Chap V

Healing of the Self

Joshi delves into the inner recesses of human psyche where he finds emotions, impulses and instincts at work. It would not be out of place to mention that for a brief period in 1957 he worked in a mental hospital in the United States where his uncle was a psychologist. His sensitive mind was impressed so much that we find his chief protagonist describe an inner life within the underworld of the soul divided against itself, In an essay entitled "Books" Josef Conrad discusses the novelist's craft, while recognizing that the genius of the creative process is inescapable from the artist's initial perception, he tells the artist not to restrict himself to experience of his own imagination in violation of the actuality of human experience.

In truth every novelist must begin by evolving for himself a world, great of little, in which he can not be made other than in his own image: it is bound to remain original and mysterious and yet it must resemble something already familiar to the experience, the thought and the sensations of readers. (Conrad, Notes on Life and Letters 6)

The artist, while creating his own world, must be cautious so as not to force his own sensitivity in to some too-convenient a pattern. That is, he might project mere reality. Conrad recognizes a reality beyond the phenomenal world, a reality which the artist could imagine and capture by giving a consistent form to shapeless facts of actual human existence.

Arun Joshi's fiction is in tune with Conrad's conception of the novel. The source of most of Joshi's novels is actual experience. Joshi, the artist, however, is not satisfied merely with restating experience in a coldly scientific fashion. He feels a need to give shape to it, a need to discover the reality which was hidden in the
actuality of his own self. For him, the fiction is neither a source of entertainment not an instrument of propagating some set of ideas. Unlike, M. R. Anand, he does not use his genius for propagating any political or social creed, nor does he escape from the realities of human struggle and seek relief in an imaginary place as R. K. Narayan does. Joshi is against writing fiction according to a set formula. Instead he is seen struggling with the moments of acute trying situations in human life. His experiments with the medium of literature for studying man's predicament particularly in the light of motives are responsible for his action and the reaction on his action of his psycho.

In this connection Joshi remarks, "My novels are essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and of myself"(Reply to M R Dua).

Joshi's fictional world is revelation of a world where man is confronted by himself and the question of his existence. His search is directed at the unknown region of uncertainty. This effort on his part makes him a great artist of psychological insight. Reading Joshi's novels is not always a smooth experience, there are moments when one is faced with doubts and questions. Joshi has thus widened the scope of his fiction by taking up issues that concern larger humanity rather than some individuals. His clever use of allegoric mode and the legend as a vehicle for political satire lend a new charm to the fictional mode. In his novels, Arun Joshi portrays a world where man is confronted by the self feeling fractured and fragmented under the burden of many unanswered questions and problems concerning the self. Living in an era of rampant materialism and individuality his protagonists are unhappy people. Their material prosperity, academic achievements artificial life-style fails to lead them to a state of peace within and calm around. Sindi Oberoi, Billy Biswas, Ratan Rathore, and Som Bhaskar all lonely and desperate and defeated people who are painfully aware of the mess they are in and are oppressed with the "sadness of living". (Dhawan
In the struggle for survival they find themselves in a wilderness where W. B. Yeats would describe: "Things fall apart The centre can not hold ",(1-2).

All the order is gone out of their life. There is no pain, no peace, nothing to keep them within the pattern of everything living. In such a state, they seem to undergo the crisis of faith where they are lonely, alienated, isolated striving for the meaningfulness in life. Joshi is confronted by acute trying situations in human life. The loneliness of the contemporary man arising out of the crisis of the faith and the quest for harmony and peace is articulated in all his novels.

Arun Joshi's The Foreigner (1968) examines the problem of alienation, isolation and involvement and man's despair at being unable to find a meaning in existence and attempts to explore his self so as to seek relief. Sindi Oberoi, a young man, who is detached, almost isolated sees himself as a stranger wherever he lives or goes - in Kenya where he is born, in England and America where a student is, and in India where he finally settles down. His detachment transcends barriers of geography, nationality and culture. It leads him from one crisis to another affecting in the wake of several other people, including June, the chief female protagonist. Meenakshi Mukherjee describes the hero of The Foreigner as "a perennial outsider" in her review of the novel (Meenakshi 202). She rightly observes that Sindi is an alien everywhere physically as well as metaphorically. He is an existential character always engaged in exploring his own self and finding relief in a world where everything is chaotic. He is rootless, restless and luckless in a mad bad absurd world. He belongs to no country no people, and regards himself as an uprooted Youngman living in the old half of the twentieth century, who has become detached from everything except him self. He is brought up by his uncle settled in Kenya. Rootless as he is, his life takes him to London, Boston and New Delhi. He has his education in London where he meets
Anna, a minor artist separated from her husband. He has an affair with this artist who longs neither for him nor anybody else but for her lost youth. Later he gets deeply involved with Kathy, an English housewife who hungers for adulterous love. She leaves Sindi after carrying on with him for six months and goes back to her husband because ultimately she realizes that marriage is sacred and has to be maintained at all costs.

These two lasting impressions of his life have taught him to practice detachment and non involvement in human existence, which cost him dearly when the final crisis of his life approaches. He goes to Boston as an engineering student and meets June, an attractive young American woman at a foreign student's party. He is reminded of Kathy but the darkness of June's hair draws her to him, gets infatuated by her beauty and has a short lived but passionate affair. His loneliness is apparent to anyone who meets and talks to him. Sindi is trapped in his own loneliness which is heightened by his withdrawal from himself and from the society around him.

The novel deals with the Life of Sindi Oberoi, a young man in search of his roots and meaning of life. He is a foreigner not only to the cultures between which he shuttles but also to his self. At the deeper level, The Foreigner can be viewed as an attempt to protect man's perennial dilemmas. He doesn't have the courage or the capacity to love. His alienation is of the self and not of geography. He is an orphan both in the terms of relations and his emotional roots. As he himself confides, "his foreignness lies within him" and drives him from crisis to crisis making it difficult for him to leave himself behind wherever he goes. Right from the very beginning, he is oppressed by a desire to find the meaning of life so that he finds relief and heal the wounds that are out to destroy him. He himself wants to do something meaningful. While gathering experiences in life, however, he becomes convinced of the
impermanence of things. He tells June that nothing ever seems real to him. His entire
life is geared around his quest for permanence in life. He argues with June on the
necessity of marriage and comes to a conclusion that "Marriage is more than lust of
possession than anything else. People get married as they buy new cars. And then they
gamble each other" (*The Foreigner* 60).

From his earlier experience in London with Anna and Kathy he has derived
conclusion firms of his opinion:"One should be able to look without wanting to
possess. One should be able to detach himself from the object of one's love" (*The
Foreigner* 60).This is the essence of life he has learnt from these women with whom
he earlier fell in love. Their separation has caused him severe pain and taught him the
lesson of detachment and non-involvement. His affairs with them have just fizzled out
like an ill-packed cracker.

The arrival of the British in India provides us with the context of two
civilizations coming into contact. One acting on, the other acted upon. One proud of
its past and content with its progress, the other nearing a stage of stagnation and
exhaustion, especially compared to the former. In the encounter between India and
Britain, each gained to a considerable extent that one of the fall outs of this tension in
togetherness was the de-culturation of India. The rapid industrial and scientific
developments, the westernization of life in the urban areas of the country and the
increase of consumerism are the main aspects of civilization with its modern approach
and changing tactics. This civilization has given rise to materialism. The materialistic
approach is termed as modernism today. With the advent of modernism man's inner
self continued to be affected by discontent, despair and lack of faith in the traditional
values that had sustained an entire generation before independence. The art of leading
a peaceful life without tensions, introspections, dwelling inside, maintaining human
relationships can be combined together to call primitivism is nothing but a revelation of modern man's alienation from his deepest self and from nature.

