CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSION
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"The belief in a gradual soul evolution with a final perfection and human life as its direct means and often repeated opportunity, is the pivot of the Hindu conception of existence. Artha, Kama, and Dharma have all their importance, finding their culmination in Moksha or the illumination of the spirit."¹ Gokak's observation in a way sums up the thematic concerns of most of the Indian novelists who wrote and have been writing in English. Rajan's the Dark Dancer, Raja Rao's The Serpent and the Rope, Narayan's Guide, Anita Desai's Voices in the City, to mention only a few well known examples in their distinctive narrative modes articulate the theme. Moksha or the illumination of the spirit cannot be separated from the other three aspects of existence namely Dharma, Artha and Kama. The most vital Hindu conception which involves Dharma, Artha and Kama as a unified scheme of reality is maya. In the Hindu view of life maya does not mean illusion. It only suggests that the self has to negotiate with one reality which has two

¹V.K.Gokak, The Concept of Indian Literature, (New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1979), p. 82.
aspects, the higher and the lower. The texture of lower
sort of reality or maya is a fusion of all the three and
Moksha is the higher kind of reality.

The self while negotiating with maya evolves strate-
gies which are sometimes successful and sometimes not success-
ful. As we have stated in the Introduction this view of life
is different from the Western existential philosophy. But
like the western view this also emphasises the freedom of the
self to choose between various available alternatives. The
dramatic quality of existence implicitly suggests this theme.
In Arun Joshi's novels there is a pattern which makes the
fictional treatment of the theme objective. This pattern which
we have elucidated in the preceding chapters discussing the
individual text may be formulated as follows: The self in its
evolutionary process encounters experiences which have a
therapeutic value. 'Sindi Oberoi at a crucial point in the
narrative confesses, "I worked in New York.... for a few more
weeks, just enough to finish the project I had started. Just
as it had happened after Babu's death the laboratory provided
me a sanctuary where I could forget my conflicts, at least
at the conscious level. But in the inner recesses of my mind
the trial went on. Each day the judges met and examined the
witnesses. My parents, my uncle, my lovers, Babu and June,
their parents, and finally myself, one by one all were
called by the invisible judges and asked to give their
evidence. Under normal conditions this would have been
painful but after the shock of June's death it came as a
great therapeutic process. I felt as if some indefatigable
surgeon was cleaning up my soul with the sharp edge of his
scalpel.² Sindi further continues when I did go out I
walked about the streets lost within myself, unseeing and
unheeding while the scalpel continued to move from chamber
to chamber and tissue to tissue, cutting out much that was
rotting and disembowelling cells which had never been seen
before. It was an awesome sight.³ The above passage brings
to a sharp focus the problematic we have analysed in the fore­
going chapters. The scrutiny of the self which is punctuated
by freedom, choice, action and consequences of the action is
in terms of the text under review is a therapeutic process.
This medicinal metaphor is fused with the surgical metaphor
of the indefatigable surgeon and scalpel. But what is
significant in the passage is that in the scrutiny of the

²The Foreigner, p. 195.
³Ibid., p. 195.
self the self may stand apart may keep aloof and watches the entire process so that the entire movement appears as an awesome sight. Joshi's protagonist in the 'Foreigner' while explicitly stating that he is wedded to the ethic of detachment implicitly chooses that which involves him in actions which have a therapeutic specificity. Although one cannot choose one's birth and the sort of identity it confers. All subsequent actions do imply a choice among a given life alternatives.

The most fascinating character of Joshi, Billy Biswas, forges himself through many difficult tunnels of existence, sometimes making a wrong choice, sometimes making a right choice which proves to be difficult and at one point leading him to disaster. But the disaster also signifies paradoxically the spiritual triumph that clarifies the meaning and significance of what he chose to do. Billy realises that his marriage with Meena is a wrong choice, and so also his secret relationship with Rima Kaul. These wrong choices affect his self so much that he appears to be half asleep. In a passage which has great diagnostic power Billy explains the root cause of his dissatisfaction with the present state of civility.

"What got me was the superficiality, .... the sense of values. I don't think all city societies are as shallow as ours."
I am, of course, talking mainly of the so-called upper classes. I didn't really get to know the others. I don't think I have ever met a more pompous, a more mixed-up lot of people. Artistically, they were dry as dust. Intellectually, they could do no better than mechanically mouth ideas that the West abandoned a generation ago. Their idea of romance was to go and see an American movie or go to one of those wretched restaurants and dance with their wives to a thirty year-old tune. Nobody remembered the old songs, or the meaning of the festivals. All the sensuality was gone. So was the poetry. All that was left was loud mouthed women and men in three-piece suits dreaming their little adulteries.

