devastating effect that ubiquitous meaninglessness can have is the stifling of spontaneity of the individual's personality, which has been conceived in terms of the "Spontaneous assertion of individual initiative, feelings, wishes, opinion. A realization of the meaninglessness in life is a prelude
to its diagnosis and cure. As Knoff suggests, "the process of creating meaninglessness itself becomes centrally meaningful. Becker, is of the opinion that various states of alienation, including meaninglessness tend to become the proper hands for the quests for value, significance, meaning and transcendence".²

The novels of Arun Joshi prove to be a barometer in assessing the human foibles, and the desperate urge for sexual and material fulfilment. Arun Joshi’s novels are thus increasingly bold attempts to discover the meaning of life. They try to devise ways and means for eliminating the discrepancy between the individual’s pursuits and his fulfilment. Joshi’s heroes are lonely and misfits in the world in which they have to live and face the meaninglessness of life. While experiencing the normal claims of love and hatred, doubts and dilemmas, they try to face challenges of their meaningless life by outstripping the narrow confines of their distraught-selves.

The novel ‘The Foreigner’ expounds the grim nature of human weaknesses and the hollowness with which he leads the modern life. The long and tedious journey of Arun Joshi’s protagonists helps them to arrive at some meaning. The sense of guilt that has oppressed Sindi ever since Babu committed suicide is erased with the traumatic realization that Babu’s father is a cheat of great magnitude. His eyes are opened to the miseries of the world and he arrives at a re-adjustment of his values.
Sindi is possessed by a lust for travel but his travel has manyfold functions. A tireless seeker of truth that he is, Sindi continues "Wandering through the maze of [his] existence" (T.F. p.168) looking for a solution to the seemingly intractable problems of life. The philosophy of detachment, of desirelessness to meet the strains and challenges of life. Sindi wants to move on either to Nigeria or to India so that he could "experiment" (T.F. p.175) there with himself. If not obsessively, at least in a substantial way, he feels that his experiences of life have wronged him, and it is natural that while thinking over "the abominable absurdity of the world" he looks upon himself as the victim of "a tremendous illusion".

Sindi bitten by a fang of the guilt because of the death of his friend Babu, is tormented inexorably. He arrives in India and meets the family of Babu's father, a business tycoon given entirely himself in amassing wealth. Mr.Khemka offers Sindi a job in his firm which he acquits well. But a fresh crisis comes in the life of Sindi, when the workers of the firm urge on him to take over charge of the firm consequently upon the sentence of Mr.Khemka to jail on playing fraud with income tax accounts. He did not want to get involved with anything, anyone and he was through the mist of reasoning - "a line of reasoning that led to the inevitable conclusion that for me, detachment consisted in getting involved with the world" (T.F. p.239).

The wanderings of Sindi have made him realize the futility of the purposelessness. Sindi then settles not only in his business but also with Sheila, the sister of Babu, and "the random absurdity of it all". Even Sheila expressed to Sindi "I thought you had become too detached to get involved in this mess".
The novel 'The Foreigner' has an admixture of romance and fantasy when it depicts the inner and personal life of the protagonist Sindi Oberoi. Sindi is very realistic, practical and clear-headed when it comes to his assessment of others. He likes Americans as individuals but finds life in America mechanical and unattractive. Talking to Babu he remarks "you are in for a few surprises, but Americans are a pretty good people on the whole. You'll soon find friends of your sort". Later, he tells June that he is not made for America. "It is much too sterilized for me. Much too clean and optimistic and empty. One is able to understand whether he takes up this responsibility because of the persuasion of Muthu, an ordinary employee in the firm, or because of his secret love for Sheila.

It can be very well said that the 'The Foreigner' is a study in cross cultures, The Foreigner can be compared to Henry James' 'The Ambassadors', where the working of the personal and human problems against the background of culture follows the same delicate pattern. According to 'The Journal of Indian writing in English' it is "not only novel with a fine artistic vision rendering the subtle complexities of attitudes and the emotions in a language which has verne case and suppleness, ... (but) marks a definite improvement over all other novels in English on the East-West muddle". The novel begins as a crime story and ends as a mystery.

The East West cultural collision is gently portrayed in Joshi's novels. "The Foreigner" initiates us into an elitist world dominated by drinks and dance and clubs by Jazz and rock'n roll, by sex and psycho
analysis by economic, political and military crisis, by discussions relating to mysticism and scepticism, socialism and capitalism. And though this world is darkened occasionally by the shadow of want and hunger and distress, still it remains a world of glamour and sophistication.

Sindi Oberoi a morally fickle-minded person wants to change his total outlook. As M.K.Naik comments that Sindi’s transformation from a detached person into a committed individual is "neither adequately motivated nor prepared for life". The novel explicitly shows Sindi’s rootlessness. It is also the study of innocence and experience which offers us, the freedom of choice in the existential sense of the term.

