A critical evaluation of contemporary creative writings has its own advantages and disadvantages. Given the cultural intellectual and academic climate of opinion that has been prevailing in the study of Indian writing in English, it is not easy to form a valid criterion of critical assessment. Exclusive and absolute formation may compel a critique to ignore the cultural output that has made the Indian novel in English possible. On the other hand, a complete disregard for the formal considerations of the Indian novel in English may converse any critical assessment into a documentary review of a creative writing which deserves to be considered creative writing. In short, re-assessment of contemporary creative writing ought to be a happy fusion of the claims of art and claims of relevance. It is a study of self, the family and society the novelists, critical approach, in the sense that it helps us explore the themes of the writers and their creative articulation. K.R. Srinivas Iyengar begins the survey of the Indian novel in English with the assertion that "The novel as a literary phenomenon is new to India" (Iyengar, 314). Although there was a rich narrative tradition in Sanskrit and in other Indian languages, the novel as a literary form had its origin in the literary Renaissance "that swept Bengal in the later half of the 19th century. F.R. Leavish, in *Sociology and Literature* says:

It is an elementary point, but one that seems unlikely to get too much attention as the sociology of literature forges ahead. No sociology of literature and no attempt to relate literary studies with sociological will yield much profit unless informed and controlled by a real and intelligent interest. (Leavish 198)

The leavisian observation on sociology and literature has to be kept in view while dealing with the theme involving self, family and society. Adapting the
conventions of Anglo-American realism to the Indian context, Arun Joshi has dramatized some of the contemporary socio-cultural issues which have their origin in the nature of the Indian society. Joshi's modernist needs have received publicity and favorable critical response for their formal coherence and lyrical texture. Roger Sharrock, *The Figure in a Landscape*, says that a poet is "not a camera, but a consciousness" (Roger Sharrock 113). This profound observation is very useful in analyzing not only poems but all creative writing. Our novelist as person need not conform himself to a system of values, but was a creative writer whose consciousness is molded by a sort of value system. Most modernist writers, while dramatizing life as a struggle between opposites like sacred and the secular, faith and lack of faith, society and individual artist and man, integration and alienation, the outer and the inner seem to forge an aesthetic in which these opposites are reconciled, or at least remain in a state of mutual co-existence. Arun Joshi is a modernist writer and in his writings we notice a judicious fusion of the transcendent and the humanistic traditions in Indian thought. Arun Joshi's fiction and its relevance may be better appreciated by making use of some of the insights embodied in his writings. His fiction carries a sort of built-in -rebuke to the contemporary society. *The Apprentice*, for example, is an incisive comment of the contemporary Indian scene closely modeled on Albert Camus's *The Fall*. It exposes hypocrisy and corruption that are rampant, although the protagonist's penitential role seems to heal the crumbling self. Jean, Baptiste Clemence, the Protagonist of *The Fall* like Ratan Rathore of Joshi sees the falsity of his existence and tries to salvage his fragmented self, preparing himself for a cure of his fractured self. He narrates his experiences in such a way that the norms of our civility are placed in their proper perspective. In a revealing passage
he says, "He who clings to a law does not fear the judgment that puts him in his place within an order he believes in"(The Apprentice 195).

The sort of penitential prayer we have just noticed is a characteristic of Joshi’s maiden novel The Foreigner. Sindi Oberoi passes through a therapeutic process in which he feels that an "indefatigable surgeon" (207) is cleaning up his soul with sharp edges of his scalpel. This suggests that Joshi’s protagonist, while submitting himself to a clinical probe, earns an awareness which makes his own self a labyrinth. The image of the labyrinth controls the narrative perspective of Joshi’s fiction. The consonance and the dissonance that characterizes the self, the family and society are metaphorically suggested by the following passage from The Strange Case of Billy Biswas:

If life's meaning lies not in the glossy surfaces of our pretensions but in those dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish for ever, hidden from the dazzling light of the sun, then I don't know of any man who sought it more doggedly and having received a signal, abandoned himself so recklessly to its call. In brief, I know of no other man who so desperately pursued the tenuous thread of existence to its bitter end, no matter what trails of glory or shattered hearts he left behind in his turbulent wake.(8)

Arun Joshi's fiction without appearing as an overt sociological exercise gathers within its fold most of the issues that trouble and torment the post independence generation. The way out of the Labyrinth is not to make the self a mirror but to liberate it by constantly reminding oneself that the labyrinth is not an unsafe place to exist provide one is apprenticed to the sublime principle of giving, which is very well exemplified in Anuradha in The Last Labyrinth. The Indian novel in English is now
an integral part of Indian reality. The development of the Indian novel in English can be traced from its experimental stage to realistic, to psychological. Essentially realistic novels came to be written in India for the first time in 1920's, when with the overall nationalistic feelings the scene shifted to contemporary battles and education. The novels written between the two world wars were chiefly concerned with exploration and interpretation of the social milieu as is noticeable from representative works like Mulkraj Anand's *Untouchable*, R.K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. These novels did not make any concrete attempts at dealing with the individual's personal predicament.