Corruption in the social life or the substitution of ideals by deals reflects the temper of modernity. In fact the English did not nearly destroy the native cultural values of India; the western culture distorted the very fundamentals of the tradition of India. The achievement of new goals, of money, career and power by any means was in fact the result of the process of urbanization and modernization under the influence of the west. Modernism has brought with it a growing sense of loneliness, purposelessness and drift whereas primitivism reaffirms a strong urge for re-integration and a sincere and passionate struggle to recover the lost vitally and wholeness of being. It is an established fact that things in this world keep changing. Even our priorities and the process with which we identify ourselves change with the passage of time. Arun Joshi is exposed to both the cultures. The present generation is facing the conflict between modern civilization and primitivism. Joshi has explored the reality of cultural interaction and has located its significance in Indian life. In his fiction the encounter of cultures doesn't come up directly. It is present in the concept and conflict of tradition and transition and in the juxtaposition of the materialistic, rational view of life, and by spiritual side of life.

Joshi' protagonist's face the problem of barren, modern sophisticated society and hanker after the inner peace to be found in the simple life. Sindi Oberoi is seen battling with the conflicts of life, existence, involvement, and detachment. The novel is an existential quest to find a meaning in the absurdity of life. The so called civilized world has created lots of problems including the destruction of self. Naturally, when the self is wounded or looses its existence, it gives hurt to the person concerned. Sindi Oberoi finds his own self out of tune with itself. He is in search of something
which can heal his wounded self. Primitivism or the simple life finds favor with him. Sindi goes on from land to land because he finds his life meaningless and rootless. He considers his life to be full of illusions and is unable to fix up his roots. His problems multiply when he feels insecure. For an insecure man, everybody around him is an enemy and everything is purposeless. Sindi's case is not a study of an individual but the whole lot of mankind suffering from the modern malady of cultural estrangement, social isolation and self interest. In fact, he is in search of a cure which can restore him to himself. He confesses to Mr. Khemka that he has no sense of morality and that he does not belong to any culture. He realizes vanity of his thinking in his dialogue with Mr. Khemka, “You had a clear-cut system of morality, a caste system that laid down all you had to do. You have a God, You have roots in the soil you lived upon. I have no roots. I have no system of morality. What does it mean to me if you call me an immoral man?” (The Foreigner 143).

Sindi's life in Kenya, London, or Boston and varied experiences he undergoes illustrates his predicament. Sindi clings to a false image and deceives himself with the idea that he has developed the spirit of detachment. In truth, he lies to himself like the pipe-dreamer of O-Nill in The Iceman Cometh. He finds that in the civilized society there is no end to suffering, no end to struggle between good and evil. He is conscious of the absurdity of human rituals. Sindi's feeling of futility and meaninglessness of life is pervasive and he spoils his relationship with June. On the other hand, Babu had given her all that she needed. He had his roots in Indian soil. In America he tries to play around with girls but he forgets that memories and roots are like fortifications in one's self and they may destroy one in the process of disowning them. June fluctuates between Babu and Sindi. She can not put up with Sindi's philosophy of detachment and transistoriness of love. The false detachment of Sindi drives Babu to death. When
he learns that June had been yielding to Sindi, he kills himself. In Babu's death, oriental innocence is destroyed in the strange ways of the western world. June's death is a symbol of a face of cultural disharmony. She has left the American world without becoming familiar with the oriental universe. Sindi makes the mistake of withdrawing himself from June, his life his life force. Laing affirms that a man suffering from this "goes round in circles in a whirl, going everywhere and getting no where" (Laing 128).

Kenya, London, Boston are not more than whirls for Sindi. His relationship with Anna, Kathy and June has not brought him out of the labyrinth of meaninglessness. It is in India, his ancestors's land, the land of simple life and high thinking, that he is able to project an authentic self for himself out of the dilemma of being and not being. It is very essential that Sindi should cure himself of the malady and heal the wounds that have gone deep into the inner recess of his self. In the modern civilized world Sindi thinks that marriage more than a lust for possession than anything else. People get married just as they buy new cars and then mix each other up. Sindi does not know that a person who runs away from his duties has nothing in store but pain. Sindi does not want to discharge his duties and feels the pangs of pain time and again. Detachment in Sindi's case is another name for inaction. It amounts to doing nothing. It is the best way of running away from one's duties and responsibilities and yet feels happy in the thought that he has been able to detach himself from everything worldly and mundane. He admits that detachment at that time "had meant inaction. Now I have begun to see and not escape from it" (The Foreigner 204).

The journey from Boston to India finally becomes a shift from alienation to arrival. Sindi is akin to existential heroes like Meursault and Roquentin in presenting crisis of civilized world, but he differs in his basic human element, his inner urge and
restless quest for peace. He is now guided by a mystic drive. The symbols of hill, the river and the sun indicate that Sindi is on the right path of becoming, i.e. he is in the process of healing the wounds that have been torturing him for days together. The dawn breaking the dark water is the breaking of the darkness within him. At the start, his experiences in India are obviously not much different from those in the west. Only the theatre has changed, the show continues. But gradually Sindi's understanding deepens and he gets rooted in the world of the miserable that live in rags. Human suffering purges him, awakens him to the real meaning of detachment. In India, Muthu, who is really a Karmayogi, becomes the human voice of the divine truth. It is from him that Sindi learns of Karmayog. What has been puzzling before Sindi earlier now gets washed in daylight. He has now come to learn that detachment does not mean running away from one's self, but to confront it, and if possible to restore it to its rightful place and liberate it from all the assaults that it may have received from time to time. Sindi now believes that detachment means involvement, devotion and sacrifice. He finds his roots in Indian soil and Indian culture. It is this primitive, simple life that gives a meaning and significance to his existence and which ultimately acts as a healing factor so far as his self is concerned.

Almost all of Joshi's novels depict the peculiar predicament of the protagonist's figuring in his novels. The Strange Case of Billy Biswas tells the story of the desperate quest of its protagonist Billy Biswas for the meaning of life which lies not "in the glossy surfaces of our pretensions but in those dark messy labyrinths of the soul that languish for ever, hidden from the dazzling light of the sun" (The Strange Case 8). Biswas' case is strange in that it is that of a rich, sophisticated and brilliant young man who, returning from America with a Ph.D. in Anthropology mysteriously disappears into the tribal wilderness of central India to be found when
'dead' literally and figuratively. His story is narrated by his Collector friend, Romi Sahai, who says that he has felt an overpowering urge to recall and relate because of his sense of wonder. He becomes a part of the tribal world. In order to know the meaning of life and also to know his own self which stays wounded. It is also his effort to heal his wounded and fractured self which has been engaged all along in the pursuit of the meaning of life.

Billy thinks that to pursue the meaning of life in this so-called materialistic world would bear no fruits. It is not surprising that when he is sent to America to pursue his research for the Ph.D degree in Engineering, he takes up research in Anthropology defying his father who believes that man should be governed by only engineering and law and nothing else. Further, in America disillusioned with white America which is too civilized for him, he goes to live in the slum area of Harlem in an apartment which the narrator finds clumsy and horrifying. In choosing to live in such a clumsy place which offers a telling comment on the American Dream, Billy expresses his disillusionment with the so-called America as well as of India. Alienated from a society with which he can not be identified, he finds his predicament more unbearable and burdensome. He frequently experiments a weird feeling which makes him move away from himself. This gives rise to mental torture resulting in his self being fractured and wounded. Unless he does something concrete to heal the wounds affecting his self, there is no chance of his being in tune with life.