In the same way, Joshi brings out the susceptible elements that play havoc in the life of individuals. In ‘The Apprentice’, the protagonist Ratan was a criminal and a guilty man. He had willingly allowed himself to deteriorate and had no reason to find faults with the world. The very duplicity, corruption and immorality he had hated in the society had now enslaved him.

The delineation of the character Ratan Rathor is another projection of the depravity of moral and ethical values. "In Ratan, Arun Joshi has presented a brilliant pascalian image of self-deception and self-love in which he holds himself innocent and runs to accuse others for his misdeeds". Ratan faces the reality and learns that one cannot play with life. The fall of Ratan is an act of purification and he accepts his responsibility to himself to regain his innocence and purity. As a part of his atonement therefore he takes to the humble job of a shoeshine.
Joshi makes it very clear that hypocrisy has become one of the avowed qualities successfully followed by most men. In the character of Ratan the novelist seems to project that in life no man has courage to wholeheartedly choose either right or wrong. In Ratan he presents a curious mixture of self-evasion and vanity and self-condemnation and humility. Ratan Rathor wipes shoes well. It is humiliating at times to do such work but apprentices need to be put in their place. The temples look deserted - Frozen, petrified like our civilisation. It is a pity that good is thrown away with rubbish.

The novels of Joshi pave a way for realization of life in its true perspective. There is hope as long as there are young men willing to learn from the follies of their elders. "Willing to learn and ready to sacrifice. Wiling to pay the price of dawn, after all, is a dawn" (T.A. p.144).

The acts of expiation and obeisance definitely bring succour to troubled soul. Ratan himself brings to confession which confirms his self-love and cowardice. He covers up by his humility of action. Before the death of Sheik he tells to Ratan : "My soul was killed, you put yours to pawn. But souls that were pawned could perhaps be retrieved". It is to retrieve his soul that Ratan who has turned morally into "nobody" comes to the temple daily and as he wipes the shoes of the worshippers, he tells himself : "Be good. Be decent. Be of use (T.A. p.148).

Arun Joshi does not stop with exposing the human follies and foibles but offers a remedy for the malady. He has suggested a remedy to life's problems, which are within the easy reach of the common man.
Ratan comes to realize and rightly so that life may well be a zero, but "it need not be negative". He learns the lesson of humility and resignation to the Will of God, doing what he can "without vanity and without expectations and also without cleverness".

The noteworthy aspect of the novel 'The Apprentice' is that in it Arun Joshi, apart from making the exquisite study of the underworld of the soul in people like Ratan Rathor, Himmat Singh the Sheik and the Secretary, not to say the Minister, as individuals has actually covered social psychiatry. The broader topic of this novel is the rotten soul of a whole generation in a nation.

It is much emphasised that one should care for social values and honour. Ratan realises that one cannot live for oneself because no human act is performed in isolation and without consequence. Each act should be performed with a sense of responsibility. Hence out of an acute sense of alienation and a quest to understand the meaning of life, Ratan undergoes the sternest apprenticeship in the world. Symbolically he starts at the lowest-dusting the shoes of the congregation out side the temple every morning on his way to the office. This way he would like to expiate his sins of cowardice, dishonesty and even direct murder. He learns the lesson of humility.

Joshi through his novels, chides the younger generation for their callous attitudes in moral and social responsibilities. The realisation by the young is possible only when they have integrity. This integrity is tested in the fires of existential choice. Ratan has lost his self and felt the
anguish of loss. A pseudo intellectuality creeps in when the protagonist hits upon the solution that there is hope as long as there are young men willing to learn and ready to sacrifice where he himself fails to objectify his observations candidly brooding more on the hindsights. The novel employs stream of consciousness.

Equally poignant is the story of Billy Biswas, another protagonist. In "The Strange Case of Billy Biswas", Billy is a new type of character in the whole range of Indo English fiction. He is not a stereotype of a traditional Indian hero posing wisdom through philosophical speculations but a character effecting metaphysical manifestations. He is a rebel. He has passionate resentments against modern Indian society.

Joshi does not advocate a complete religious outlook but borders on spirituality for human problems. Although Joshi brings in images of God in his novels but he is not apocalyptic, when Romesh asks Billy if he was looking for God "Revolution or God" or "The God of Kurukshetra" as the only way out for India. We have to believe that here exists a world beyond the bounds of reason and science. The puzzles and contradictions of life cannot but be resolved through faith. Corruption and degeneration are villains in the world of Joshi. Fear, insecurity and cowardice are the real evils. In Billy's case the society is the villain.