After 1950's, however, the novelist's interest shifted from the impersonal to the personal. They began to portray the individual's quest for the self in all its varied and complex forms and his problems and crises. Novelists such as Anita Desai, R.P. Jhabwala, Shashi Deshpande, Geeta Hariharan and B. Rajan, including Arun Joshi dealt with the inner turbulent psyche. In our study of these novelists, we notice the pervasive sense of personal crisis that informs all other alienated self in describing the protagonist of the various novels. Since all the novelists suffer from a deep sense of insecurity, their novels address themselves to the basic problems concerning selfhood. As the finest products of the age, they reveal in their novels a quest for authentic self which had been explored even in the sixteenth century, especially when Shakespeare reveals through his protagonist the main Hamertia tragic flow in *Hamlet* when he says "to be or not to be that is the question". The novels are attempts to create and preserve the self in a disintegrating world. The novelists, as their main functions are to reflect the society, the more they bring out the agonies of the modern world, more will there be the interest of the readers and this accounts for the popularity of the novelists. The novels as the outcome of literature also embody the
lucid form of the ideas which may affect him people like a “soothing balm” for the
injured world. Arun Joshi is one of those modern world Indian novelists in English
who have established new trends in his search for new themes he has renounced the
larger world in favor of the inner man and has engaged himself in a search for the
essence of human living. An outstanding novelist of human predicament, Joshi has
presented in all his five novels the inner crisis of the modern man. The problem of
meaninglessness is so wide –spread that it threatens to do away with every sphere of
human life. It has been treated in considerable detail in American and European
literature. Its treatment by Indian novelists like Joshi is no less interesting.

Man fails to perceive today the very purpose behind life and the relevance of
his existence in an unfavorable world. Despite remarkable scientific and technological
advancement, which has multiplied his physical pleasures and comforts, the
contemporary man is doomed to find himself in a pathetic condition. The prevailing
economic conditions resulting in the abject poverty of the masses and the economic
constraints of the middle classes on one hand, and the economic affluence of the
newly rich on the other, the drag of social conventions and traditions, the fast
changing value system consequent upon the impact of rapid modernization resulting
from industrialization and urbanization, the inter-generational tensions have made
disturbing demand on the individual and contribute in their own ways to his sense of
meaninglessness of life.

As it is the contemporary man finds himself participating in a "rat race" and is
isolated not only from his fellow men but also from his inner most nature, having
nothing within or without him to fall back upon in moments of crisis. The present
century has seen the dissolution of old certainties. Deprived of the benefit of ancient
wisdom, which provided the much needed basis for value and meaningfulness in life,
the modern man has no substitute for faith and religion except science and information. Thinkers like Huxley have rightly pointed out that "ours is a world in which knowledge accumulates and wisdom decays" (The Spiritual Crisis of Man 124). The problem of the contemporary man has been considerably heightened by the crisis of the present. The twentieth century, especially the post-war period has been an age of great spiritual stress and strain. It has shrunk in spirit in confusion, frustration, disintegration and meaningless. Almost every man suffers from a growing sense of meaningless which may be manifest in the alienation from oneself from one's own fellow men and from nature, the awareness that life runs out of one's hand like sand, and that one will die without having lived, that one lives in the midst of plenty and joyless. The potential meaningless of human existence has affected human life from various quarters. The existential encounter with nothingness and the uncertainty of human existence are typical products of modern life. The gap between what the individual aspires for and the hard reality of what he achieves, between what he believes in and what he practices has mercilessly reduced life to the very state of nothingness and purposelessness. The injuries inflicted on his psyche generate a cynical attitude towards the established social norms and values and make him grope for life's relevance. Man is shocked to find that he is no longer the master of his destiny and that there are forces which are out to threaten all its joys and hopes. Life has grown today indefinitely vast but there is no any central authority to hold it firmly. Painfully aware of his precarious composition, man experiences severe limitations in today's set up and an acute terror of the world is drawn into the world of objects and has lost or is continuously loosing.

Man has failed to live an authentic life as a result of which he finds himself in no-man's land. It has brought him face to face with the crises in faith. He notices
disintegration and purposelessness in every walk of life and in his attempt to get out of the mess in which he has fallen, he allows his self to get injured. As a result he moves about with a fractured self and in search of a cure but fails to find it. No emotional problem is more threatening today than the pervasive sense of meaninglessness. Conditions in India, though not so alarming as in the western world, have begun to take a very ugly form. Current recent Indian novelists in English have made significant efforts to delineate the predicament of the modern man. The work of Arun Joshi in particular reads like the spiritual Odyssey of the 20th century man who is spiritually bankrupt and morally degraded. Despite some differences in their approaches all of Joshi’s heroes are "men engaged in the meaning of life" (Jasbir Jain 52).

