CHAPTER-VI

THE CITY AND THE RIVER

Departure from the Existentialist Path
Arun Joshi's fifth and last novel, *The City and the River*, was first published in 1990. The speciality of this novel consists in its being a departure from as well as a continuation of Joshi's earlier fictional endeavours. The nature of the novel is explained in the blurb of the book which reads as under: "Narrated with humour and a gentle irony, *The City and the River* strikes an entirely different theme from Arun Joshi's earlier novels. At one level, it is a parable of the times; at another, it deals with how men, in essence entirely free to choose, create by their choice the circumstances in which they must live. *The City and The River* 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".

The novel is a departure from the existing oeuvre of Arun Joshi in as much as it is "a commentary on the times" and "apolitical". It presents a critique on the political scenario of the times. There are obvious parallels between the Emergency regime of 1974-75 in India and the one portrayed in the novel. The bulldozing of the huts of the mud-people to widen a street reminds us of many such deeds in the name of beautification, "Sundarikaran", of the city of Delhi at the time of the Emergency. The
power-structure in 'the City' bears a close resemblance to that of the Emergency. The consolidation of power by the Grand Master (P.M.?) to the extent of anointing himself as the King with unlimited powers is reminiscent of the then dictatorial rule in Indian history. The coronation of the Grand Master's son as the heir apparent is suggestive of the then Prime Minister's son becoming all powerful. Likewise, there is a presence of a coterie of fawning councilors, surrounding the Grand Master and always misleading him and thereby remaining in the limelight and improving their hierarchial position in the administrative set-up of the Government. The Grand Master has sycophants like the Rallies Master who organizes rallies in his support to prove that he is loved most by his subjects. The principal-trio—the Commissioner of Police, the Education Adviser, and the Master of the Rallies—formulates the strategy and his syndicate adopt all kinds of methods to perpetuate their rule.

Cruelty and coercion, violence and destruction, selfishness and corruption, hypocrisy and deceit dominate the political and administrative fabric of society in the 'City' ruled by the Grand Master. The events portrayed in the novel are reminiscent of the days of the Emergency in India, the after-effects of which prove as ruinous to the political image of the Grand Master as it did in the case of the then Prime Minister of our country.
Not only the political image is shattered, but the wrong-doer must suffer also. The novelist holds the view that one who misuses power cannot escape punishment. It does come sooner or later. Even if the wrong-doer must suffer also. The novelist holds the view that one who misuses power cannot escape punishment. It does come sooner or later. Even if the wrong-doer succeeds in getting rid of all his worldly adversaries, the even-handed Divine Justice comes forward to punish him. Here in *The City and the River*, all the dissenters absolutely fail in their rebellion. The Headman (who is actually a woman) is blinded and later deserted by her own followers. Bhma's pronouncement that the King is naked comes to a stop when he stays with the Grandfather and afterwards dies when the Son demolishes the Grandfather's house in an attempt to arrest him. The Professor dies because of his fast in prison. Shailaja's brother immolates himself. But when human beings fail, it is Nature that punishes the wrong-doer. There comes a flood in the river and the King "gazed at the vast sea in a stunned silence". (257):

"The inmates of the palace shuddered in horror as the new Grand Master's building broke in the middle and floor, frame by frame fell into the sea. One last wave uprooted the foundations and sent them flying into the sky. The waters swept over the top of the hill and cascaded on the other side in a loud waterfall". (258)
Thus, in so far as the novel exists as a powerful commentary on the political scenario of the post, the present and the future, it rightly claims a privileged place among the political novels of our literature. But in many ways it remains a continuation of Arun Joshi's earlier novels. It is an existentialist commentary on the absurdity of human situation. Like his earlier novels, herein, too, he continues to explore the existential and hostile world. Critics are almost unanimous about this aspect of his novels which have a distinguishing mark of their own and which certainly differ from those of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Manohar Malgonkar and many other Indian English novelists. Madhusudan Prasad observes that "They (Joshi's novels) are singularized by certain existentialist problems and the resultant anger, agony, psychic quest and the like". Inna Walter, commenting on The Last Labyrinth, says that" Arun Joshi plunges deeper into the depths of the eternal queries that have perplexes man's consciousness from time immemorial". Ramesh K. Srivastava observes"Most of Arun Joshi's Hero's are aliened beings". R.K. Dhawan believes that "Joshi's fictional World' is a revelation of a world where man is confronted by the self and the question of his existence".
The main plot of the novel revolves around the theme of power struggle. The Grand Master rules the city by the river and is determined to become its unchallenged king. His schemes meet with stiff resistance from the boatmen who refuse to fall in line with the Seven Hills. Their leader, the Headman, tells the Astrologer: "We have no quarrel with the Grand Master and we have no quarrel with you. If it is a matter of allegiance, our allegiance is only to the river and cannot be shared...". Their refusal accentuates the conflict—the conflict between the city and the river, between the Grand Master and the boatmen, between the urge to dominate and the desire to assert one's identity. This conflict is the life and the soul of the plot.