The characters of Joshi are far from being checked. They are least bothered of being exposed and reprimanded for their shameful acts. Arun Joshi explores the "dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish forever, hidden from the dazzling light of the sun". Life's riddles, can be
solved by an unwavering "trust in the world's mechanisms, this faith that the engine shall not seize or worse, explode" (T.L.L. p.63). The protagonists encounter all these labyrinths, but their groupings in the dark reach an illumination of some sort or the other. Their dilemmas are modern, and their affirmations too are personal. But all the same the novels seem to restate in modern contexts the eternal quest for self-realization and fulfilment and for a spiritual and cultural identity which has distinctly Indian overtones.

The cultural values are poised for a stand off. To the extent Arun Joshi has brought about a sharper awareness of the principal contradictions of the modern Indian society. The novel, "The Strange Case of Billy Biswas" is likely to remain as an extraordinary response to the Indian society. The strange case of Billy Biswas is strange for its distinct quality of representing the authorial voice which Joshi dimly suggested in his other novels. It is however less dramatic, less functional but more intentional of the authors' ideas. This novel becomes an aesthetic sign of his structural principle of uniting the opposite sex, the union of the anima with animus which has a purgatory effect. This purgatory effect is the human reality. Billy joins with Bilasia. The whole government machinery moves to trace Billy in the sail forest. As Billy tries to escape, he is hit by a bullet and dies. Deeply grieved by the tragedy Romi reflects: "What we had killed was not a man, not even the son of 'governor', but some one for whom our civilized world had no equivalent. It was as though we had killed one of the numerous man-gods of the primitive pantheon" (T.S.C.B.B. p.236).
Joshi does not mince words in offering remedies for the sickness of the soul and the body. He suggests a different solution in each of his novels. He does not care to work out fully the philosophical possibilities of his themes. Nor does he try to probe deeply into his characters' psychology. There is nothing very original about the means suggested by him to counteract life's meaninglessness, they have established a tenuous relationship.

As Joshi firmly believes in the Gandhian ideology, he suggests temperance on the part of the human emotions to keep the body and soul pure. The different solutions are put forth by Joshi. He seems to be grouping for the solution to face the meaninglessness of life and his search for it, in its present state, remains indeterminate. His novels go a long way to affirm the value of meaningfulness in life. They seem to indicate that one can realise the essence of life by liberating the self from the clutches of mercenary civilization and by paying due need to authentic calls of the inner being. This seems to Joshi to be the only way out of saving man from terrifying degradation and purposelessness of the contemporary sordid, meaningless world.

Ratan Rathor of 'The Apprentice' wants to elevate his troubled soul. He does not find any other way except serving the abode of God. It is a pity that good is thrown away with rubbish. But there is hope as long as there are young men willing to learn from the follies of their elders.
The confrontation between materialistic urge and spiritualistic yearning find an expression in ‘The Apprentice’. It attacks materialistic values but with a different strategy. Ratan Rathor wades through corruption to arrive at an understanding of life and its affirmations. According to World Literature Today, "the novel is cast in a series of Browning-like monologues to a boy to whom the protagonist, burdened with sorrow of 'a wasted life' lays bare the motives, aspirations, dilemmas and frustrations of his past".

The depiction of Ratan Rathor in ‘The Apprentice’ calls for a thorough study of his psychological imbalances. Ratan’s life not only shows the absurdity and the fittest of the survival of an individual but the humanity in general.

Billy’s case is a tragedy in this sense. But all is not lost. So long there are men like Billy on the earth who, instead of overlooking the malaise, try to pin it down, take sincere stock of the situation and are prepared to make a decisive choice, however painful the consequences, there is still hope for humanity. All of them need not have the vision of Billy; only a knowledge of human suffering and loss, an honest and humble expiation as well as a determination to follow the problem to its end, whatever the cost, can redeem man from contemporary corruption and confusion of values - a theme that Joshi explores in his novel, ‘The Apprentice’.

The confessional note is present in Joshi’s first four novels, but it is only in ‘The Apprentice’ that confession comes to acquire the hero’s central concern. As Thakur Guruprasad remarks: "the narrator in this novel is an insistent confessionalist; confession is a factor in his
But no critic has attempted to examine the larger implications of this mode in Joshi's fiction in general and in 'The Apprentice' in particular. The dislocation in the inner world of Ratan Rathor and his arduous quest for an order irrespective of any external force lead him to an intense self-examination.

The exploration of a guilt-stricken consciousness and the compulsive forces that lead to confession as well as the relevance of confession to the tormented and confused hero are the major concerns of modern confessional novel. The confessional novel is one which "presents a hero, at some point in his life, examining his past as well as his innermost thoughts, in an effort to achieve some form of perception". The confession serves a threefold purpose in Ratan's case. First, the need for confession is an attribute of criminal consciousness. By compelling the young student to listen to his grisly tale, Ratan regains some of the human converse of which his crime had robbed him. Secondly, it offers him the possibility of cleansing his soul of the layers of filth piled upon it during his 'successful' career as a Government official. There cannot be a cleansing of the soul without any clean confession. As Mahatma Gandhi writes, "A clean confession, combined with a promise never to commit the sin again, when offered before one who has the right to receive it, is the purest type of repentance". Finally, through his confession he seeks to achieve a perception which is, however, deeply personal.