It has been the aim of the novel away from "to produce a human world charged with meaning"(Eliot, The Love Songs of J. Alfred Prufrock 3). The impact of modern psychology on the novels explores the relationship between social world and, models of individual personality of the relations between the artist's personality and the aspect of the world.

The modern relevance of the re-evaluation of the novelists like Arun Joshi becomes more demanding in a larger context because writers in their works of art stress group dynamics than individual behaviour. They project the individualistic competitive pattern in their novels exploring the modern dilemma in materialistic society which has been observed in the words of T.S. Eliot:

Let us go then, you and me

When the evening is spread out

Against the sky

Lay a patient etherized upon
In yet other respect the high degree of social and experimental awareness of the part of these modern novelists enables us to correlate social and intellectual background to the nature of literary preoccupation of the 20th century. The matter can be approached through a realization that such awareness expresses itself in a very different guise in the great creative artist from what it does in the novelist's across the Atlantic whose increased importance has already been noted. The sustained attention that Arun Joshi can manage in long sequences of life makes it possible for him to manipulate the response of the reader, as in great classical work of art, thereby instilling confidence in the artistic integrity of the novelist. This is how the personal revelations are transformed into artistic wholes. Moreover as we move from one novel, we get turned to the personality traits of the author and learn to expect his moments of crisis and the manner of resolution. Joshi's crisis of faith and crisis of identity make up one long sequence that chart his quest for identity in a disintegrated world.

Virginia Wolf asserted in *A poem of One's Own* that "woman writing things back through her mother", (Virgina Wolf 101) and that woman novelist in the 29th century had the bare minimum tradition of a female with which to identify. Similarly, Arun Joshi also tries to explore the actual place that Joshi's protagonists look for in his novels. Like D.H. Lawrence, Arun Joshi indeed is the name of that ultimate spark of spontaneity, the essential uniqueness, the untouchable novelty at the centre of all true human beings rejected both the false individuality of the liberal tradition and the increasing socialization of his times. His triumph is to see his protagonists as joint manifestations of the same basic outlook, involving the elevation of the "ego or self,
the conscious entity with which every individual is saddled" (Pathak The Aliented Self 12).

Arun Joshi's protagonists appear to be suffering from a crisis of identity and this can be seen in the behaviour and the conduct of the various protagonists figuring in his novels. Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is a study in the total alienation of its protagonist. Billy Biswas has all the material comfort and luxury and the best the life can give and yet he is not happy because of a primitive urge within himself. This primitive force has been troubling him since his adolescence. This makes him feel out of place and out of tune with himself and gets isolated from his wife and children. He becomes interested in anthropology instead of engineering. Once on an anthropological trip to the Maikal Hills with his students, he disappears in the saal forest of Maikal in quest for peace and harmony to the crisis arising out of faith.

In Arun Joshi's *The Apprentice*, Ratan Rathore finds himself isolated and lonely in the corrupt civilization when he is made to face the world in search of a job after his father's death in freedom struggle. So he becomes an apprentice to the corrupt civilization and adopts the way of the world to earn his livelihood as he hails from a lower middle class family. In pursuit of his career and position he becomes indifferent towards people around him. He keeps even his morality aside and supplies defective materials to the Defense Forces during Indo-China war for a large sum of bribe resulting into retrenchment of his Brigadier friend who died of an attack. The death of his friend causes mental conflict and agony. Once again this remorse ignites the crisis in his conscious as he finds himself a stranger in the society. He isolates himself among the evil doers. So out of penance for his sins, he decides to wipe the shoes of the congregation before the temple get on his way to office and confesses his guilt.
Arun Joshi's *The Last Labyrinth*, too, is built around the theme of human loneliness and a continuous search for a meaningful stance in life. Despite all material comforts and prosperity Som Bhaskar finds himself cut-off and suffers from a void within. He suffers from a crisis of conscious and finds himself unable to cope with the situation he is in. He also moves away from his own self. Som confronts the dilemma and contradiction of his own being. Frustrated within himself he finds this world indifferent, drab and meaningless. For him world has no meaning or truth. For him life becomes an eternal journey from nothingness to nothingness leading to an existential dilemma. In pursuit of a definite meaning in life, he gets trapped in the same problem without finding an answer.