The atmosphere of the City is absolutely unnatural and chaotic. It reminds us of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. To quote Arun Joshi, "In the city's newly laid parks and along its well-straightened avenues and on the Seven Hills, however, in spite of the chief horticulturist's strenuous efforts, and to the Grand Master's great regret, neither grass nor flowers grow". (136). It is natural that in an unnatural atmosphere like this even sensible persons suffer from certain existentialist emotions like alienation, weariness, rootlessness, boredom and meaninglessness. For instance, there is the Rallies Master who is known to be "an unhappy man", and the real cause
of his unhappiness is rootlessness: "His misfortune lay in the fact that instead of teaching him how to row a boat his parents had wanted him to join the ranks of the brick-people... The boatmen did not have the money to hire him, the brick-people considered him an upstart", (71). The Professor is "weary". (87). Bhumiputra, having been crushed by solitude and burden of human misery, feels utterly alone and alienated: "Bhoma urged him (the man) to stay because he still felt very alone"., (157). He is "plunged... into gloom" and thinks of "his own ineffective life. A sense of overwhelming futility filled him at such times, so much so that he saw no point in living". (174). When the Minister for Trade sees the Grand Master standing "with his face in his hands" and his chest heaving in uncontrolled emotion, he is greatly moved. He tells the Grand Master: "You are tired. In your weariness you let dark thoughts assail you". (203). Dharma's father suffers from "the Three Truths Syndrome, statis of the soul. Atrophy of the brain and locomotor functions". (135). He means that "we have turned into robots". (135). He himself admits openly: "My insides are rotting. I too am just vanishing". (133). Thus, life of a human being is reduced to "a strange sorry tale" (10), comprising meaningless and "pointless episodes" (16) signifying nothing.
In such a world as this, the protagonist is bound to create his own values which determine the way of his life. He rejects the theory of psychological determinism and leads an authentic existence which Sartre regards as "the new and absolute virtue in existentialism". Marjorie Grene aptly remarks about authenticity: "The concept of authenticity is not a concept of adjustment... in fact with respect to the current ideal of the well-adjusted member of society it is truly and deeply a heresy". Judged from this point of view, it is only the poor boatmen living in the mud huts by the side of the river who lead an authentic existence. They are prepared to pay the price they are supposed to for the life they lead. Simple as they are, they are far away from being mere simpletons. They have the courage to be honest and bold and are able to call spade a spade. To the Grand Master, they are both "incomprehensible and stubborn". The novelist tries to picture them clearly: "They are poor, but refuse to work for anyone except themselves... When the Grand Master goes out he rarely sees them greeting him. Where others always have a ready salute for him the boatmen simply stare out of dark unblinking eyes as though he were a stranger... and for their beliefs they are willing to die. And don't let their poverty mislead you into believing that they can be bought".
The high class and middle class people lack in authenticity as they get themselves adjusted to the social status of the inhabitants. The social stratification is signified by the height at which the different classes of people live. Among the high class people, the Grand Master lives on the highest hill and the Ministers live and administer the City from the Seven Hills. Their status varies according to the altitude at which they live. The middle class people live on a comparatively lower ground in the colony of brick houses. The boatmen live in the area along the river bank which is the lowest in altitude. But the lowliest and the poorest boatmen living in the mud huts are the most superior as they do what they feel like doing and, thus, lead an authentic existence. The second category of the middle class people living in pink coloured brick buildings is inferior to the boatmen but far superior to the high class people in this regard. The middle class men lack in authenticity as they adapt themselves to the situation and they do not practice what they feel like doing. They do not protest but comparatively they are not so thick-skinned as the people belonging to the highest class are. More often than not, the middle class men slowly come to confront the reality of their situation. They come to realize their hypocrisy and begin to chafe under the burden of "bad faith" and consequently break down. For example, Dharma and his father come to have nervous breakdown on
account of the realization of the loss of their authenticity. Dharma dresses himself like a boatman making atonement for the faults committed in his official capacity. Dharma's father gradually becomes a complete wreck.