The crookedness of the world which he knew was nothing of the two ways that the Sheikh had spoken of Revolution or God. "The Superintendent's God is no use. Of that I am sure. Whose God then? The God of Kurukshetra? The God of Gandhi? My father's God, in case he had

Ratan sought the remedy for his soul’s malaise neither in flight from the treacherous society nor in detachment. He remained in the profligate society of which he was a part and learnt to be of use of others. He began the process of a novel revolution in his inner world by cleansing the filth gathered on it and thereby realizing the God in him whose other name is Truth. The choice was entirely his own taken by himself without any external aid. The means he adopted was selfless service which is, according to Gandhi, the greatest religion of man. In "The Man of Suffering", he once wrote "If I found myself entirely absorbed in the service of the community, the reason behind it was my desire for self-realization. I had made the religion of service my own, as I felt that God could be realized only through service".6

Salvation from the contemporary confusion of values and suffering can be found not in self-defeating isolationism or unprincipled pursuit of material comfort and worldly success but in communal faith, commitment and resoluteness of the humble. Joshi's image of responsible existence in 'The Apprentice', thus, contains a social dimension.

At the end, Ratan, a man without shame and honour - 'perhaps a man of our times' - tells his young and still unpolluted listener that though the present is dismal and the future uncertain, there is still a ray of hope. He pins his hope on the youth of the country who are "willing to
learn from the follies of their elders. Willing to learn and ready to sacrifice. Willing to pay the price". It is the people like the young students who can hold back the tide of this 'frozen, petrified' civilization. The novel significantly ends at dawn: "It is a cold dawn. But no matter. A dawn, after all, is a dawn".

The impact of Ratan's fall from innocence and virtue on his psyche had been devastating. But the experience had enlightened, enriched and humanized him. The sense of nothingness in his beleaguered and benighted world and the concomitant sense of unspeakable agony were transcended by a desire to rejuvenate life.

Submerged in darkness, Arun Joshi's hero is impelled by some inner voice to search for light, for a way out of life's intricate labyrinth. He never gives up the struggle. It is this balanced combination of contemporary experience and aspiration for transcendence that gives Joshi's novel a place of distinction in post-Independence Indian fiction in English and accounts for its difference from Camus's novel that ends in an abyss of nihilism.

'The Apprentice' depicts, in a sense, modern man's crisis of faith in an ordered universe and in God. The first crisis is sought to be resolved here. Joshi turns his focus very elaborately and succinctly in the novel, 'The Last Labyrinth'.
The explanation is, obviously, based on Jung's theory of the union of animus and anima. Until this encounter, which Jung calls 'the masterpiece' in the individual's development, takes place, discontent corrodes the animus. Almost a similar thing happened in the case of Billy Biswas. Billy found no peace in life and was haunted by a mysterious call until he met and got united with Bilasia. At Som's suspicion about the existence of a 'higher goal', the psychiatrist said that religions would not have succeeded so much if a higher goal did not exist.

When Som demanded a proof of the existence of souls, he replied, "We assume certain things \textit{a priori} in all exercises of logic". All this touched Som only briefly. It failed to remove his doubt for good. "But what if nothing like a soul at all existed? What if nothing existed that could not be reasoned through?" He felt confused as nothing was clear and 'at some point on the horizon all [was] mixed up.' Like Billy, he constantly suffered from a facelessness, a blurring of reality.

Through the confrontation of 'the conflicting forces, the clash of opposites' that the complexity of Som's search comes out. Arun Joshi uses these comparisons and contrasts to highlight some of the besetting problems of our time, problems like scepticism, hedonism, loss of faith, anguish of intellectual doubt and spiritual homelessness that westernized Indians suffer from. 'The Last Labyrinth' stresses the need to break out of the vicious circles of self-seeking pride and obstinate rationalism and to find meaning and purpose of life as well as faith in one's cultural and religious tradition. This faith can be attained, the book suggests, only after passing through a painful ordeal and over-coming the impasse of
intellectual doubt through a knowledge of human suffering and through spiritual commitment. In the course of his journey to the mountain, Som meets a number of characters who serve as eye openers to him.

Som's tortuous quest for the ultimate reality of life is worked out in terms of parallels and opposites. Characters, pitted against Som Bhaskar, highlight his inner confusion, vacillation and scepticism by their placidity of mind, composure and inherent faith in life and divinity. Som's mother, Anuradha, Aftab, Gargi and Geeta are, more or less, Som's opposites. His father and Leela Sabnis are his parallels, suffering from confusion, doubts and uncertainties, which are the products of their rational minds and logical approach to life and reality.