Joshi is in the habit of delving into the inner recess of human psyche where he finds instincts and impulses at work. He seeks a process of the apprehension of reality which may lead him to the core of truth in Man's life. He realizes man's uniqueness and loneliness in an indifferent and hostile universe. The most common problem that modern man faces today is the problem of alienation and meaninglessness. As has been aptly put, "in our age man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin but from inner problem and meaninglessness in his way of existence" (Huxley 7). The problem of meaninglessness is so pervasive that it threatens to destroy every sphere of human life. It has been treated at great length in American and European literature. Its treatment by Indian novelists like Arun Joshi is no less interesting. Man fails to understand the purpose of life and the relevance of his existence in a hostile world. The contemporary man finds himself in a tragic mess. The prevailing economic conditions resulting in the utter poverty of the masses and the economic mire of the middle class on one hand and the economically sound people on the other, the fast changing value system resulting from industrialization
and urbanization, the inter generational tensions ignited by changing values—all these make increasing and often disturbing demands on the individual and contribute in their own ways to his sense of meaninglessness of life.

Arun Joshi's, *The Foreigner* is symbolic of Sindi Oberoi's sense of being a foreigner wherever he goes. He feels that his sense of foreignness lies within himself. He suffers from a moral and physical crisis resulting from his wounded self. His sense of alienation transcends the geographical boundaries and lies in his inner self. His sense of alienate is rather psychological which is embedded in his three layers of mind. In his second novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, we find that Billy's alienation is not only physical but also psychological. The crisis is faith which he undergoes makes him feel alienated and he desperately longs for peace and harmony, and a meaning in life. So he suddenly disappears from the society in his quest into the Maikala Hills. Joshi's next novel *The Apprentice* is symbolic of the fact that Ratan Rathore is the apprentice of the corrupt civilization who becomes an apprentice on finding himself cut off in the corrupt society and accepts the way of the world to earn his livelihood and gain material prosperity. In such a devil-may-care race of careerism, he happens to be responsible for the death of his Brigadier friend who dies in a heart attack out of the feeling of remorse because he had to be retrenched from the Indo-China border because of the defective supply of weapons. This guilt causes mental agony and he becomes a victim of wounded self which brings about the crisis of conscious in his case. So, in quest for peace and meaning in life, he wipes the shoes of the congregation of his-self Joshi's fourth novel *The Last Labyrinth*, too, symbolizes the isolation of Som Bhaskar who undergoes the crisis of faith as he tries to find the cause of the first cause and tries to unfold the mysteries of Life, Death
and God. He realizes that Life, Death and God are Labyrinths in whose maze one is lost and death is the last labyrinth.

Joshi’s fifth and last novel, *The City and The River* works on three distinct levels: mystic, primitive and modern. The mystic elements are represented by the Great Yogeshwar, The Nameless One, the Hermit, the Little Star and the River. The primitive forces are signified by the Boatmen, their rites and rituals, the modern components are illustrated by the weapons, the lasers and other instruments of war which are, in fact, ultra–modern. These three factors unite the structure of the novel. Mystical parallels raise certain controversial issues and give the work an existential depth. Arun Joshi creates myths and legends to make his work realistic despite the absence of psychologically realized characters. As a realistic work of fiction the novel becomes an indictment of social and political forces at the archetypal level, its rhetoric builds up the tempo of quest. By the time a reader finishes the story, he achieves a sense of having completed a quest for purity through the sacrifice of ego. The question is not of individual success or failure but of collective efforts for the common good.

What Joshi, the product of the post-modern period endeavors to represent is the psychological experience of which the self is an integral part? Hence, the psychological interpretation of the modern people by Joshi provides a method of presenting characters outside time and place, in the double sense that, first, it separates the presentation of consciousness from the chronological sequence of events, and second it enables the quality of a given state of mind to be investigated so completely, by means pursuing to their end the remote mental associations and suggestions that we do not need to wait for time to make the potential actual before we can see whole. The relevance of the delineation of the moments instead of
presenting the complete part of the protagonist lies in the fact that Joshi has not only been able to re-interpret the historical significance of the past but also to integrate the past culture with reference to the present life of the individual.

Arun Joshi’s fiction and its relevance may be understood best by making use of some of the insights embodied in the following observation made by Faulkner:

This is where the questions of the ‘relevance’ of literature come in. We may say that literature may carry a sort of built in rebuke to the hubris of its age and that the more powerful drives of an age and the more successful they appear, the more powerful, radical and complex may be the literature on ‘rebuke’. (Faulkner 113)

Joshi’s wounded self which is dramatized largely in terms of a man’s world doesn’t expand in space and time but always turn inward. Familial brings in a kind of self alienation, which in turn impels Joshi’s protagonist to subject themselves to a search for an emotional center within, which they can cling to in their crises. Self, family and society is neither theoretical concept nor a sociological principle. It is not employed in the study as a yardstick to measure the success or the failure of the individual novelist in his novels.