The highest class people most terribly lack in authenticity. They are the most corrupt, morally bankrupt, hypocrites. They are big frauds. The Grand Master declares the Era of ultimate Greatness for the welfare and prosperity of the City, but the main motif behind the declaration is to consolidate his own position and pave the way for the realization of his dream of becoming the King. He and his Ministers practice "Bad Faith". The Grand Master simply believes in accepting the demands of the people but never really intends to implement them. Once he very clearly instructs the Astrologer to issue a decree but not to think of implementing it: "Issuing a decree, Astrologer, does not mean its immediate implementation". (168). The Grand Master and his sycophant coteries of over-ambitious Ministers like the Minister of Trade, the Education Adviser, the Master of Rallies, the Astrologer, the Commissioner of Police, the Commander of the Army, General Starch are the group of persons living at the highest altitude of the Seven Hills, but they miserably lack in leading an authentic life. The Ministers fail to probe the nature of their "freedom", freedom to become "for-itself" or "in-self".
The boatmen prove the authenticity of their selves in Heideggerian and Sartrean terms. For Heidegger, "genuine existence is existence which dares to face death". They safeguard their authenticity in Heideggerian sense in as much as they mock the threats and dangers hurried on them by the Grand Master and his fawning associates. They boldly refuse to take the oath of allegiance to the Grand Master. Their Headman (who is a woman) symbolizes courage, strength and commitment to freedom. Of course, they have to pay a heavy price for their resistance. Their Headman has to lose her eyes. The boatmen under the guidance of the Headman defy the Triple way intended to fortify the position of the Grand Master and force the people to yield to the repressive laws in the name of The Era of Ultimate Greatness, although every night a few boatmen are transported to the Gold Mines where a long detention causes both physical and mental deterioration and where "the idea of the self (is) suitably dissolved". (161). A representative case of the authenticity of the mud-people is the old man named Patanjali who is arrested as a substitute of Master Bhoma. Patanjali's boldness is exemplified in his replies that he makes in an answer to what the arresting police officer Dharma tells him. When Dharma tells: "You only have to apologise and you will be set free", how boldly Patanjali replies: "But why should I apologise? I have done no wrong. Rather the Grand
Master should apologise for making such absurd rules". (26). Likewise, the other boatmen follow the suit. They are imprisoned in the horrible Gold Mines, fired upon and killed, but they do not surrender. They have their authenticity in the Sartrean sense of the term. Sartre says: "For the secret of a man is not his Oedipus complex or his inferiority complex: it is the limit of his own liberty, his capacity for resisting fortune and death". Thus, the boatmen remain free even if they are imprisoned as their liberty consists in their resistance. Bhumiputra, a mud-hut man, stands for all those who are opposed to the dictatorial rule of the Grand Master and his coteries.

Among the brick-people, too, there are some who are much concerned about the authenticity of their selves. One of them is the Professor who gives up everything, including his life, in search of his pupil Bhooma who is supposed to have been picked up by the police in one of their night operations. In spite of the warnings to abstain from doing so, he goes on with his search. Consequently, he is incarcerated in the Gold Mines where he becomes weaker and weaker day by day and ultimately dies. The Grandfather, Dharma's father's father, who rears unique roses on his farm in the barren city, is another person who dares to oppose the powerful rulers. It is he who keeps Bhoma at his farm and, thus, risks his own life. Ultimately, he along with Dharma, Shailaja and Bhooma, dies in the massive attack launched by the armed forces of the Grand Master.
The novelist seems to suggest his own solution to the problem arising out of one's awareness of the lack of purpose or meaning in life. The most damaging effect is the stifling of spontaneity of the individual's personality which has been conceived in terms of the "spontaneous assertion of (one's) individual initiative, feelings, wishes, (and) opinions." A realization of the meaninglessness in life is a prelude to its diagnosis and cure. According to Knoff, the process of creating meaninglessness itself becomes centrally meaningful. Becker holds that various states of alienation, including meaninglessness, tend to become in proper hands quests for value, significance, meaning and transcendence. In *The City and the River*, "only the great river knows the true meaning" (228). The City, however, abounds in "tall structures of steel and glass" (12), but it is "falling apart". (199).