It is indeed, 'The Last Labyrinth' is only the enactment of Som Bhaskar's peculiar dilemma and as such it does not provide any resolution. To try to read the ending of the book as ushering in of faith will be serious misreading, an over-simplification. The hiatus between the two worlds - the world of science and rationalism and that of mystery, faith and transcendentalism, represented by Bombay and Benaras respectively, and worked out in terms of parallelisms and contrasts of character - remains unbridged till the end. It goes to the credit of Arun Joshi's artistic integrity that he does not offer any facile solution to the problem and settle the issue conclusively in favour of either rationalism or spirituality.

'The Last Labyrinth' is a deep psychological exploration of a lost soul. Som Bhaskar is woefully aware of the baffling human predicament of being lost between two worlds, of being unable to accept, or quite reject, the one that shakes his disposition with its inexplicable but tantalizing
mystery. In fact, he is more than aware of it; he exemplifies it. It is for this reason that Som’s predicament appeals to the readers so powerfully as a paradigm of the life of modern man.

At the root of Som’s failure lie, his intellectual pride, his excessive reliance on reason and his conviction that science and logic are enough to solve the problems of life. He fails to take cognizance of the basic fact that trust in something other than reason is necessary for mere survival. Som’s way to life is not, like his mother’s or his wife’s, the way of faith; nor it is, like Anuradha’s, the way of suffering. His is the way of stub-born rationalism, expediency and disbelief that results in anxiety, psychic disorientation and a division of personality. He does not trust anything, anybody, not even himself. He does not know, as Anuradha points out, what is right and what is wrong just as he does not know what he wants.

There can be no doubt about the earnestness of his desire for knowledge. His father tells him, ‘But, surely, you want to understand’. He tries to convince his friend Gargi, ‘I want to assure you I am not vain. I am not arrogant. I am curious. I want to know. May be over-curious but not vain’. Som is sure that all his problems will be solved only if he gains knowledge. But there is something fundamentally wrong with the means he uses to acquire this knowledge. He has tried to know God through reason and argument without apprehending the fact that this rationalistic attitude is hopelessly inadequate before the questions of metaphysical magnitude he encounters.
This trust can be attained only by those who have humility and a capacity for self-denial that includes renunciation of egoism and intellectual pride. Such a sacrifice was demanded of Som. He has to pay a price for realization and understanding. This principle of sacrifice, which is at the root of creation according to Hindu cosmology, is embodied by Anuradha. She possesses an understanding that ordinary women can never have. Anuradha's spirituality opens for Som the way to divine light, he seeks so desperately. Her love and faith, that exceed the boundaries of rationalism and logic, provide him with the clue to the intricate labyrinth of life just as the love of Ariadne in Greek Mythology supplied Theseus the means of escape from the maze of Minotaur. But proud of education and ravaged by an insane desire to possess her, Som rejects Anuradha's offer to help him cure his spiritual malaise. Hence she is taken away from him.

If Som Bhaskar is deprived of understanding, it is also because he has never experienced suffering in the way Anuradha and, to some extent, Aftab have done. Joshi, who holds the view that 'it is very difficult to steer one's way through life without God, or at least concepts like right or wrong', looks upon suffering as a means of self-realization and liberation from the labyrinth of life. The protagonists of his novels overcame their predicament and arrived at an affirmative knowledge of life and the world through immense suffering and, sometimes, through encounter with death.

Som Bhaskar, devoid of such suffering and of the understanding that suffering brings in its wake, is lost in introspective solitude. He has lived a life of illusions, of indecision and negation. His invaluable possession of humility lends him strength but his delusion subverts comprehension of reality. The furnace of doubt that consumes him, does
not bring any hosanna of faith. Sanjay Narasimhaiah rightly observes, "A study of Som's character shows that introspection itself is not enough unless there is strength of mind to fiercely alter one's living, thinking and being. It can be an indulgence too, for when one expects him to suffer and learn he gives himself to defiance".

Though it is a special poignancy of Som's predicament that he, like other Joshi's heroes, faces his crisis alone, he rejects Gargi's and Khafka's call for self-reliance. He lacks the inner strength which steadied Billy Biswas in the face of his existential crisis and carried him in a single and continuous course of action. Som cannot take any decision, despite his realization that one has to find the way out of life's impasse oneself. While the other protagonists of Joshi plunge into the dark, mossy labyrinth of the soul for light and truth, Som relies on his reason and intellect.

The failure of Som Bhaskar to resolve his dilemma is, thus, his individual failure. The novel suggests ways through which Som could come out of his ego-centric isolationism and the maze of intellectual doubt. But, proud of his Western education and cynical about the religious beliefs of his community, he refuses to avail himself of them. It is here that Som differs from Kafka for whom there is no way which he can follow to ascertain the presence of God. The Castle represents what is regarded as the 'negative theology' of the age that consists in exploring the mystery of the divine reality and, since it is impossible to know what God is, in defining everything that negates God.
The 'Last Labyrinth' becomes, in the ultimate analysis, a warning against a particular state of mind that, devoid of faith, seeks to unravel the mysteries of life, death, and God through Western rationalism and discursive reasoning. The book suggests that egress from the intricate labyrinth of life can be found not in hedonism or rationalism and self-imposed isolation from one's cultural heritage but in love, sacrifice, communal faith, and adherence to one's tradition that may provide one with a positive framework for individual self-definition and meaningful existence.