Significantly, Billy considers it natural that to live in the so-called sophisticated society, he won't be able to know the meaning of life. His psychiatrist friend Tuala seems to have a clearer understanding when she tells that Billy feels something inside him, but he is not yet sure of which it is: sometimes he expresses his fears but immediately tries to surprise it. He seems to be in the grip of some peculiar
force i.e. the primitive force. It is very strong in him and can explode anytime. What she is referring to in primitivism, a paradoxical product civilization, traceable to the interplay of the impulses of the civilized self and the urge to reject or transform it which can produce a positive reaction as in the case of Lydia in D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* whose communion nature helps achieve emotional fulfillment or a negative reaction as in that of Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* whose journey into Congo ends in his condemnation of contemporary civilization as a horror on account of its moral hollowness. The first hint at Billy's isolation from society and his inner conflict is given by his experience at Bhubaneshwar where as a boy of fourteen he has gone on a holiday with his parents. As he recalls, “Almost from the moment that we emerged from the railway station something odd started to work within me. It was as though a slumbering part of me had suddenly come awake” (*The Strange Case* 122).

As a result, Billy becomes restless and behaves strangely which shocks his parents. Being restricted to his movements by his mother, he becomes disillusioned, caught up in the hectic routine of school life, Billy is not able to respond to the call of his inner voice and self and soon that spell is broken, and not until he is in America does he have his first lapse. Finding American society highly materialist and ruthlessly competitive, he finds himself suffocated. While working at a hospital for the mentally sick he has a typical experience. Here, he looks at life from a totally different point of view. This gives him a clue to his own perception of life - a perception that discloses a reality more meaningful than the one presented by the absurd world in which he lives. His unidentified fear seems to help him apprehend a higher reality and it gets a further boost after the accident at Acapules in which Billy sustained a head injury necessitating his admission into a hospital. For several days he was continuously under observation. It was here that he was able to be with
himself and examine the conclusion that man does objectively. On examination, he comes to the conclusion that man doesn't remain what he is if he is divorced from his own self. In case of self being wounded, something concrete must be done in order to restore the wounded self to its rightful place. He was so shaken up by his experience in the hospital that he decided to get back home. He has grown so afraid of himself that he fears that terrible things may happen to him unless he does something drastic that the only thing he can think of is marriage to Meena. Unable to understand his state of mind because of her upbringing, her ambitions and twenty years of contact within an artificial society, she doesn't approve of Billy's wanting to be left alone and extracts a number promises from him, all directed to ensure that he is not to be left alone. His association with her Aunt's business at Bombay which is given to corrupt practices worsens his condition. Becoming increasingly isolated from his society he feels that the priceless treasure of his life in the name of civilization in his letter to Tuala, he gives expressing to his feeling of disgust with the contemporary civilization:

I sometimes wonder whether civilization is anything more the making and spending of money. What else does the civilized man the so called thinkers and philosophers and men like that they are merely hired to find solution on complications caused by making and spending of money. (*The Strange Case* 97)

He has a feeling of repulsion from the world of which he a part. He is fed up with the vanity and hypocrisy of the elite society which seems to be in distinguishable from the one where animals live. Significantly wherever he returns from an archeological expedition he says that things that he looks for are not to be found there. Totally isolated from his society and even from his wife Meena, he becomes
increasingly fed up and appears to his wife a stranger. Indeed the degeneration in Billy affects even the moral side of his life with the result that he seduces even Meena’s cousin Rima Kaul. What is shocking is his admission of making love for its own sake. He feels that a tremendous corrupting force is working on him as if his soul is taking revenge on him for having denied it for so long those other things that it had been looking for. He is highly shaken by his realization of his moral degradation, so much so that he seeks refuge in religion.

Billy finds it increasingly difficult to distinguish between the real and the unreal which convinces him that he is fast loosing grip on life and his own self. He now realizes that he has to make his own choice if he is to retain his sanity and heal the wounds that are out to destroy his self. His disappearance from the society all of a sudden confounds many people including his relatives. The mystery surrounding his disappearance clears when after a lapse of ten years he suddenly appears before Romi who has now become Collector of a district in Central India. Billy recognizes in her the strange woman, the woman who has undergone a change. In fact, he has run away from the hills and also from Bilasia and finds himself again in the same suffocating meaningless society where it won’t be possible for him to have a dialogue with his own self which has remained cut off for so long. Thus, Billy comes back once again to live among the tribals identifying him totally with them and their way of life and marries Bilasia who symbolizes for him the elemental nature and who understands his need for being left alone. Though his rejection of contemporary civilization is for different reason, his cases are comparable to those of many people who left the world in order to be in tune with their own selves. Billy, during his meeting with Romi, requests him not to disclose the fact of his being alive to his relatives. He fears that they may try to trace him out which in his view, would result in something dangerous
and unbecoming. Romi discloses it to Sita who in turn informs Meena. As expected Meena and her father come down from Delhi and ask for the whereabouts of Billy. Romi advises her not to look for Billy but this advice falls on deaf ears. They launch a man hunt that results in Billy's tragic death in the forest.

Thus, the civilized world from which he has opted out gets only his ashes since it has come to spell for him all that is destructive of man's moral fiber. His tragic death is caused by a fire started by his son. It represents an indictment of the moral hollowness of contemporary civilization. His second coming would have been possible only if he had found some change in the so called civilized world. This could not take place because Billy found that this world has no place for people like Billy. Billy was in search of the meaning of life so that he could understand not only himself but also the self within him. Billy still feels that unless something concrete is done and society liberated from the old shackles of thinking, there is no hope for and change coming over that society. It is by disappearing into the hills and living among the tribals that he finds the actual meaning of life - life that lays in primitivism i.e. simple and real life. He is convinced that this simple and real life will liberate the self from all the wounds by which it is surrounded. Man feels liberated only when his inner self is healed. In his struggle for liberation from the corrupting forces of the contemporary society, he takes shelter in the hills inhabited by the tribals and comes to grips with life. And is now capable of being in tune with his own self. this makes him feel that the life lived by the tribals may be primitive but at the same time it is simple and real and it is to such a life that one should be wedded.

Joshi 's third novel , The Apprentice again deals with the existential problems of life depicting the existential problems of life depicting the plight of the contemporary man who finds himself in a confused society without norms, direction
and purpose. The protagonist, Ratan Rathore, hails from a middle class family. He has to decide on his own way and pay his own price in this world. He happens to be the product of a double inheritance. His father was patriotic and courageous but his mother was guided by worldly wisdom. She used to tell Ratan that it is not patriotism but money that brings respect and security. Chased by these two conflicting philosophies of life, Ratan finds it difficult from the very start to live smoothly in the phony world of civilization. He is left with no option but to keep appearances and do away with the world of ordinary decencies. He naturally comes face to face with tension and resentment because of the totally divergent social norms and expectations to which he is exposed. He comes to the conclusion that life is nothing but a series of chaos, absurdity, brutality and meaninglessness. Fed up with the corrupting materialism of the contemporary society, Ratan feels crushed under the growing load of meaninglessness and isolation from his innermost nature and surroundings.