In his novels discussed in the foregoing chapters, Arun Joshi faithfully highlights the moods of anxiety, alienation and boredom in the human world. The temperament of the modern man has proved congenial to existential passions. It is not surprising, therefore, that in a world challenged by the loss of religious faith and traditional values, the works of certain existentialist writers Sartre captivated human attention. Albert Camus highly valued courage as a necessity to face the radical onslaughts of life and to affirm human dignity by rejecting the ultimate temptations of
suicide and murder. The concern to advance the solidarity of human kind through freedom of choice, love, and responsibility is further strengthened by the thoughts of Sartre, Albert Camus, Paul Tillich, Martin Buber and others who viewed the individual involved in a situation of inevitable tension, a perpetual conflict. These existential writers saw the individual confronted with the norms of faceless bureaucracy, modern technical civilization and other static systems and the confrontation usually results in the feeling of loss of identity of self and crisis of values. The sophisticated society, its ethics of worldly wisdom and its faith in material progress have deeply affected the individuals psyche and his consciousness. This has given rise to crisis in conscious making man feel out of tune with himself. Man has been left in a peculiar situation and finds no way out of it. With its emphasis on individual consciousness and his subjective ethics, it is withdrawal from active participation in life that offers modern man a new way of salvation.

Arun Joshi's view of human predicament assumes an existentialist pose when he states that identity, human contact and meaning are all contingent on a willingness to concede the basic facts of the modern man who worships only material progress while allowing him to be dragged into a spiritual Abyss. Like Wordsworth he is extremely sorry how and why man cares only for his worldly advancement and never thinks seriously of his spiritual death. He reminds an insight into the inner dilemma of his characters and has pointed out the absurdity of existence which is made perceptible in a social contest. His characters spell out the futility of the human condition wherein the modern man is a part of the world of his own making, of his own choice. The central experience of Joshi's novels is crisis – sometimes a crisis of emotions and sentiments including crisis of conscience as in *The Foreigner, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, sometimes a crisis of ethics and allegiance as in *The
Apprentice and The City & The River, and sometimes a crisis of consciousness as in The Last Labyrinth.

Joshi’s main concern in his novels is quest. We see how he works out the hopeless longings that drive all his heroes. Trilling rightly observes that the novel is "a perpetual quest for reality", and "the most effective agent of the moral imagination, of the times”. Through his novels, Joshi portrays the conflict of the contemporary Indian. His novels present the individual's inner crisis and consciousness . He is stimulated into writing as he tells his interviewer Sujatha Mathai, to explore "that mysterious under world which is the human soul"(Sujatha, The Times of India).He further writes in his novels, The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, that "life's meaning lies not in the glossy surfaces of our pretensions but in those dark mossy labyrinth Labyrinths of the soul that languish forever"(8). His character throughout their lives tries to seek meaning of life in meaningless world. They are "the lost lonely Questers" after the absurd in the dark night of the soul in the dark recesses of existence. His interviewer, Sujatha Mathai has rightly remarked: "He sees life as labyrinths – hopeless mazes where you get lost or discover the shining secret at the core of life”(Sujatha, The Times of India).

Arun Joshi honorably withdraws from the outer social reality and engages himself totally towards the exploration of the human soul, the inner psyche of the modern man. His fiction is a quest for the essence of human living. The external world and reality emerge from the consciousness of the individuals. All his heroes are both pica roes and pilgrims- picaroes in their wanderings and pilgrims in their search of meaning of Karma, for life force, for atonement for the First cause, for the Ultimate Truth, for God.
His characters are essentially seekers and Questers. The central theme of his novels is expounded in *The Last Labyrinth*: "Hunger of the body, Hunger of the spirit. You suffer from one or the other or both" (11).

Sindi in *The Foreigner* is a quester after absurd wants with a void in his soul. He continues, "Wandering through the maze of his existence,'(179) trying to discover the meaning of his life. Billy Biswas in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is concerned with his search for the potential divinity that is there in latent form in his unconscious. It is this "other thing" for which he continues his quest. Billy's becoming a primitive is a step towards his spiritual awareness, his existentialist quest for meaning and values in life. It is this quest that ultimately drives him to the doors of death. Joshi, through Romi, describes Billy's quest beautifully:

Life’s meaning lies not in the glossy surfaces of our pretensions but in those dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish forever, hidden from the dazzling light of the sun. I know no other men who show desperately pursued the tenuous thread of existence to its bitter end, no matter what trails of glory or shattered hearts he left behind in his turbulent wake.(8)

In *The Apprentice*, Ratan, out of an acute sense of alienation and a quest to understand the meaning of life undergoes the hardest apprenticeship in the world. Symbolically he starts at the lowest, wiping the shoes of the congregation and thus begging forgiveness of all those whom he has harmed. He believes that polishing their shoes of the devotee will cleanse the filth enveloping his soul, will bring an absolute humility and general acceptance of life. He pleads that there is nothing wrong in making second start: "One must try and not lose heart, not yield at any cost, to despair"(149). His existential decision to recover the lost self through an act of
penitence makes his an affirmative kind of existential figure and the personal value he discovers for himself surely lends meaning to his existence.