In the novel "The City and the River", "Joshi underlines the need to have a peaceful existence which the native settlers struggle hard to achieve. Joshi in an unequivocal terms advocates peaceful means for settling the problems instead of violence. The city is set for yet another conflict between the forces representing politics and religion over the issue of allegiance, 'to God or to man'. But, is there no escape from this endless repetition, this relentless cycle, no end to this periodic disintegration of man and his civilization. Joshi, deeply influenced by the age-old wisdom of his spiritual heritage, believes that there is one, though a difficult one. As the great Yogeshwara says to the Nameless-One, the illegal child of the boatmen grown to full manhood, on the eve of his departure to the city: "The main thing is to prevent this endless repetition, this periodic disintegration. ... The city must strive once again for purity. But purity can come only through sacrifice. That perhaps was the meaning of the boatmen's rebellion". Salvation from tyranny and oppression and egress from the endless cycle of becoming can, thus, be found in the purification
of the soul, sacrifice, complete effacement of ego, and a total surrender to
a higher consciousness beyond oneself. The Divine, the 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 affects not only
himself but also others. Being a man he justifies his actions. He 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, forget his petty concerns, and have the courage to translate his
knowledge into action.

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. For the sake of their ideal, they faced suffering and
death. They did not lose heart and their worldly consideration could not
persuade them to abstain from the struggle. Pure in heart and poised in
the knowledge of the Divine, they turned their rebellion into a 'yajna'
under the guidance of the Hermit and Bhumiputra.

In a sacrificial spirit they dedicated their lives and deeds to the
service of the river and even accepted death, which was unjustly meted out
to them, so that the city might grow and become purified. If the Grand
Master could rise above meanness and egotism and discern the uprising
in the right way, he could have saved the city and its people. Since the
struggle failed due to the obstinacy of the stupid Grand Master who refused to see himself in the mirror of his consciousness and overcome the ignorance of his self-centred ego, another attempt is required. The Nameless-One, the chosen of the river, is to lead this resistance. 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, - the Great Yogeshwara says to the Nameless-One : "In any case we are only instruments - both you and I - of the great God in the highest heaven who is the Master of the Universe. How perfect we are as instruments is all that matters. His is the will, His is the force".

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 Grand Masters. At some point in the historical process, the struggle and suffering of the people will touch the Grand Masters' 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.

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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.

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 egocentric 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 life 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 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, involving suffering, loss, bereavement and sacrifice, but it is not impossible. The 'path is strait and narrow and sharp as the razor's edge'.

'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 an 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. One can aptly remark, "As a parable of political society - the endless variations of the relationship between men and power 'The City and the River' is honest, ironical and rewarding". Joshi has narrated an old story in a new context, and 'The City and the River', despite 'the high quality of imagination that the novelist brings to it lacks the force of the Emperor's new clothes'.

It is also true that the parable is packed with too much details and too many characters, and that some of the episodes could, perhaps, have been omitted without any damage to the main thematic thrust of the book. But these limitations do not detract from the readability of the novel that depends largely on the author's unpretentious treatment of the profound subject, keen observation of men and events, incisive details that make each character credible and, finally, his lucid prose tinged with gentle humour and intelligent wit that flows on smoothly like the easy-flowing river, engaging the reader's undivided attention to the end. The 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.

In the wake of the monumental failure of one system of order, the spirit of hope affirms the possibility of finding another, even a better one. 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 tour de force in contemporary Indian English fiction.

In Joshi's works, the mysterious in life symbolized by the labyrinth is a reflection more upon the heroes' comprehension than upon life in which they are involved. That is to say, 'the sense of mystery ... is a result of the inadequacy of the heroes' epistemology rather than that of the objective world'. Joshi's heroes get entangled or deadlocked with life because of ignorance and delusions. And 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 the 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. Their salvation comes only when they pass through an ordeal and surmount the impasse of doubt, vacillation and, often, self-inflicted isolationism.
It is evident from the foregoing discussion that Arun Joshi's fiction articulates a distinctly Indian voice and reveals a clearly discernible Indian sensibility. It delineates the modernity of human condition in the Indian context and explores some fundamental problems of human existence. While modern in his choice and treatment of subjects, Joshi draws his strength from the deep well of his cultural heritage. I have tried to show in the previous chapters that the reductivist approaches to Joshi's fiction, that subsume his novels in either a psychological or an existential system of interpretation, are inadequate for evaluating the totality of his achievement and appreciating the complexity of issues that his novels deal with.