*The City and the River*, shows that the ruler in the novel resorts to two types of malpractice: the mean methods adopted to gain and retain power and the foul means resorted to for wiping out dissents. The Grand Master who rules the City has the ulterior motive of becoming an omnipotent dictator. He pretends to be a benign ruler dedicated to the people and their well-being. The Rallies Master and the Master of Trade act as his tools aiding and abetting him using all cunning tactics. The Grand Master directs the Rallies Master to organize rallies in his support to give an impression that he enjoys his subject's confidence and love. He tells the
Master of Trade to propose in the meeting of the "Supreme Council" that he be made King. The latter is asked to plead that it is in the interest of the people, and not in his own. The Grand Master stage-manages what he wants to achieve with the help of the Master of Trade. The Master of Trade proposes in the 'Supreme Council' and of course gets it approved. In his proposal he says:

I shall briefly put forward certain criteria that the King of the City should meet. First, as already decided, he must be a wearer of the sacred thread. Second, he must come from a family which has already demonstrated its willingness to make sacrifice for the city. Third, he must command the affection of our masses and the trust of the armed forces and the business class.... Now gentlemen, the only person who meets these criteria is our beloved Grand Master. I propose, therefore, that he be requested to accept the onerous burdens of the King's high office. (213)

After having achieved his desire by firmly entrenching himself in the throne in the new role of a King, the Grand Master is haunted by a deep desire to have his son as his successor. The Rallies Master is instructed to
organize rallies for the Grand Master's son, too, with a view of creating an
impression that he also has endeared himself to the masses. In an interview,
the Rallies Master tells a journalist:

And now, journalist, I must gather rallies not only for the
Grand Master but his son as well. The city must now face
its final humiliation and I must be an instrument to it. (76)

The Grand Master now uses the astrologer as his mouth-piece to pour
out attractive arguments justifying the perpetuation of the rule of a family.
The Astrologer tries to sprinkle a spiritual mesmerism on the subjects, when
he argues:

The sacred and mysterious has shown us the light that we
have unanimously concluded the Grand Master must
immediately request his son to help him maintain the
Dharma Rjya that he has established. (101)

The Astrologer puts forth his specious argument saying that by
agreeing to make his son succeed him to the throne, the Grand Master
makes a great sacrifice:

We know what we are asking. We know we are asking for
great sacrifice. No sacrifice is greater than the sacrifice of
a young son. But we know we are asking this sacrifice from a family that has for a hundred years sacrificed its men, its women, its children, its wealth, its very all for the sake of this city. They have suffered endless privation just so that the city might prosper. Such is the family that we are asking this sacrifice of and we have no doubt that the Grand Master will listen to our pleadings. This city needs his son and he must give him to us. (101)

The narrator satirizes the efforts of entrusting a man with power under the pretext of obliging the country. An overt satirization is revealed in the speech of the Master of Trade:

At one go every tradition of the city is abandoned. But even that does not satisfy the Grand Master. He must crown the Son as well, make him an heir apparent above the heads of all of us, put him on the Advisor Council, and in days to come train him for a thousand mischief. (111)

A glaring impropriety is found in the Grand Master's ambition of equating himself with the nation. Again the Astrologer jumps into the scene to promote the evil designs of the ruler. He identifies the scene to promote
the evil designs of the ruler. He identifies the Grand Master with the river. He tells the Headman: "Do not bring the Great Yogeshwara into this, Headman. All I ask is that you also swear to the Grand Master. He and the great river are one". (164) The astrologer's words find an echo in the claim of Louis XIV of France that he himself was the State.

Another example of the misrule of the Grand Master is the misuse of public funds to satisfy the whims of their family members rather than meet the needs of the people. The people have to suffer untold miseries for fanciful thoughts of the wife of the Grand Master who orders to straighten the road, Avenue Great River for no other reason than having a nicer view. She feels: "How much nicer would the view be if there was a straight road running from here to the river". (37) To straighten the road several homes and hearths of the people have to be ruthlessly felled uprooting many just to create a nicer view to the ruler's wife.

Attempts are made to cajole the people to continue to tolerate poverty. The poor people who have lost their home and hearth, in the process of straightening the palace road, have been exhorted to accept poverty on the plea that they belong to a country whose civilization is spiritual rather than material. The narrator says:
The Astrologer issued an order the next day authorizing the homeless to carry on living on the spots where they had their homes as though their homes were still there. The As though attitude, his orders said, was fundamental to spiritual civilization like ours where even kings had preferred the purity of the forests to the suffocation of palaces. No doubt there would be initial inconvenience but, in the long run, all was bound to work out the best. (37)

Brahma Dutta Sarma, commenting on the use of spiritualism to silence the poor, rightly says:

Here spiritualism is being used as a narcotic to keep people homeless and reminds one of the religion which, as Karl Marx put is, was made to work as opium.12

Another horrible step taken by the Grand Master to keep himself in the seat of power is to take the help of the army and the police to frighten the masses into loyalty. These two forces which are expected to protect the state from external threat and internal revolt are blatantly misused for self-protection. The police of the Grand Master are in no way less cruel than the much dreaded Thought Police who maintain law and order in Orwell's
1984. The violence of the police in Joshi's novel is revealed through the arguments of the Commissioner to the Professor:

"If you ask me, the New Era is not enough. What we need is a violent clean up".