Joshi's Sahitya Akadami Award winner novel, *The Last Labyrinth* depicts a fascinating exploration of the turbulent inner world of a millionaire industrialist, Som Bhaskar, whose mystical urge is presented in his perpetual longing for the vitals of life and existence and who is frequently driven by undefined hungers which he unsuccessfully seeks to satisfy by possession of an object, a business enterprise and a woman named Anuradha who becomes more and more the centre of his entire existence. He is in quest of knowledge and is always guided by reason, not by faith. He is curious to know the secret of life and tries to probe into "that core of loneliness around which all of us are built" (54). He is convinced that all the problems can be solved if one has knowledge. He affirms if one knows and if only miracles take place, one would surely know the secrets of life and the drive that is responsible for taking man from his position of weakness to his position of strength. Josh seems to suggest that the unwavering faith is the right substitute for rationalization. The mystical Indian way of life can administer trust and faith in the tortured soul of Som. Gargi holds that suffering and sacrifice cleanse the soul of all impurities. Now, Som notices the change entering into him. He deserts Leela Sabnis, the embodiment of reason and pines for Anuradha the motivator into the world of belief and faith. He discloses his agonies before Gargi, Anuradha and Aftab. All of them have their answers to his quest and cooperate by extending a helping hand to him towards realization. There is a gradual development of Som's soul on the lines of faith and trust. His journey towards the temple at the mountains to encounter Krishna symbolizes his attempt towards reaching his soul. The dirt and filth hindering from having visions of God are being cleaned by his suffering. Suffering and humiliation bring an understanding that helps
in solving the problems of life. The novelist, through *The Last Labyrinth*, seems to suggest that the labyrinth s of life can be resolved through unwavering faith, trust, and intuition and open hearted prayer to God that help in leading a really peaceful life.

His last novel, *The City and The River*, is an existentialist commentary on the absurdity of human situation. Like his earlier novels here in too continues to explore the existential predicament of his characters in an indifferent and hostile world. One thing new in the novel is that here Arun Joshi has widened has canvas by taking up issues that concern larger humanity rather than some individuals. In this novel, he takes up his favorite issues of faith, commitment, choice, responsibility and identity, but the way how he handles these issues is some what different from that of his earlier novels. Here he looks at them with the spectacles of politics and makes this novel a political satire. There are man questions in the number. Master Bhoma goes out in search of peace of mind after the disturbing events, the boatmen to the river in search of their livelihood. The Hermit of the mountain seeks knowledge in isolation and he comes back to save the child for the welfare of the human race. The real quester is the Nameless-One whom the raft carries as an illegal child and brings back as illumined one. The Nameless-One seeks knowledge discipleship with the Great Yogeshwara and comes back to restore peace and order in the world around. By the end of the story, the reader achieves a sense of having completed a quest. It is a universal human quest for purity through sacrifice of "egoism, selfishness, stupidity "(263). The Yajna of life "burns only on sacrifice. When the fire is low, when the flame is dying, men must feed it with their own lives"(166) this, perhaps, is the meaning of life in the meaningless world. This is certainly the meaning of the boatmen's rebellion.

Joshi seems to suggest that "the cure, surely, of all sorts, of problems is within oneself"(69). Like *The Last Labyrinth*, this novel too emphasizes the significance of
faith, prayer, understanding and truth. The novelist puts forward his hypothesis through the Astrologer: "Ours is a spiritual civilization it is through vows that a man perfects himself "(100) as God resides in each soul, Joshi reassures that all should be well and we find The City and The River certainly far more optimistic than his earlier novels.

In all the five novels that Arun Joshi has written, we find a forward movement from one novel to the other. We see that the novelist has progressed from Sindi's search for self in The Foreigner to Billy's search for true self in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, from Ratan's cry of conscience in The Apprentice to Som's cry of consciousness in The Last Labyrinth. In The City and The River, he emphasizes the value of suffering and sacrifice. Like eminent novelists of the world such as Dostoevsky Kafka, and Tolstoy, he has learnt the value of suffering. In The Last Labyrinth through Aftab, Joshi speaks: "There is an understanding that only suffering and humiliation bring"(217). There is a progression from suffering in The Last Labyrinth to sacrifice in The City and The River. This understanding Joshi affirms brings tranquility and enables to learn only by ourselves. A clear understanding unfolds truth which destroys the falsehood at the very roots, and leaves all men free to choose as they like. The last two novels are similar in the sense that both emphasize the significance of the faith, prayer, understanding and truth, in his last novel Joshi affirms that human beings are only tools of the great God and who happened to be the Master of the universe. It is according to his will and forces that everything in the universe functions. He suggests that one who prays and believes in God, tends to be peaceful, contented and in the long run happy and hopeful. The Great Yogeshwar tells the Nameless-One that God resides as much in a Grand-Master as in each one of us.
Therefore, there is always room for hope. Hence, this novel is regarded as the most optimistic work of Joshi.