Although his novels reveal a psychological insight into human condition, psychology becomes, for Joshi, only a means to an end, an instrument for exploring some of life's basic problems. His search is directed towards something beyond psychology. The critical efforts to measure Joshi's significance and relevance to us in terms of Western existentialist thoughts are thought provoking. One can draw analogies with European authors for the resolution of some of the crucial problems that Joshi's protagonists encounter in the novels.

The serious existential concerns that one finds in Joshi's books necessarily justify the assertion that he has produced an Indian version of Western existentialist literature. The detailed textual analyses of the five novels unmistakably prove that Joshi has transplanted the Western man's existential crises to the Indian context and reflected the socio-
cultural predilections of the Western authors. The influence of the existentialist writers on Joshi is more technical than conceptual or ideological. What distinguishes Joshi's works from those of the existentialist writers is their emotional burden and quality of vision.

While his western training and exposure to European and American experiences have, doubtlessly, had their impact on Joshi's imagination, his distinction of his own country. Structured in the immediately native socio-cultural situations, his novels give expression to the psychological moral and spiritual problems of contemporary Indians. He has taken full cognizance of the inter-cultural development in his country and created a coherent fictional universe that faithfully embodies the internal contradictions of the post-Independence Indian society. But Joshi has almost invariably reacted to these problems from his native anchorage.

While writers like V.S.Naipaul, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and Bharati Mukherjee treat the multi-cultural situation "not only as a subject-matter but also as a mode of perception," their apprehension of reality being "affected by the experience of more than one country and conditioned by exposure to more than one culture," Arun Joshi, like Raja Rao, ascertains his deep-rootedness in his cultural tradition. Like Raja Rao who has lived much of his life abroad, Joshi holds tenaciously to an Indian cultural identity and to Indian modes of thinking that shape his content and colour his vision. It is his Indian mooring that conditions his response to experience.
The Foreigner delineates the quest of a deracinated individual, lacking any clear-cut frame of reference and system of value, for emotional roots and spiritual anchorage. Cut-off from his cultural and emotional moorings, Sindi Oberoi finds himself in the predicament of a foreigner everywhere in the world. He drifts from one end of the globe to another in search of peace and emotional stability. He cannot reach out to the world for fear of pain and he seeks refuge in the concept of detachment which he misconstrues as inaction and withdrawal from life.

But his detachment turns into a delusion as he cannot free himself from self-engrossment and selfish desires. It drives him from crisis to crisis sucking in its wake the lives of two innocent persons he loves most, Babu and June. The tragedy shocks Sindi out of self-complacency and re-oriens his attitude to life. Through sincere self-examination and intense suffering, which impel him to face the consequences of his actions and accept their responsibility, Sindi learns that true detachment does not mean inaction and withdrawal from life. It means right action without any desire for its fruit and involvement with the world without any expectation.

'The Foreigner', thus, records the spiritual odyssey of a confused individual from a withdrawal from life to a return to and participation in it. So long as Sindi was lost in ignorance and besieged by doubt, error and cowardice, he could not see himself in his inner mirror and, consequently, he suffered from a sense of alienation from his true self. He felt unfulfilled and imperfect. He could not come to grips with himself and failed to come
to grips with the world. He remained a foreigner to himself, to his soul, as well as to the world. But with the fuller perception of the self and the world that comes in the wake of Babu’s and June’s deaths, he feels reintegrated and achieves a new kind of relatedness to the world.

All his earlier delusions are destroyed and he finds his identity in a spontaneity of love and unselfish act. The withdrawal from the world is only a part of his quest. It is followed by a return. It is like a conversion, a new way of living, a matter of becoming a new man. The revelation of the value of living - as against Sindi’s initial obsession with sickness, morbidity and death-comes with the shock of conversion. And at that moment Joshi hits upon the terms for repairing the tragic loss. This new orientation of the values of life is something achieved by Sindi through desperate struggle and intense suffering. And the successive phases of the struggle provide the plot of the novel.

Sindi is not coerced into this renewed sense of living but attains it by the exercise of his freedom of choice consciously and with the full knowledge of its consequences. And the basis of this transformation is his companionship with the suffering mass of humanity and his willingness to exist as a conscious, responsible being. This transformation is the result of a deep-seated belief in a metaphysical view of life. What in another author without this shared belief to prop him, would have ended in despair and alienation, is in Joshi’s novel transmuted into a positive vision. It is this central operating sensibility that informs and irradiates the novel and accounts for its difference from the Western existentialist literature.
Influenced by the teachings of India's spiritual leaders, Joshi offers suffering as a necessary step towards self-realization. The Upanishads recognize pain and suffering as the 'condition of progress'. Thus, instead of self-pity, he now engages in self-analysis. He experiences soul-searing pain which stands as the final plight of the consciousness.