It is in this suffocating atmosphere that Ratan finds it difficult to adjust to the existing situation. He begins to feel that in his pursuit of desires and ambitions, he is running away from his own self and this gives hurt to him greatly. We find him going from place to place in search of job and it is during this hunt for job that he realizes the cruelty of the human lot. He joins as a clerk but is always haunted by the unknown fear of losing his job and suffers from a keen desire for getting promotion so as to have pre-occupation with work. He finds himself in a peculiar mental condition which threatens to destroy his soul and deprive him of his personality and identity. Ultimately, he surrenders to the demands of his job and latter on being rewarded with security and promotion. He doesn't mind accepting a bribe especially even when he doesn't need money. Thus, we find Ratan undergoing a radical change. The man who appeared violent and rebellious at the start ends up becoming a greedy person running
for more money and power. While he tries to seek comfort from the pools of corruption, his dying conscience and wounded self keeps on hurting him. At every stage he puts up an initial resistance only to find the futility of his efforts. The whole business of living in a muddle causes him all the more and he fails to distinguish between good and wrong. Ratan's dilemma is expressive of an average product of his highly sophisticated civilization. With a wounded self and troubled conscience Ratan moves from place to place without getting any peace or empathy.

Ratan is committed to find out the purpose of life and all its estimates. But he takes almost a life time to liberate himself from the clutches of valueless urban civilization. In his eagerness to earn more, he even enters into corrupt deals. He does not mind joining hands with the Brigadier and supplying sub standard materials to the army just for earning easy money. Ratan has come to realize that life in the contemporary society is guided more by deals than by principals. No doubt Ratan starts living a comfortable life and rolling in luxury, at times he feels hurt when he thinks that what he is doing is not right. Though he thinks of changing his attitude to life many times, yet he sticks to what he does as the lure of money is found to be difficult to run away from. Because of the corrupt practices in which he indulges, his colleagues go to the extent of calling him a whore. He often doesn't attach much importance to their taunting comments and keeps getting ahead of others in search of his ambition. As an officer in the military stores department, he permits spurious warm material after taking a bribe from Himmat Singh, a man of questionable character. After the cease fire, the military authorities suspect that a shady deal has been responsible for sending useless war material to the front. Not only has it caused loss of life, but it also humiliated the country. Ratan Rathore is aware of what he has done. He knows that his partnership with Himmat Singh and the Brigadier have
brought defame to the country and feels greatly guilty also. It is from here that the process of Ratan trying to heal his wounded self begins. He not only feels guilty but also wounded and decided to do something concrete to set his life in order. Rathore learns that due to this shady deal the Brigadier has committed suicide. Immediately Ratan looks for Himmat Singh in order to teach him a lesson. He takes him to the Secretary but by then his determination to take revenge on this betrayal looses its hold on him. This happens because he is still in a conflict as to what he should actually do. One side of his conscience says that what he is doing is right while another side tells him to withdraw. In fact he is at war with himself. He is not sure of the ground he stands on. He seems to have lost faith in himself. He is found to be suffering from a dual conflict – one physical and the other moral and spiritual.

The novel elaborates the theme of corruption of the self in a society which is it corrupt. Himmat Singh with whom Ratan Rathore comes into contact tells him without mincing words that his soul has been killed. He also says that he has moved away from his own self and moves about like one having lost one's grip on life. In the novel, Ratan Rathore is found narrating the way in which he falls victim to corruption in a metropolitan society during a war between India and China. At the beginning, he is found to be better placed both in spirit and conduct. It is only when he steps into a wider world and comes into contact with the people like Himmat Singh and the Brigadier that he begins to learn the strange ways of life. He finds that people everywhere are busy making money and would not mind adopting immoral practices just to supplement their income. Hunger for money has made them bankrupt inwardly. In pursuit of money they appear to have bartered away their souls to the custodians of the so called sophisticated society. The very theme of the moral demonstrates the kind of society Ratan lives in, in order to pursue his ambition. It is during his stay in a
bigger society that he comes to know that the society that he has come to occupy is not what he had imagined it to be. He finds even his daughter and his wife always showing some sort of discontent. Even though he doesn't need money, he takes a bribe. As he observes:

First of all I did not need the money. I needed it no more than sitting here. In this poor land I can be called comfortable, even well off. I have a car, a flat, a concrete roof, running water, even a refrigerator. So you see I did not need the money if I had needed money it was when I had been offered the first time -by the contractor - and I had refused.

(The Apprentice 61)

The passage while revealing the tormenting and tortuous examination of the self when it is sorting out its own problems unmistakably brings out some of the civilized values that prevail in a metropolis. The self analysis makes the narrator discover that along with money one involves oneself in other new distractions like women and power and becomes crazy about 'brand new enjoyment'(78). As he reflects, he comes to the conclusion that money he has earned but self he has lost. This reveals that there are ways of coming out of the mess into which man falls. The narrator protagonist becomes an apprentice in order to learn the method of restoring his soul and self to its rightful place. It is in order to heal the wounds that have eroded his self that he thinks of being at the gate of the temple in order to clean the shoes of the congregation. The process of facilitating the self in this mood of penitence is further explained and given a symbolic color.

Arun Joshi deals with themes having contemporary relevance and socio-cultural significance. The Apprentice, for example, is a creative comment on the crisis of character with which we have been familiar for a long time. But what we
should not lose sight of is the fact regarding the interpretation of the novel, is its claim to be considered a novel and not a sociological study of the roots and causes of corruption. Joshi wants to emphasize that man finds himself in compromising situation only when he moves away from his own self and allows his own self to be corrupted by the forces that have always been at war with the good elements in society. The choice to make a leap so that the self may be protected from decay is brilliantly presented in the final episode of the novel where Ratan Rathore decided to wipe the shoes of the congregation in order to cure his affected and hurt self. This comes out as a therapeutic process a sort of cleansing. The self becomes an apprentice to itself so that it may explore the labyrinth which is it. As Ratan Rathore frankly admits, "then there is another thing that my father used to say, whatever you do touches some one somewhere" (*The Apprentice* 149).

Arun Joshi dramatizes the truth embodied in Ratan' confession by taking into account an aesthetic pattern in which we come across dreams, stories within stories, characters experiencing horrible and unexplained horrors and visions of which they have no idea. Ratan after his initial hesitation submits completely to the corruption of modern society and even prospers. It takes almost a life time to reject the world of civilization for he happens to be the product of a double inheritance, the patriotic and courageous world of his father the worldly wisdom of his mother who reminds him:"

It was not patriotism but money that brought respect and bought security. Money succeeded where all else failed. There were many laws but money was law unto itself"(*The Apprentice* 20).Ignace Fuerlicht writes, “Modern man may either try or adjust to the others, to society, to the system, bartering away his true self or he may try to keep and develop his individuality and thus isolate himself from society” (Ignace 41).
We find both these types of isolation in Ratan Rathore who begins his life with high ambitions and ideals to be honest, true to him and like his father, make a mark in the world. But he finds that he is not cut out for this kind of role. He has to suppress and if possible strangle his true self in order to be a part of the corrupt society and make a living. "Thus he moves away from his true self in the process. In his craze for careerism Ratan submits himself to all sorts of corruption to which modern world is exposed. His corrupt deal at the end costs his life to the Brigadier, his closest friend. Ratan feels guilty and responsible for his premature death. His sense of individuality comes into conflict with his life of hypocrisy. With deep remorse he realizes the futility of his life and decides to be of some use to others. He takes up the menial work of a shoe shine on the stairway of a Delhi temple to purge and cure his impure heart. Unlike Billy Biswas who opts out of the modern world in a bid to seek his communion with the primitive world, Ratan lives in the modern world and seeks fulfillment in serving others in the humblest form as in the symbolic act of shoe shining. It has been argued that the novel commented the value of humility and self purification. In this sense the novel is a study of the loss and healing of one's soul. The cause of inner emptiness of Ratan is neither the rootlessness of Sindi nor the unusual urge of Billy. The compelling force of the so called civilized society shatters the idealism of the young like Ratan and compels them to end up being cynical and even hypocritical.