It would be worthwhile to compare Arun Joshi with some other Indian and English novelists for a better understanding of his vision. Joshi is not a novelist in the tradition of famous English novelists like Jane Austen and Charles Dickens who achieved a finished realism in their novels. Jane Austen (1775-1817) produced novels of consummate art without any blemish. She never cared for the past or the present political events which stirred Europe. She also never bothered to instruct her readers. Her only aim was to draw a realistic picture of her society that would amuse her readers. For example, her most popular work *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) contains characters that are familiarly known to a wide circle of readers. Mrs. Bennet is the match-making mother; Collins is the psycho-fan tic clergy man. Above all there is the jolly, clever young Elizabeth who prejudice is matched with the pride of Dercy, the aristocrat. It gives a lot of fun and amusement added to this are certain special gifts of wit and elegance of dialogue and humor illuminating phrases and a classical precision. Of structure which make her able to have a complete command over her world, although the world she controls is smaller and very limited. Charles Dickens, (1812-1870) who is generally described as the greatest novelist that England has ever produced seemed to be an innovator at every term in his novels. He began in the picturesque manner with *Pickwick Papers* (1836). He contemplated the historical novel in *Barmanbi Rudger* (1841) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) *Oliver Twist* (1837) *A Christmas Carol* (1843) *Hard Times* (1854); he devoted himself to the criticism of social conditions with a reformatory zeal. David Copperfield (1850) is considered to bean autobiographical romance. Like Sharat Chandra, the Indian novelist, Dickens is interested in the workings of lower middle classes. He seems to
see things in an amusing and exaggerated way. His realistic scenes are sometimes lit up by laughter, sometimes warmed up by pity, sometimes distorted by lively caricature and sometimes altogether transformed by poetic imagination. His realistic presentation is at the same time colored by humorous and pathos, satire and melodrama.

Joshi is also not like Mulk Raj Anand or R.K. Narayan, Kamala Markanday or Bhabani. Mulk Raj Anand is an advocate of the down trodden and the under-privileged. He has written about the untouchable, the coolie, the sepoys and the laborers. He has been associated with the Progressive Writers' Movement and the Leftist Peace Movement. He has political blessings and as such he is necessarily a committed writer. R. K. Narayan on the other hand is not a committed novelist. He is an observer of life, pure and simple. He has depicted things as he had seen in real life. He has no philosophy of life to discuss, no axe to grind. Verily speaking he doesn't like deliberate writing at all. He tells Ved Mehta: "I don't like any writing that is deliberate. If an author is deliberate, then I can't read him- he is not readable" (Ved Mehta 149). He belongs to no school, advocates no movement. He is not a reformist, nor is he a propagandist. His concern is with all men, particularly of the middle class and the facts of daily life have taken the form of fiction in his hand. In the novels of Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markanday the peasant life in Indian villages has been sympathetically dealt with. Bhabani Bhattacharya's novels are set against the background of Indian social scene with special reference to certain political and historical events. So Many Hungers covers the incidents that took place in 1942 and thereafter. Shadow from Ladakh pictures India at the time of the Chinese invasion of 1962. The historical touch has distinguished Bhabani Bhattacharya from R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and also from Mulk Raj Anand.
Anita Desai, like Arun Joshi had shifted from the outer world to the inner recess of the mind and heart. She, too, is concerned with exploring the enigma of modern woman. But in her novels, as in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal, the crisis is born out of marital discord, a lack of understanding between husband and wife. On the other hand, Arun Joshi's specialty lies in unraveling diverse facets of crisis in modern man's life. He has the potentiality to give a proper fictive form to the chaos in the mind of the modern man and to correlate it to human condition. Arun Joshi, verily speaking is a novelist who can be said to be long to the tradition of existentialist writers like Camus, Sartre, Kafka, Marcel, Jospers, Becket, Salbellow, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and such others. His character are in search of their lost selves, their identity like Blanche Duboi's of Tennessee Williams or Willy Loman of Arthur Miller. In The Courage to Be, Paul Tillich writes:

Man is drawn into the world of objects and has lost his subjectivity in it. But he is still aware of what he has lost or is continually losing. He is still man-enough to experience his de-humanization as despair. (Tillich 142)

Joshi, like other existentialists, is deeply concerned with man's feeling of alienation and anxiety in life. But he differs from the western existentialist writers in the sense that in him the existential dilemma, the anguish of alienation and the absurdity of situation never remain the final predicament. His central motif is quest and all his characters are Questers and seekers. They combine both Halmud's Yokov Box's search for the human and Kafka's search for God. Joshi admitted his interviewer, Purbi Banerjee, that he might have been considerably influenced by the existentialists, “I did read Camus and Sartre, I like the outsider. I might have been influenced by them. I didn't understand clearly or like. As for existential philosophers
like Kierkegaard, I have never understood anything except odd statements” (Purbi Banerjee, The Sunday Statesman).