"But the people too might become violent?"

"The people do not have the guns. Only we can afford guns, not that we should use them (for anything other than securing justice for the poor)".

"But the whole city is poor," the Professor pointed out.

"That is why we need more guns. This might sound absurd but the fact is that the poorer a city is, the more guns its government needs." (82)

In order to acquire absolute powers, one day the Grand Master proclaims the beginning of a new era called 'The Era of Ultimate Greatness' which is nothing but the declaration of Emergency in the State curtailing all fundamental rights of its citizens. The decree enjoins on the people to beware of the enemy within and the enemy without and reminds them of the Astrologer's Three Beatitudes which remind us of the three slogans of the Inner Party: WAR IS PEACE, FREEDOM IS SLAVERY and IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH of Orwell's 1984. The Grand Master's New
Era is inaugurated with the arrest of a boatman and a clown. The Era of ultimate Greatness turns into the Era of barbarity for the suppression of the boatmen. The Commissioner of Police swings into action at the instance of the Astrologer. Their secret activities for arresting the defiant boatmen during nights is launched. Every night a few boatmen vanish; they are committed to the God Mines -- the dark dingy suffocating underground jail. Here, a long detention causes a slow and steady decay of body and mind where "the idea of the self suitably dissolves". (161) Patanjali is arrested as a substitute to Bhumiputra (Maste Bhoma) because he is not available for arrest. The code of the new Era says: if the actual person evades arrest, then his immediate neighbour would be picked up. Dharma, the arresting police officer, asks pantaljali to apologize so that he may be set free. pantanjali's boldness is revealed in his reply: "But why should I apologize? I have done no wrong. Rahter the Grand Master should apologize for such absured rules". (26) The other boatmen who follow him are picked up by the police, incarcerated in the ghoulish Gold Mines, fired upon and killed. The charges levelled against the boatmen by the Commissioner are that "the boatmen spurned the Astrologer's three Truths, that they have ridiculed him, calling him a pompous fool; and have indeed, burnt his effigies along the banks of the river". (24) It is clear that the boatmen are arrested, hauled into
the Gold Mines and fired upon not because they have committed any crime but because they refused to take oath of allegiance to the Grand Master and raised a voice of dissent against the Grand Master's proclamation of the Era of Ultimate Greatness.

The police also resort to heinous crimes to eliminate the rising opposition by opening fire even on people who are staging a peaceful sit-in which is more horrible than Jalian-Wallabagh firings. The horrible events are reported:

Then all exits were barred from the outside and all lights were switched off. For the next two minutes the machine guns sprayed the pitch dark hall with bullets... At the end of the two minutes the lights were switched on and the gunners were given another two minutes to finish their job. (184-185).

These incidents echo the inhuman gassing of the victims to death in Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War. The irony is that all these horrible incidents are carried on strictly in accordance with the provisions of the decree of the Era of the Ultimate Greatness which aims at a violent shake up to give a more happy life to the citizens. One is reminded of the famous quotation from Lord Action's "Lectures on the
French Revolution": power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely.
The Grand Master and his sycophant coterie carry on this clean-up of the
dnation only for people's welfare and for achieving the real Era of Ultimate
Greatness.

Underhand methods are used by the administration for manipulating
the prices and the trade of commodities. Prinstripe advises the Master of
Trade:

\[ \text{In the light of approaching Festival of the River cooking oil} \]
\[ \text{can bring excellent revenues. Prices can be pushed very} \]
\[ \text{high} \]

\[ \text{If the produce of the Gold Mines is cornered (64) Though the} \]
government needs money, its role is quite different from that of a selfish
businessman. The novelist satirizes the Grand Master's decrees. The
decrees are issued to help the people but their implementation is either
postponed or held up for ever. This is nothing but cheating the subjects.
The Grand Master instructs the Astrologer to issue a decree but never to
think of its implementation:
"Yes, Astrologer, let us decree that all prisoners shall be told their crimes, or, set free".

"Issuing a decree, Astrologer, does not mean its implementation".

(167-68).

New curbs are imposed. The freedom of the press is restricted. No independent newspaper is allowed to flourish. The Professor is informed:

There are two newspapers in the city. One of them is owned by a trust of which the Astrologer is the head, the other is owned by a girl. The girl is five years old and cannot manage a newspaper. It is managed for her by the Master of Rallies. (88).