Joshi's themes are relevant to the contemporary society and his novel. *The Apprentice*, for example, is a creative comment on the crisis of character. But what we should not lose sight of the fact while reading the novel its claim to be taken to be a piece of fiction and not a sociological study of roots and causes of corruption. Ratan Rathore, after his initial hesitation submits completely to the corruption of
modern society. According to Srinath, "The Apprentice is the tail of conscience-torn man with a curious mixture of idealism and submission to the lures of materialism" (Srinath 127).

The unfortunate part of the story is that while the society is responsible for shattering Ratan's personality of values, it has however failed to help him restore his integrity of the self. "One can, without any doubt find in The Apprentice the impact of Camus's The Fall" (Melwani 68). In The Fall, we find the protagonist to be in the same predicament. But soon we find that he is able to see the deep seated hypocrisy of his existence which motivates his action. He turns to debauchery and finally becomes a part of the corrupt society. Both The Apprentice and The Fall preset a disquieting mirror to modern morality. As long as Ratan remembers, his father retains his moral values but gradually they get eroded in the competitive urban environment. All his education and intelligence are not of any help to him. Then he learns to keep appearances by discarding even ordinary decency and friendship. Thus, he completely isolates himself from his true self and his ideals. Ratan himself gives expression to his own predicament with a sense of self-awareness and objectivity: “I had become at the age of 21 a hypocrite and a liar, in short, a sham. I had been insecure before and full of strange fears. But I had never undertaken such sustained deception for once I had lied about having a job. I had to lie about numerous other things. I had become a master faker” (The Apprentice 28).

Ratan narrowly escapes the starvation death through the generosity of his equally miserable friend in a room in an inn. A chance introduction by one of them secures him a job of temporary clerk in the department of war purchase. He even surprises himself by ignoring those who saved him from death. He became loyally attached to wealth and is guided by the lures of materialism. Although he is well
settled in life, he fails to have any sense of satisfaction because he keeps his cover above anything else and sacrifices the principles that have guided him all the while. In spite of all the material comforts available to him, discontentment has become a way of life for Ratan. He finds himself deeply lost in the mires of corruption. For the sake of confirmation and promotion, Ratan doesn't mind marrying a girl related to the Superintendent, though he is not particularly interested. He doesn't take much time to realize that the world runs on deals and in fact, his own marriage turns out to be a deal for his career.

In the process of these strange bargains with the world, Ratan becomes a hypocrite. His hypocrisy fetches him a car, a bungalow and a good place in society at the expense of his peace of mind. Thus, his conscience degenerates totally and suffers a crisis of character. In short he becomes a whore in the pursuit of his career and ends up by accepting a bribe when he least needs money. At every stage he puts up an initial resistance only to discover the futility of his effort like so many of his kind in the contemporary society. He leads a frustrated and exhausted family life. The more money he amasses, the more dissatisfied he becomes. A strange fear of death haunts him all the time. He feels restless and out of tune with himself, He finds his own self slipping from under its own core. When the Brigadier is on the brink of madness in a military hospital, Ratan feels that some priceless essence that he has so far experienced for 40 years has disappeared. It is the second time in his life that he has felt the pain of another as his own. The first time being when his father was shot, “and standing there by the glass window I felt as though it was not the Brigadier but I who was rocking through some dark dungeons of the world”(The Apprentice 103).

At first Ratan is mentally resolved to save his friend. He writes his confession but modifies it soon and tries to justify his act by convincing himself of his innocence
and finally pockets the confession letter for ever. Now his main concern and objective is how to get out of the mess into which he has fallen. He is surprised to find that the secretary of his department and the minister concerned rush to his rescue and get him released quite magically. Ratan later finds that these persons at the highest levels are the agents behind the act of bribery and he is simply a tool. The Brigadier cannot, however wait for his confession and committed suicide. Ratan realizes that there is no end to human vanity or for that matter, human stupidity. The thought of the dead Brigadier follows him wherever he goes. Ratan is filled with an endless torment of fear. He realizes the gravity of the scene. At last his alert consciousness takes him away from the degenerated society, “20 years and nothing gained an empty life time. What had I learnt? At 45 all that I knew was to maneuvered a trickster that was what I had let life make of me. Did I know the meaning of honor, friendship? Did I ever know it? Would I ever know it again?” (The Apprentice 139).

Ratan realizes that his life has been a great waste. He is not sure what precisely corrupts the atmosphere of the society. He feels that need of doing something for changing the prevailing situation but he is full of doubts about the way to rid the society of this disease. Ratan finally realizes that one cannot live for oneself because no human act is performed in isolation and without consequence. Therefore 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 outside the temple every morning on his way to office. Thus he would like to wash away his sins of cowardice, dishonesty and even indirect murder. He learns the lesson of humility. He seeks his fulfillment in this symbolic act. He feels that the only sustaining basis for action is to be of use to others. He earnestly
pleads with the young that there is nothing wrong to make a second start, "One must try and not lose heart, not yield at any cost to despair". Ratan standing at the doorstep of the temple that offers a deserted look, "frozen, petrified, like our civilization itself ", hopes that the young can turn the tide. (*The Apprentice* 149-150)

The realization 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. His existential decision to recover the lost self through an act of pertinence reveals the need to realize and value one's integrity. Joshi seems to suggest that man, like Ratan Rathore, can still hope of doing something concrete in order to come out of the mess they have made of life. The only thing that he is required to do is to indulge in self retrospection to find out its cause. Man may fall a victim to the lures of materialization but still there is a chance for him to hold on to. He can come out of the prison of his own materialistic life by realizing the sins he has committed. He is still capable of doing something concrete in order to get away from the temptations of life and save his self from being victimized. The process of healing one's soul is never lost. We should always remember that the game is not lost so long as we act on the assumption that it can be won.

Joshi's *The Last Labyrinth* may not be his most powerful novel, but one thing is certain and it is that it makes a powerful appeal to our hearts. The novel can be seen as a tale of two cities, Benaras and Mumbai - one symbolizing western rational, industrial and technological, the other oriental, occult, feudal and treacherous. At one level it is a story of shrewd Mumbai business man trying to grab an inefficient plastic company owned by a feudal Benaras Jagirdar getting involved in "a game of chess ", also into winning the owner's mistress, and capturing the worthless business while almost losing his life to the Tantrik maneuvers of the of the tricky Aftab Rai.
operating from the mysterious Lal Haveli full of innumerable Labyrinths and certainly
loosing the mistress he desired more than everything else in the world. Another
remarkable element is the symbolism latent in this novel. The Lal Haveli is a symbol
of life itself, its last labyrinth of death. Anuradha symbolizes the unattainable in life.
Gargi is yet another symbolic, mysterious character who turns the purposelessness of
existential philosophy into the mystery of life.

And yet, it is essentially like any other, a typical novel of Arun Joshi. Som
Bhaskar is a troubled soul. He tries his best to relieve the tension in his soul but fails
to find any cure for it. He has a morbid urge for knowing, in which he is a great
incarnation of Sindi or Billy Biswas. He suffers from voids within and though he is
married to a beautiful wife Geeta who he loves and who has given him two children.
He is existentially alone and all his business knowledge is existentially purposeless.
Not only does he fall hopelessly in love with the mysterious dark beauty Anuradha,
and looses her after possessing her most intensely for a while, there are many more
women in his life and he still finds that that he is empty within. He stumbles over
wine and women again and again to survive each new existential crisis as he explains
his womanizing in his confessional talking of his necking with his future wife in his
seaside villa.