The above passage seems to offer a clue to the startling decisions Billy takes, which plunge him in a course of action that brings a sense of illumination. The items that are catalogued in the passage and the words dry, mechanically, abandoned, wretched, loud mouth, little adulteries so precisely convey his disgust with the kind of maya in which most citizens live. To put it another way life has lost its poetry but the question arises whether his decision to become a part of a

\[\text{The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, pp 178-9.}\]
primitive community gives him the poetry which he doesn't find in the felicities and civilities of urban life. From his point of view the poetry of life is very much there in Bilasia's primitive community. He tells his narrator friend, "we lived at the subsistence level, what keeps us happy, I suppose, were the same things that have kept all primitives happy over the ages: the Earth, the Forest, the Rainbows, the liquor from the mahua, an occasional feast, a lot of dancing and love making and, more than anything else no ambition, none at all (emphasis added)." Apart from the repetition of the word happy the exclusion of ambition from the normal activities of life suggests that the grip of maya over the primitive community appears to be much less than it is a civilised urban community. Billy's choice for this sort of life suggests that his self has slowly and steadily evolved to a state where there is a feeling of shared communion with life and nature not in the romantic sense but in the elemental sense. In other words a romantic search for the sources of communion are ambitious if not egotistical. Billy on the other hand does not want to explore but stick to what is given.

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, p. 148.
In *The Apprentice* we have an interesting infection of the dynamics of choice in a different narrative mode.

But following the pattern about which we have been talking if we consider *The Apprentice* as a confessional novel Ratan Rathor's confession of his own corruption appears as a therapeutic process. The very purpose of narrating his story to a young cadet and at the same time removing the dust from the shoes heaped before the temple threshold serves the double purpose of confession and expiation. We have referred earlier to what Billy says on the theme of choice. When the self, has all the freedom to choose what is right and act upon it and when it fails to do this however terrible the price it has to pay for it, it is in a state of corruption and there is nothing more terrible than corruption. But what is significant is that not only the self but the entire society is full of it. While Billy wants a life without ambition, Ratan Rathor is full of it. Words like sham, bogus, whore, humiliation, fake and filth and their analogues frequently recur throughout the narrative. "Himmat Singh was born in filth and in filth he had grown." An interesting example will clarify the point. The poojari of the temple to which Ratan goes often has a contractor son whose bills were not cleared by the inspecting
engineer because there was too much sand in the mortar. The poojari is prepared to pay a huge bribe to the engineer and ask Rathod to negotiate it with the Engineer. This suggests that the society in which Rathod exists is a society which has evolved a formidable system of money making mechanism. Rathod has all the necessary conditions and facilities to start his apprenticeship in the pursuit of appropriate choice and a viable action which may validate and vindicate the self. Unlike Billy Ratan fails to rise to the occasion and after a shattering and shocking experience in confronting the death of his Brigadier friend he seriously seeks to redeem himself. The rehabilitation of the self involves Ratan in a different sort of apprenticeship. But the choice to be an 'apprentice' is itself a dynamic one and is in consonance with the pattern we have been discussing. The Last Labyrinth is Joshi's most ambitious and creative enterprise in the sense that while it solidifies the pattern, it achieves a symbolic spread which illuminates the earlier novels. Although Prema Nandakumar hints at its similarity to the theme of Greene's novel which we have also discussed. It appears that the comparison cannot be pushed too far. The Last Labyrinth also is narrated in the first person. But the focus is not on the narrative consciousness but on Anuradha who confronts and modifies it and inter-
interprets it in terms of the dynamics of the choice. The image of Labyrinth and its analogues define the character of Anuradha. Gargi the deaf mute daughter of a Sufi pir is the stabilising force behind Anuradha. Though a daughter of a Sufi Pir, Gargi is deeply versed in love of Krishna Leela and worships Sri Chakra. In the most crucial context in the narrative Gargi propels Anuradha to choose between her lover's death and his survival. She chooses the survival of her lover Som which also means snapping ties with him for ever. This may be a drastic choice, but in the labyrinth of life the self grows stronger and becomes its own labyrinth. When it has a glimpse of higher sort of reality which it can reach by removing the cloak of a maya, a lower kind of reality.

From the foregoing observations we can conclude that Joshi's achievement consists in fusing the Hindu view of reality with the Western Canons of realism which we have discussed in earlier chapters. Although his reviewers and critics have noticed and explained the thematic similarity of his fictions with those of Kafka, Camus and Greene, we feel that his ideational bent is towards the Indian thought. The problematic of existence is suggested and symbolised not in terms of the existential frame work of the European Existentialists
but is dramatised within the framework of the Hindu concept of reality which is constituted by Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. This does not mean that his texts are philosophical or convey a message. What we have in them is a creative articulation of the salient features of our cultural heritage which crystallises itself as a complex and dynamic theme of the self, freedom and choice.