The entire broadcasting and television system and the satellite are controlled by the Master of Rallies, on behalf of the Grand Master because the satellite is the private property of the Grand Master: In such a situation the people can know only the government's version of facts as the newspapers, radio video and the satellite are controlled by the ruler. The Grand Master and his coterie become successful in spreading the false news that Master Bhoma has hatched a conspiracy to dislodge the Grand Master.
from the seat of power, as near totalitarianism is achieved by the Grand Master virtually seizing the press. The pressmen are strictly warned not to use their papers against the persons in power. The Rallies Master tells Vasu:

unless his underground daily, The Rumblings ceased publication or changed its tune before the Festival of the River, which was only one month away, he would be expelled from the journalists' guild and the businessmen and the little girl who owned the newspaper would be instructed not to give him employment. (74)

Clever devices are invented to harass the dissenters causing them inconvenience in one form or another. The Grand Master gets the boatmen's musical instruments destroyed since he himself nurtures "an antipathy to music". (48) Barbarous methods of disabling the citizens are adopted by the over-enthusiastic coterie of the Grand Master in a determined bid to stamp out dissent. The Headman of the boatmen is "the symbol and repository of strength, courage, honesty and commitment to freedom.... She challenges the intentions of the Grand Master whose mouth-piece the Astrologer is and insists that the welfare of the boatmen is merely a facade, hiding the fact of repression to be practised on the poor". The Headman is mercilessly
blinded. The narrator of the novel described the incident in the following words:

During the night the guards pierced the Headman's eyes with long pointed needles and poured acid into the perforations.

(164)

Bhumiputra (Bhoma) represents the aspirations of the boatmen who are opposed to the dictatorial regime of the Grand Master and his cohorts. For some time he goes underground as the ruling junta levels a false conspiracy charge against him. Bhooma succeeds to a great extent in enlightening the people about the tyranny of the Grand Master and rousing them to open revolt. But he, along with others, is mowed down in an operation commanded by the King's (erstwhile Grand Master) son.

An example of the totalitarian trend can be observed in the Grand Master's policy of population control. He uses, may, misuses the family planning to check the growth of the population of the section of the people who are not loyal to him. He tries to freeze the population of the boatmen as they rise in revolt against him. He decries:

Let their (the boatmen's) numbers be frozen by law... the force of arms if necessary. Nothing else will suffice. (16)
It is further said in the decree that the poor are required to adopt family planning and more than one child to a mother and more than two children to a family are declared illegitimate because of shortage of foodgrains. But the Headman questions:

It is not true Astrologer, that the city's granaries are full?

And is it not a fact that out of the mud-people the city shall always extract work equal to what it feeds them even as it is done to the animals, even though that cannot be said of the brick-people or their children? (20)

The fact is that there is no shortage of food, but the boatmen are poor and therefore they cannot afford to buy the goodgrain which is easily available to the brickpeople and the ruling elite.

The greatest tyranny in the novel is that the wrong doer blames the victims even for his repressive measures and their attempts to direct the people's ire towards the dissenters. The novelist attempts to satirize the Grand Master when the latter chooses to blame every boatman for his using police and army against him: "He forces us to beat him with sticks and fire bullets and lasers into him. He forces us to call out the army". (58)
At last though the Grand Master succeeds in wiping out the dissent by employing inhuman and barbaric devices he cannot escape undergoing punishment in this life itself. Arun Joshi believes in the Divine justice. Though the human beings fail, Nature uses water, one of its elements to punish the guilty. The King (erstwile Grand Master) becomes helpless as floods of the river continue to rise:

The waters now reached the top of the fourth hill on which the new Grand Master stood. A wave went up encircling the base of the building... Waves nearly as high as the building rose in quick succession and threw a lock around the shining structure. The inmates of the palace shuddered in horror as the new Grand Master's building broke in the middle, floor by floor, frame by frame fell into the sea. One last wave uprooted the foundations and sent them flying into the sky. The waters swept over the top of the hill and cascaded on to the other side in a loud waterfall. (157-58).