Som has made several unsuccessful attempts to find out what he wants. The
enjoyment of money and riches is the first. He has been born into a rich family and
has every imaginable luxury that money can buy. With the spirit of an American
tycoon and guided by the dictum "survival of the fittest", he has tried to acquire
wealth and the name and fame that go with it, but the world around him seems to
value things other than money. Money has thus merely added to his misery. He has
tried to drown himself in drink and soothe his nerves with tranquillizers but as soon as
their effect wears off the voids would return with a relentless ferocity. He has carried on affairs with innumerable women but each of these affairs has ended in bitterness and frustration. He has married Geeta who is all that a wife can be and has had two lovely daughters by her, yet he is not at ease with himself. Family life fails to fulfill his need. He has been to the world's finest universities and equipped himself with knowledge which is amazing. Apart from professing a thorough acquaintance with the Indian religious text and western philosophers he can off hand, reel out information on such complicated religious issues. He is also constantly aware of his father's miserable death due to melancholia upon failing to find a scientific explanation for the mysteries of the world. The old man happened to start wondering if there is a first cause that would explain everything. He had no evidence to believe that life is the expression of the will of the first cause or God.

Som therefore knows that scientific enquiry will lead him no where. He has then turned to psychiatry for an explanation of his problem. Literary critiques of various shades have offered their explanation of Som's quest and his quest and his self to its rightful place. By now Som has moved away from his true self and lived a life devoid of meaning and purpose. He feels that he has lost his grip on life. He also feels that he is like a ship without a rudder i.e. a person with a ruptured self. Naturally, he finds himself in a peculiar position where he is not in a position to decide what to do in a given situation. It has been hinted that there is a bit of The Outsider and of Trial in Som, and therefore he finds life absurd and can possibly have no solution to his problem. One of critiques has found "a deep rooted desire to know everything in life ranging from the outcome of his business shares to the outcome of man's belief in God"(Sanjay 82).
Devender Mohan is of the opinion that Arun Joshi makes the narrator (Som) work out the historical reality within himself so that "he defines the fictional voice by visualizing the natural impulse moving towards its own destruction" (Devender Mohan 28). Devender Mohan comes closest to naming death as the answer to Som's quest. What is suggested here is that people like Som in search of something unknown don't belong to the world of the living but to the world of the dead. Their quest leads them to the verge of the death. These critical opinions have their value in understanding the complex character of Som. Still the question of what Som wants, what is capable of fulfilling him and bestowing peace on him remains not properly and convincingly identified and explained. It is his mental unrest which is the result of his rationality. Devinder Mohan is only partially right when he says that Som longs for death. In fact, for Som the feeling of death is like the embrace of something warm capable of giving relief and that it is taking him over. But he has an insatiable hunger for life. At the very point of death he cries out, "not now. Not now" (The Last Labyrinth 144). Towards the end of the novel he certainly grows to love life otherwise he would not carry a girl in the face of a threat to his life from Aftab.

The collapse of the joint family - an inevitable consequence of urbanization has merely added to the problem. It has led to the relaxation of the hold of tradition on the individual and severely corroded the dwindling feeling of security. The middle class and richer sections of Indian society who show remarkable alacrity to change with changing times on the economic and educational front find themselves utterly undecided about the norms that would govern them. On the religious front especially, while some of these people continue to uncritically cling to their old beliefs, others find themselves confronted with an irresistible dilemma between agnosticism and faith. Som finds himself in this unenviable predicament. He is a rich
third generation urban Indian. Apart from inheriting the dilemmas "romanticizing" (189) and therefore in the light of the knowledge of depth psychologically, it can be reasonably assumed that he misses romance in his life and goes all out seeking it in his own neurotic way. The word "romantic" is used here in its broadest sense so as to include passion, danger, adventure, challenge, mystery, death and love for the bygone era. It is significant that the voids that we have mentioned occur to him for the first time in a romantic historical locale, the Ajanta caves. Analytical experience tells us that Som's unconscious allows his hidden wish to surface when it finds the objective co-relative. Som, however, cannot identify it but his temperament characterized by obsessions, self centeredness, egotism and possessiveness has always fitted into a romantic world. He consciously desires to work out his passions in a romantic setting without being checked, analyzed and corrected.

Mumbai life is too prosaic to afford any romance and adventure to Som. The people that he associates with or is related to or either analyzing and judging as for example Leela or forcing him to do or not to do something against his will. These people make it impossible for him to be himself. Therefore when he meets Anuradha, the almighty woman of the labyrinthine Lal Haveli located in the ancient city of Benaras he unconsciously identified that it is she whom he has been longing for all his life. He easily understands that Anuradha is the centre of his romantic interest. The first thing that attracts Som to Anuradha is her antique appearance. "I had noticed Anuradha like one notice a monument, tall, handsome, ruined -she did not look clever. She wore costumes of 20 years ago. She was obsolete" (The Last Labyrinth 12). She is dark eyed, sexy and brings up the image of childhood before his mind's eye. Everything about her is out of the ordinary, exotic and shrouded in mystery. Lal
Haveli, where she lives with Aftab of feudal blood and Benaras with its streets filled with danger, death, filth and piety present a vivid contrast to the matter-of-factly built Mumbai. The spell of Lal Haveli on him is such that he finds a natural instinct reviving in him. The architecture of Lal Haveli and the life within conjure up pictures of forgotten past for Som.

As Som gets closely involved with Anuradha he learns that Anuradha is the 'right soul' meaning the right person that his psychiatrist mentioned meeting whom would result in peace and even drive one towards a higher goal and that she is the woman in whom the world of matter and spirit which Leela talks about merged to form an enchanting whole. Possessing Anuradha will present him with a challenge and this is definitely part of the romantic quest of Som. Anuradha is not a free woman not is she married to Aftab. But she is attached to Aftab and can not be easily wrenched away from him. She has acted in films and has seen it all. Through force or love she has to be won and Som uses both. With almost revengeful attitude of a medieval tyrant he starts buying the shares of Aftab's company so as to financially ruin him and at the same time is passionately involved with Anuradha “Each meeting far from cooling my passions, served only to fuel them. I lived on the nourishment of the shades thrown by her naked body under the shower” (The Last Labyrinth 121).