However, in The Last Labyrinth, when Anuradha, Som's "Shakti" his gateway to self realization, disappears, he cries bitterly: "Anuradha, if there is a God and if you have ever met him and if He is willing to listen, then, Anuradha, my soul tell him, tell to God to have mercy upon me" (223).

This is a "cry for grace, a belief in God" (22). This cry is what Camus means by "metaphysical revolt". In his last novel The City and The River, this cry for grace is established as firm faith that leads a human being to perfection. Joshi puts forward his hypothesis through the astrologer: "it is through prayer and vow that a man perfects himself"(100). He opines that "the belief in God restores peace to human soul"(76). The novel explores the relevance of God to man and affirms that "the world belongs to God". (70) the final message of Joshi seems to be that the only solution to life's problem lies in complete surrender to God's will: "In the great hand of God we stand and can only do our best. For the rest it is his law and will"(157). He further states that "God is the highest Truth as it is known to each one of us"(70). And that "he is the noblest thing each of us can imagine"(70) Joshi reassures repeatedly that "All should be well"(29) and that God resides in each soul In his novel, The City and The River and The Last Labyrinth, he seems to be more drawn towards Kierkegaardian line of philosophic faith, a metaphysic of hope which is very much akin to Hindu thought that is eventually optimistic and never finally tragic. It so appears that it is the Hindu vision of life that offers solace and consolation to Joshi's mind and art.

Arun Joshi's fiction explores the self and brings to our focus the way in which the self tries to assess its involvement in the alienation from the family and society. For example Sindi Oberoi in The Foreigner says, "I worked in New York for a few
more weeks just enough to finish the project I had started. As it happened after Babu's death the laboratory provided me a sanctuary where I could forget my conflict, at least at the conscious level" (207). The above passage may be taken as a thematic statement of Arun Joshi's fiction. The exploration of self is like a great therapeutic process. By narrating his own experiences, Sindi Oberoi tells us how June, Babu, Mr. Khemka and his daughter Sheila contribute in their own way to his understanding of and awareness of the problem of the self. What is more, the passage seems to convey many levels of awareness through which he passes. The image of the labyrinth signifies the nature and the function of the self. In this context, we may also note that the word 'labyrinth' and its analogues occur quite frequently in Joshi's novel. The core of Joshi's functional theme consists in viewing the self as a labyrinth, and any kind of assessment that the self makes itself is a therapeutic process. This thematic concern in relation to his other novels is also evident. In Joshi's fiction as a whole, reminiscence is the major fictional device. All his protagonists narrate their experiences and these are unified not in terms of sequence and logic but in terms of experiencing consciousness. Social and human relations are meaningful within the scope and reach of narrative personality the process of discovering the self is a sort of cleansing and disinfecting exercise and has a diagnostic implication. In understanding Joshi's protagonist dilemma, such as his failure in life, his obsession that he thinks a lot about women his commitment to his home and his nostalgic saving. His protagonist tries to clarify the problematic of the self. Joshi seems to infer that a foreigner is not one who stays in a country not his own but one who suffers from a sense of rootlessness. This feeling inevitably leads to self alienation. If the self is detached from the world, it may gain a certain amount of objectivity and human perspective. But this is not
enough if the self is to earn the awareness that would clarify the objectivity further and make it a mirror in which images of society could be reflected.

Joshi seems to suggest that life's meaning doesn't lie in the world outside but within. The "glossy surfaces" are contrasted with the "dark mossy labyrinths of the soul". This unmistakably suggests that the soul/self have innumerable chambers whose significance can't be brought to the fore. If one ties to pursue this kind of enquiry, society considers him strange and a useful case for a psychiatrist. There are many passages in Joshi's novels which bring out the problems pertaining to self. We notice how man is detached from himself, how he falls victim to the crises created by the loss of self, how self is wounded and how efforts are made to restore it to its rightful place. Joshi's protagonist is aware of the hurdles he has to face when he enters the world of civilization. It is after his entry in the civilized world that he begins to experience a new set of problems. We come across many incidents which demonstrate the kind of society in which the protagonist lives and pursues his ambition. All values are inseparably tied to the craft of making money as it usually happens the more the money the greater the frustration that accompanies it. The protagonist in spite of his awareness fails to get out of the corruption rackets. He finds himself in a peculiar dilemma where he doesn't know what to do in a given situation.