Thus, Joshi's novel, The City and the River is a marvellous satire comparable with George Orwell's great satire 1984. The Grand Master with his ambition of becoming the king lets his coterie adopt ruthless measures to crush the masses, stifle all dissent. A corrupt regime -- where
nepotism is rampant -- is revealed to the reader though the ruling janta often argues in favour of the Era of Ultimate Greatness. Referring to the irony and satire, Usha Bande rightly comments on the events in the novel:

Nearer home, the events portrayed here have obvious links with the Emergency time of India, at human and universal level, it is the exposition of human folly and the futility of human aspirations devoid of moral codes. The novel lashes out at corruption in public life, selfishness of the rulers and the political shenanigans of the cronies. It is interesting to note that the author achieves his goal of delivering his message without giving us psychologically realized characters.\(^4\)

The City and the River is clothed in an allegorical attire. The novel has archetypal characters in some important roles. In his earlier novel, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, allegory is employed to some extent, in the character of Bilasias, the tribal woman showing her as the embodiment of the primitive force, as the mythical queen that resides in the Kala Pathar and as the Devi mata.
But *The City and the River* consists of only archetypes rather than individuals in order to give a mythic proportion to the novel. The novel has nine chapters besides a prologue and an Epilogue. At the opening, the prologue recounts the last day of the Nameless-One with the Great Yogeshwara his teacher. The Great Yogeshwara gives initiation to his pupil, the Nameless-One on his thirtieth birthday by revealing to him who he was. And in the Epilogue of the 250-page hoary account of the city and its final doom, the Great Yogeshwara commissions the Nameless-One to go and prevent the "endless repetitions" and "the periodic disintegration" (262) of the city and its people. Thus the story ends where it begins. The city has grown over years, it sees ups and downs and is ruined by human stupidity. Like an ostrich rising from its own ashes, a new city grows on its ruins with its Grand Master and others. The Great Yogeshwara explains this phenomenon, of human continuity to the Nameless-One:

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, and the Bhumiputra, another tribe of boatmen. There is another Council and another set of Councillors. The men have other names but the forces they embody
remain unchanged. And into all this when you go you will, perhaps be known as another hermit of the Mountains. And it is possible you will have disciple whose name will be Little Star. (262).

The Nameless-One reappears at the end. His reappearance signifies a hope for the future of humanity, assuring us that the Messiah has the power to stage a come-back through the esoteric region which assures the continuity of the mankind.

Symptoms of human continuity are shown through a number of archetypal symbols. The Hermit of the Mountain is the "Old Wiseman" and the saviour of the mankind. He saves the "illegal" child by his timely action and the child is rafted across to the Great Yogeshwara. Like Christ, the child is a chosen one who is sent with a mission to purify the city of its "egoism, selfishness and stupidity". (263) The child is made to pour "ahuti" into the Yajna performed by the Hermit. In this process he gets purified by the fire. The Yagna also absolves the Astrologer from blasphemy. The Hermit carves out the future course of the boy and reveals the region beyond the Seven Hills in a sort of vision to the people. The people are dazzled by the glow of the peak. This symbolizes the Hermit's own purification by the
fire of the *Yagna*: then he hears the Divine music and prepares himself to face the ordeal of the water and he is engulfed by the great waters. The certainty of the Nameless-One becoming the future Hermit is indicative of the Hermit's psychological re-birth.

The Great Yogeshwara is also an example of the archetypal symbol. He stands for the "Puran Purusha" and his disciple, the nameless-One represents Menu on the day of the Great Delug -- *Pralaya* -- saving the Vedas (here the box containing the prophecy). It can also be viewed from another angle. The Great Yogeshwara appears like Lord Krishna telling Arjuna the gospel of 'duty', by revealing to him the mystery of the human existence and of the universe. This becomes clear to us when the Great yogeshwara gives him "a heady eliir" and when the Nameless-One drinks it, he feels "as vast as the sky and as tall as the mountain" and hears a "music" coming from beyond the stars. Only after this revelation, the pupil gets ready for his initiation. Both the Great Yogeshwara and the Nameless-One are "instruments... of the great God... who is the Master of the Universe."

(264) The Great Yogeshwara analyzes the divine scheme. The Great Yogeshwara is ageless -- the Nameless - One is the hermit of the future city and he will have the Little Star as his pupil. Three will stand for divine activity, whereas the Professor and his student Bhoma represent the human
spirit and the parrot symbolizes the spirit of nature. This mystery can only be glimpsed but never seen.

Another allegorical symbol is the river which is the mother of the boatmen. The boatmen owe their total allegiance to the river, which they believe, protects them like a mother. For them the river "is a symbol of divine mother, of God himself." (22) They are the "children" of the river and are prepared to sacrifice themselves for her. On her part, the river speaks to is children when they are in trouble. The Professor hears her many times and he turns to her for help in times of need. It is like Bhishma seeking help and guidance from his mother, Ganga in the Mahabharata. The Hermit performs his Yajna to purify the "mother, the great river". (249) Though the river is a protecting mother, it grows wild when people go wrong and becomes a destructive power, too. That does not mean that she is life-negating. She carries the child on her bosom and bears him to the Great Yogeshwara who trains him to become the saviour of the city.