He clings to her as a child clings to her mother. She talks sweetly like none of Som's women has ever done. Unlike in the case of Geeta and Leela love-making with Anuradha is a very romantic experience if not a highly satisfying one. Yet the distance between them does not seem to diminish. He therefore, takes her to a Himalayan Resort and then to Mumbai to be completely absorbed in her. Just when Som is getting used to the idea of happiness he suffers his second heart attack and Anuradha his only solace callously deserts him and goes to Gargi, the deaf mute God
woman to enlist God's help in saving Som's life. This is a cheap and worn out third rate Hindi film technique. This apart 'God' has always been a stumbling block in Som's happiness. Earlier when he and Anuradha were enjoying their vacation on the mountains God happened to fall like a shadow between them and ruin the peace of his mind. Now, he has all the more reason to be angry with Anuradha, God and Aftab (the rival in love). Out his desperation and perhaps to fulfill a romantic need for revenge he now wants to settle scores with Anuradha, Aftab and, yes, God too. But it is not easy, the last batch of share certificates of Aftab's company, the acquisition of which is necessary for his revenge are tucked away in a mountain top temple where a divine flame perpetually burns, reminding one of the snow formation of Shiva's phallus at Amarnath. Som undertakes the tedious and highly risky journey only to be told by his doctor, Kashyap, that Anuradha got Gargi to work a miracle to save his life and promised to give him up for good at the behest of Gargi. Som feels frustrated and angry for such unjust inference of God and Godly people in human affairs. It appears to him as if everyone is bent on making him a believer and suggests faith as a solution to his problem. Anuradha, for example, has asserted "Krishna begins where Darwin left off" (The Last Labyrinth 172) and now sends the image of Krishna through Aftab asking him to carry it with him always. Gargi tells him that there is no harm in believing that God exists and that he works in mysterious ways. Even Dr. Kashyap seems to subscribe to the view that only a miracle has saved Som and not medicine nor his will power. Som however, rightly finds it absurd to start believing in God in the fact of his many deprivations on account of God and the overwhelming evidence to prove that faith is born of a psychological need and that most of the objects of worship are mere natural phenomena. In any case, faith has been something that he considers. There is no point in blackmailing him into believing that
God or a miracle has saved his life and therefore he should turn pious. Back home in Mumbai he not only manages to reconcile himself to the demands of life but learns to live without Anuradha and God. He dismisses his reminiscences of Anuradha and impulses towards faith in God are like strange mad thoughts. He knows that faith would have certainly felt like everything else, to fill his inner void and tries to look for something else just to heal the wounds with which his self is filled.

The restoration of Som to the world seems to occur because of his inner strength, will power and perhaps the love of his loyal wife. His unconscious urge for romance and adventure has been somewhat satisfied. He is weary but he is relatively at peace with himself. His reconciliation with life is suggested by two meaningful devices employed by the author. One, the novel is narrated by Som after having gone through these disturbing experiences. That he narrates the whole story with clarity and objectivity is proof enough that he has taken stock of himself and has learnt to relate to the world on the basis of love. Two, where earlier he was "mortally afraid of death" (The Last Labyrinth 74) he now mocks at death by casually putting a gun to his temple. Som hopes to find relief by making a new start and burying the past deep into the earth.

Arun Joshi's The City & the River is "a continuation of and an improvement upon Joshi's major thematic concerns" (Tapan Ghosh 150). The nature of the novel is explained on the blurb of the book which reads as under:

Narrated with humor and a gentle irony The City & The River strikes an entirely different theme from 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. It also explores the relevance of God to man's
choice and whether all said and done, the world indeed belongs to God
and no one else. (Shubra Majumdar)

It is about an anguished man's quest for survival and search for a viable alternative amidst materialism, corruption, cynicism alienating and dwindling spiritual faith. Without being uprooted from its cultural heritage and spiritual roots, his protagonists find themselves lost in a grossly materialistic industrial society. In the quest they are led into labyrinth of life and death and sometimes into the labyrinth of the world of spirit. "The novel is a departure from the existing work of Arun Joshi as it is a commentary on the times and a political parable" (Githa Hariharan). Joshi has made use of prophesy, fantasy and politics and presented the story in a wider backdrop. The book is a severe commentary on the times, containing echoes of the Indian emergency in the 1970s. Parallels may be found between the emergency regime of 1975 in India and the one portrayed in the novel. The huts of the mud-people are pulled down in the manner of what the then government did to widen the streets in the name of beautification. Even we find close resemblance between the power structure of the two. The way the Grand Master acquires unlimited powers and leaves no stone unturned to anoint his son to the throne is reminiscent of what the then prime minister did. Similarly, the height of sycophancy we find the novel could be seen then with a view to achieving wider significance and perhaps to avoiding controversy, Joshi has set his book as Amur says "in a temporal setting which is deliberately confused" (Amur).

In the novel we find co-existence of the two extremes at every level. Hermits, Yajans, sacrifice and primitive people co-exist with electronic civilization, ultra modern lasers, helicopters, videos, spying and inquisition. In fact the novel moves on two levels simultaneously. At one level it is a political parable revealing the ruthless
governing of the city by the Grand Master and his council of Advisors. On the other hand are people who struggle indictment of the corruption and malpractices of political leaders, business men, the police and the armed personnel with a difference fusing satire and philosophical discussion. At another level the novel is a parable of human choice between commitment to God and loyalty to man. The novel is also imbued with the sensibility of the novelist, his cultural and spiritual ethos.

Tyranny and repression, hypocrisy and deceit, selfishness and corruption, violence and destruction, are rampant in the city of Grand Master. The events portrayed are reminiscent of the emergency in India as the aftermath in both the cases proved ruinous to the rulers. It rightly claims a privileged place among the political novels of our literature as it powerfully comments on the political scenario of the past the present and the future. The metaphysical questions that Joshi seeks to explore in the political context that reflects men's ambition, egoism, truth and the suffering consequent upon them. He stresses the need for spiritual commitment and collective responsibility to do away with evils. Concerned with an entire race, the novel turns out to be, as Chatterjee says, "an allegory of Indian History and its mythic truth"(Kalyan Chatterjee), or as Githa Hariharan aptly puts it, "a parable of political society, the endless variations of the relationship between men and power"(Githa Hariharan).This metaphysical dimension redeems the novel from being a mere political satire.

_The City & the River_ is divided into 11 sections including a prologue and an epilogue. The prologue strikes a fresh note in Joshi's fiction. Set in an imaginary locale, the scene of action is a Nowhere City. There are two very important characters in it, the teacher, the ageless Yogeshwara and the disciple, the Nameless-One that symbolize the processes of regeneration and decay. They have lived together for 30
years in a hermitage amidst snow covered mountain, in the evening of his thirtieth day, the Nameless-One learns about his own identity. The Great Yogeshwara narrates a tale about the Grand Master who represents the urge to dominate and the boatman who assert this identity. The conflict presented here is an eternal one. A new city comes up on the ruins of the old and the endless cyclic process goes on, thus, making clear the immense influence of the Bhagwad Gita.

The dramatic tension springs from the struggle between the Grand Master and the Boatmen. *The City & The River* in the novel are two opposing symbols. The palace Astrologer, Mentor of the Grand Master and the hermit of the mountain are disciples of the Great Yogeshwara. The prophecy about the advent of a king makes them choose to interpret it differently, resulting in great struggle and suffering. Boatmen's leader, the Headman, tells the astrologer that they have no quarrel with the Grand Master. It is matter of allegiance; their allegiance is only to the river and can not be shared. This gives rise to the conflict between the city and the river, between the Grand Master and the Boatmen and lends vitality to the plot. The city, spreading along the river has a three tier structure. The City's unnatural and chaotic atmosphere reminds us of Eliot's *The Wasteland*. The city, particularly, the seven hills and its adjoining area has the dominance of steel glass, and marble and it is devoid of vegetables and flowers. Lack of vegetation and flowers has been stressed many a time in the novel. The road linking the palace to the government houses is well constructed but it is treeless and without flowers. The Professor goes around the city, especially along the corridors of power in search of his student, Bhoma and is stunned by what he sees.

In this chaotic and spirited sterile atmosphere the characters have a sorry tale of their own to narrate. They suffer from alienation, wariness, boredom, rootlessness
meaninglessness in their lives. The Rallies Master is unhappy and rootless. The Professor too is tired of his existence. To Bhumiputra, his life seems to be a mere waste. He is unhappy with his own intellectual life. A sense of overwhelming futility fills him at such times, so much so that he finds no point in living. The Grand Master, too, is no exception; He is also gloomy and tired. The Minister for Trade tells him that he looks tired. And in his weariness he lets dark thoughts overcome him. Thus every character has an 'a strange sorry tale'(Amur) of his own to narrate.