Sindi lives through the dark night of the soul, the profound abyss of the spirit's chasm and, to quote from Baudelaire, "the misery, the shame, the weeping, the remorse, the grief, the vague fears of those nights beyond belief which crumble up the heart's security". In his interior laboratory the self is cleansed in the purgatorial fire and it crawls free from the past's whorled labyrinths. The invisible trial he faces is the trial of his conscience which pecks and lacerates his soul. And the soul comes out renewed, purified and revitalized like the proverbial phoenix from the ashes of his past. Sindi gains in self-knowledge only when he faces the consequences of his actions and accepts their responsibility, only when he sees his own image in the mirror of his consciousness.

With June's death Sindi reaches the nadir of his benighted existence. But it is not without a ray of hope. Out of the darkness of his beleaguered soul a new dawn breaks. The sun climbing 'out of the womb of the universe' is symbolic of the emergence of a new conscious. There is no cure for this malady and the physicians only advice to the victims in The City and the River' is, 'Exercise your soul. Take it for walks. Let it speak when it wants to speak. Let it rip'. The remedy of soul's sickness is to be found within the soul itself. But the pusillanimous officials prefer to
suppress their conscience and follow the dictates of the Grand Master. In the process, they become further alienated not only from the oppressed citizens but also from their authentic selves.

"The Strange Case of Billy Biswas" continues the human quest for identity and meaning of life. But this time Joshi carries the exploration deeper. Billy Biswas is not concerned with the quest for cultural roots since he is deeply rooted in his tradition. His 'strange case' combines the Lawrentian quest for the essence of human living with the Upanishadic search for soul's spiritual reality.

"The Strange Case of Billy Biswas" is a study in the complete alienation of Billy Biswas from his upper-class Delhi society with its material concerns, spiritual uprootedness and shameless imitation of the Western cultural norms in defiance of its traditional values. It underlines the spiritual degeneration of this society and lives through a rare spiritual rejuvenation in the person of Billy Biswas. The novel suggests the need for a vision-whether moral or mystical - and for courage to make a decisive choice with full knowledge of its consequences to guide man through the labyrinth of contemporary life with evils of materialism, confusion of values, and spiritual decay.

'The Apprentice', a confessional monologue revealing a dark and troubling crisis in the human soul, is concerned with man's quest for identity and spiritual commitment in a confused society. A story of crime and punishment like Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', the book depicts the anguished attempt of a guilt-stricken individual to
retrieve his innocence and honour. Structurally, the novel has much similarity with Camus's 'The Fall' but differs from the latter in its emotional weight and quality of vision.

'The Last Labyrinth' continues Joshi's exploration of human reality and his quest for spiritual commitment at a still deeper level. Som Bhaskar, the protagonist, is a contemporary Anglicized Indian who seeks to unravel the mysteries of life, death and God with the help of science, discursive learning and logic. His Western-trained intellect is sceptical of Indian religious thoughts and beliefs. But his rationalism and hedonistic approach that betray his lack of inner stability, leave him spiritually anchorless.

'The City and the River' carries the inconclusive quest of Som Bhaskar beyond the intellectual level to find an internal system of order. Such an order not only demands total commitment as well as personal and collective responsibility but also offers a hope of salvation from social and political evils. While, the first four novels deal with the complexities of individual life, 'The City and The River' is a parable of political society - the endless variations of the relationship between men and power - and mythic truths.

Arun Joshi makes a universal appeal on the line of Gandhi's teaching. According to Mahatma Gandhi, "Suffering is an inevitable condition of our being". "Progress", he once wrote, "is to be measured by the amount of suffering undergone - the purer the suffering the greater is progress". The motif-quest for an egress from the labyrinth of life-gives
his books a thematic unity, even though one notices a development or progression in his fiction. The novels mark the different stages of this quest. While most contemporary writing in Indian English is form without contexture, Joshi is concerned with the fundamental questions about man's identity, authenticity and spiritual destinations. Individual angst and individual estrangement from society come through in his novels. But he never ends up with escapism and defeatist alienation. He suggests a remedy for the blighted life of modern man without any idealistic overturn or any compromise with his artistic integrity.

Like his fictional creation Billy Biswas, Joshi could not feel at ease in the dwindled stream of modern, mechanized society which is hooked on the pegs of money and unhinged from its cultural roots. 'It irk'd him to be here. He could not rest' - is the epigraph to 'The Strange Case' of Billy Biswas. It is the same questioning spirit, the same unrest that led him to find out ways and means of survival in life's impasse and to search for a better alternative, a life of emotional wholeness and meaningful relatedness. His search was cut short, like that of his hero, by untimely death. But Joshi will be remembered as a novelist who has done enough, through his small literary device to bolster our faith in the future of Indian writing in English and in the values that this ancient country lives by. His novels are significant additions to the literature of quest and reading them will always be a rewarding experience.
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