There are several questers in the novel -- Bhoma is in quest of peace after the disturbing events, and the boatmen go on water in quest of their livelihood. The real quester is the Nameless-One. The raft carries him as an illegitimate child and brings him back like an illuminated one. The Nameless-One becomes the Great Yogeshwara's disciple, gets illuminated, under his training and returns in the same raft to restore peace and order in
the widespread gloom and chaos. As Usha Bande puts it, the Nameless-One
"is thus a Messianic-figure whose mysterious birth is followed by an
epiphany and who is trained to face setbacks, betrayals and the final
sacrifice".15

The city is a living presence and so is the river. The city also acquires
an allegorical touch as it has got its own "horoscope" brought out clearly in
the following dialogue between the Hermit and Shailaja's brother:

"Was it you who made the prophecy?" (asked Shailaja's brother).
"No'. (Hermit)
"But you know its meaning?"
"It is written in the horoscope of the city. I have seen the horoscope.
Yes"

"There is one man in the city, it is said, who knows the meaning. Are
you the man?"
"There are two men in the city who have seen the horoscope. They
give it different meanings".
"Who is the other?"
"The court Astrologer".
"And who are you, if I may ask?"
"Some call me the hermit of the Mountain."
"And what is your meaning?"
"I don't know the whole meaning.... Only the great river knows the true meaning." (228)

Thus the full meaning of the city's horoscope is known only to the river. The river and the city, thus stand as two shining allegorical symbols.

The novel presents both the apocalyptic and the demoniac spirit in the human world of the unnamed city. The Grand father's rose garden is a state of purity and innocence: it is destroyed by the Satanic forces of the Grand Master's son. The Seven Hills stand there as a symbol of both mythic heights from where a benign king is supposed to reign and the Mephistophilian regime with sinister designs to inflict sufferings on the masses. The city has its ghoulish dungeons called the Gold Mines. Here men are incarcerated, inhumanly tortured and finally killed. It is Dante's *Inferno*, an earthly hell. The demoniac city has its two diagonally opposite poles. One individual pole is the tyrant-leader, inscrutable, ruthless, melancholy and with an insatiable will, who commands loyalty, the other pole is the *Pharmakos* or sacrificed victim who has to be killed to strengthen the others. Thus the Grand Master and his hellish machinery create a "sinister" atmosphere in the city.

The plot of *The City and the River* reveals itself at three distinct levels: the mythic, the primitive and the modern. The Great Yogeshwara,
the Nameless-One, the Hermit and the Little Star and the river represent the mythic element. The primitive forces are symbolized by the boatmen, their rites and rituals and the modern element is found in the "weapons" -- the lasers and the other machines of war. These three elements are incredibly interwoven into the structure of the novel by Arun Joshi, who "creates the measured rhythms of myths, legends and archetypes to make his work realistic despite the absence, of psychologically-realized characters". If we view the novel from the realistic angle, it is an indictment of the social and political chicanery and at the archetypal level it is a quest for truth. Subhas Chandra rightly remarks;

Using the strategies of allegory, irony and satire, Joshi dexterously weaves a tale which is a mixture of fantasy and stark realism with a view to communicating the horrors and terror that are unleashed on a society, when a handful of individuals become overtly ambitious and selfish.

Indeed those who have developed a fancy for the vitality and psychological realism of the earlier novels of Joshi may well feel a tinge of sadness when they peruse the new work. The peregrinations of a philanderer variously depicted having come full circle already, Joshi's attempt to try his hand in a new fictional experiment is perhaps but natural.
Thus this novel, *The City and the River* reflects Arun Joshi's newer path in satire and allegory. "The novel", as R.K. Dhawan puts it, is "evidence of Joshi's 'road not taken', for in this work he turns his focus from the private to the public. And in this, he is following the contemporary vogue of writing a political novel with a theme that holds good for all times"\(^\text{18}\). The novelist fails in characterization. The characters do not develop spontaneously. They lack psychological depths. Joshi leaves them as archetypes than developing them into individual characters. However, as Anup Beniwal puts it, "the novel is a powerful and pungent comment on the political scenario that was, that has been and that shall be. This novel surely claims a pride of place among the political novels of today"\(^\text{19}\).
REFERENCES


11. E. Becker, The Birth and Death of Meaning (Glencee, Ill, Free Press, 1962), Chs. 3 & 8.P.


15. Ibid., P. 262.

16. Ibid., P. 263.