It is the boatmen who lend an authentic existence. The brick people can be persuaded and if necessary, threatened. But the Boatmen oppose the Grand Master's plan and refuse to play into his hands. Though they are simple, and poor they are far from being simpletons. They are prepared to pay any price for their authentic existence. They are courageous, honest and bold enough to call a spade a spade. They consider themselves to be the children of the river, and to the river alone do they hold allegiance. They believe unfortunately with their hearts, and for their belief they are even prepared to embrace death. In the face of all odds they stubbornly oppose Grand Master to maintain their identity and way of life.

The high and middle class people never protest and adapt themselves to changing circumstances. The level of authenticity varies in inverse proportion to the status which varies with the altitude at which they live. The lowliest and the poorest boatman living in the mud huts are the most superior as they do what they feel like doing. The middle class men lack in authenticity as they adopt themselves to the situation and do not practice what they feel like doing. They are unhappy because they have abdicated their freedom to the rulers in the hope of getting a higher position in the administrative hierarchy.
The highest or ruling class leads the most inauthentic lives and imposes the same on duress. They are the most corrupt, morally bankrupt and utterly hypocrite. The Grand Master, in the name of welfare and prosperity of the city, declares the Era of Ultimate Greatness with the motif of consolidating his own position to become king and pave the way for his son as well. To ensure people's allegiance to the Grand Master, the Astrologer carries the message of 'the triple way or the way of three Beatitudes' to the people. The Era of Ultimate Greatness is declared to drum the fear of the palace into them. It enjoins them to follow the Astrologer's three Beatitudes. But the Boatmen refuse stubbornly to swear allegiance to any human being. Every effort is made to crush their protest and make them fall in line. The novel seems to have been influenced by character of Kurtz on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* who exercises of real power on natives.

A few characters among the brick people also are concerned about their own lives. The Professor sacrifices everything including his life in search of his pupil Bhoma who has been picked up in one of his night operations. In spite of the dire consequences he would meet, he does not give up his search. He too, is thrown into the huge dungeon where he gets suffocated and finally dies. The Grandfather is yet another character who risks his life by giving refuge to Bhoma at his farm. He along with, Dharma, Shailaja and Bhoma dies in the massive attack by the armed forces of the Grand Master.

Bhumiputra, popularly known as Master Bhoma, is also one of the characters who are ready to sacrifice his life got the authenticity of his existence; He is considered by the police as the "kingpin of a conspiracy" (43) against the Grand Master. Unlike other university teachers who side with the Grand Master to ensure his blessing, Bhoma firmly believes that the king is 'Naked'(153). Joshi has used the
proverb with the parable technique as in Vishnu Sharma's Panchtantra. He begins to narrate the parable of the naked king to his students and the whole university is taken by storm. Bhoma finds himself in the grip of fear and assure the Secretary that he would eschew such acts. But before he has surrendered himself shamelessly to the spineless authorities, the Hermit of the Mountain meets him. Like Lord Krishna the Hermit keeps Bhoma as to who he is and role he is to play in the scheme of things. In the words of the Hermit we find echoes of the Gita and Bhoma chooses to act dutifully in the larger interest of the city. The Grand Master, threatened by the possibility of revolt, gets Bhoma arrested but he escapes to the great shock of the authorities.

Now the Professor, an astrologer of great repute, decided to find Bhoma. In his search through the corrupt and apathetic administrative machinery, he is assisted by a Gandhi like figure called the little star- a shaven headed brown boy of eleven in a loin cloth only. The Professor, with the little star by her side searches Bhoma every where and is shocked by the corruption, tyranny, degeneration and repression of the city. He fails to find Bhoma and the search leaves him physically and mentally broken. He gives up the search and leaves the city. As Subhash Chandra aptly remarks, "Arun Joshi in his novel is dealing with the universal predicament of the modern man, besieged as he is by debilitating forces"(Subash Chandra 271). The delay in the fulfillment of prophecy makes head strong Grand Master important. Fear sets in and with it confusion. Mortally afraid of Master Bhoma and his propaganda he devises a nefarious plan with the Astrologer to affect an "unquestioning allegiance to the prophecy's goals. But truly speaking there is no inevitability in the prophecy"(6).

The Grand Master is not content with consolidating his position only, but wants his son also to ascend the throne after him. The so-called Bhoma conspiracy is
published to gain public sympathy and thereby to change the balance of power. The tyranny of the Grand Master increases the misery of the boatmen. The condition of the city is so unbearable that he decided to complete Bhoma's unfinished work. The Grand Master and his men are so terrified that they get the Professor, Shailja’s brother and the Headman arrested and detained in the Gold Mines. The lottery stall, the symbol of protest and defiance is pulled down, but the Grand Master fails to contain the resistance.

The inhuman torture that leads to the Headman's losing eyesight impels the Professor like Mahatma Gandhi to undertake fast unto death, and the Professor also finally dies in the Gold Mines. Things take an unexpected turn. At this function, Bhoma comes back. Like Sindi Oberoi in *The Foreigner* Bhumiputra finds the meaning of his life not in escape but in action, and he turns into a dedicated man of action. Under his guidance a campaign is launched for the release of the Headman. The persuasions fail and the boatmen go on strike. They strike peacefully when unexpectedly "Shock brigade" of the Education Advisor offers unconditional support despite Bhoma's unwillingness and the movement turns violent. Bhoma, seeing this violence and meaningless destruction of properties decides to withdraw the movement. The entire incident is reminiscent of what Mahatma Gandhi did when his peaceful non-violent movement turned violent at Chauri Chaura and he withdrew the entire movement.

When all this is going on the Grand Master holds a secret meeting in an underground chamber of the pyramids at night. He becomes the king and appoints the Minister for Trade as the new Grand Master of the city.

While the Seven Hills celebrate the Grand Master's elevation to the throne, an unequal war goes on between the boatmen and the army. The boatman Bhumiputra
and those who side with him are perished. Before his death, the Hermit performs his last yagya of the immortal. The deluge that follows turns the river into an ancient sea, like the sea that had first condensed on the whirling planet a billion years ago. And in its churning whirlpools is swept away the entire city and with the Seven Hills and the Pyramids. Although the city is washed away, the cyclic march for humanity continues.

On the ruin of the city, a new city springs up. The river flown on eternally and the city are ruled by the councillors. The Great Yogeshwar explains this phenomenon to the Nameless one, which speaks of human continuity thus:

> On the ruins of that city, as always happens, a new city has risen. It is ruled by another Grand Master, which of course, need not always happen. In the new city is another Professor, another Bhumiputra, another tribe of boatman. There is another council and another set of councilors. The men have other names but the forces they embody remain unchanged. (225)

This passage clearly indicates how deeply Arun Joshi is influenced by the Bhagwad Gita and Indian mythology in shaping the thematic structure of the novel. It is this cyclic repetition of things that affords Indian English literature. But the significance of the novel lies in the way suggested by Joshi’s escape from this endless repetition. The way is that the city should purify itself of "egoism, selfishness, stupidity" (The City & The River 263) the novel seems to suggest the solution to this malaise. The solution suggested is obviously derived from the Bhagwat Gita. The cycle of "Karma" will move on until the Divine scheme is accomplished. But the same is to be achieved through human instrumentality. We may sum up with the statement of Tapan Kumar Ghosh, “Indeed, as a re-affirmation of Indians and as an
experiment of the parable as fictional mode conveys mystic truths and political satire, 
*The City & the River* is a remarkable tour de force in contemporary Indian English fiction” (Tapan Ghosh 173).