Chapter – 1

INTRODUCTION
Arun Joshi is an outstanding novelist of the post-colonial period of Indian English Literature. His five novels and a collection of about a dozen short stories are a projection of human predicament and the tormented self of mankind in this mysterious and indifferent universe. Joshi was a thinker, who wrote without fanfare and publicity, about the dilution or destruction of man's native innocence by experience. An engineer by training and a top executive in an industry, Arun Joshi was a widely travelled man. His novels are confessional in tone as he takes us into the inner realms of his characters. Joshi's protagonists seek to confront the mystery of life. He catches the bewilderment of the individual psyche, confronted with the overbearing socio-cultural environment and the ever-beckoning modern promise of self-fulfilment. Modern man is disillusioned inspite of all the modernization and industrialization but in fact, all this is leading our civilization to disaster. Joshi saw the modern man struggling constantly to find a way in this universe. All his protagonists are absolutely puzzled fellows restlessly searching for their roots and purpose of life. In the wake of their quest, they become alienated from their society, world and even from their own self. They engage in soul searching and finally come to know the meaning and purpose of their lives and also have a sense of their true identities. The present social system of India is very well exposed by
Arun Joshi, who aims at establishing a good society with happy civilians and in his novels we find a criticism of civilization.

Arun Joshi finds man in the contemporary society totally frustrated, separated and alienated because of being detached from his fellow beings. His novels are the revelation of human predicament in an indifferent and inscrutable universe. The modern society is full of exploitations. There is only chaos, confusion and anarchy in social life. According to Shivani Vatsa and Rashmi Gaur:

"Arun Joshi was pained to see the chaotic conditions of the society. He therefore took into his hands the task of providing a solution to the society, to escape from the vicious circle of rapid industrialization. Thus through the struggles of his protagonists he aims to achieve a good society and happy and joyful individuals."¹

The novelist noticed the collapse of the age-old values resulting in the disjointed, purposeless and absurd universe. So in all his novels, Joshi deals with the themes of alienation and involvement, East-West encounter and compromise, love and hate, quest and complacence and existentialism and materialism. Though he was influenced by the Western existentialist writers, Joshi has his roots deep in Indian culture. He has
tried to highlight some of the constant metaphysical and ethical questions and conveys a spiritual world view or vision of life in his novels.

The origin of Indian English Literature too was a result of the contact between the East and the West. It is one of the best gifts of the British Raj in India—a bye-product of Indian and English culture. The Englishmen had come to India as merchants at the beginning of the seventeenth century, but by 1757 after the Battle of Plassey, the British East India Company started calling the shots in Indian politics. In 1813, the British in India assumed, besides police functions, educative and civilizing functions as well. Soon they became the rulers of Bengal and eventually they colonized the whole of India. The Englishmen set up many printing presses and opened many schools and colleges. In order to strengthen their machinery, Sir William Jones, a member of the English Supreme Court founded in 1784, The Royal society of Asian Studies. In 1792, Charles Grant, one of the directors of the East India Company pleaded for the English language to be used as a vehicle for imparting western ideas. This was soon supported by Indian patriots and social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and so English was introduced in schools and colleges. The cause of English education in India got a great impetus by the work of Christian missionaries. This brought about the birth and growth of English journalism in India. Hicky’s ‘Bengal
Gazette’, the first newspaper of modern India was founded in 1780 by James Hicky.

The reading public demanded more and this provided a great scope for English educated Indians and Indian English writers. So, the English language and its literature, which was confined to Bengal in the beginning, now opened to the whole of India. This led to a large scale establishment of English medium educational institutions all over India. This brought about India’s political and cultural renaissance. The earliest form of English writing by Indians was confined to prose and the drafting of speeches or a pamphlet. Many Indians were attracted to write in English as it helped them to impress the British and gave them a wider international reading public. Moreover the multiplicity of language in India made English a common language. The growing nationalism and distrust of the vernaculars inspired Indian writers to articulate the glories of India in the English language. Meanwhile in 1835, Lord Macaulay’s ‘minute’ paved the way for English language and literature. Thus Indian English literature was born. At first, a clear cut western influence was evident as these early writers imitated the writers of English literature. These early writers were either patriots or belonged to highly westernized families. Most of the early English creative writing by Indians was done in verse. Although Indians produced English literature in all four genres –
poetry, prose, drama and fiction, the poetry was the first to be written and most popular. Drama has remained the poorest, but it has been the novel, which best suited the Indian English writers’ as well as the readers’ temperament. Prose was mostly written on impulse like political protest or social reform.

The novel gives artistic form to the relationship of man and society and is particularly concerned with time and space and their effects on man. The first Indian English novel was ‘Raj Mohan’s Wife’ by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, ‘The Prince of Destiny’ (1909) by Sarath Kumar Ghose, Hindupore, A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest’ (1909) by S.N.Mitra, ‘The Dive of Death: An Indian Romance’ (1911) by T.Ramakrishna, etc. In the nineteen twenties, a few talented writers emerged, who could lift the Indian English novel to international status and recognition. During this time social realism was ushered in creative writing by Munshi Premchand in Hindi and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee in Bengali. Among them the most prominent were – Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao, whom William Walsh called ‘The Big Three’ of Indian English fiction. These three novelists are really responsible for establishing and developing the Indian English novel. The overall contribution of these novelists can be best expressed in the words of William Walsh:
“It is these three writers who defined the area in which the Indian novel was to operate. They established its assumption, they sketched its main themes .................. Their language has been freed of the foggy taste of Britain.”

There were other notable novelists in that period, when India was struggling for independence like Purshottam Tricamdas, G.V.Desani, Khwaja A.Abbas, etc. It was Babhani Bhattcharya, B.Rajan, Manohar Malgaonkar, Khuswant Singh, Chaman Nahal, etc. who carried on the good work of ‘The Big Three’ after India became independent in 1947. These novelists along with Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao have produced brilliant novels in the nineteen fifties and sixties.

The progress and development of Indian English fiction has been divided into three phases by K.R.S.Iyenger:

1. **Novelists before 1920. This can again be divided into (a)**

   1820-1870: The beginnings – The age of the great pioneers. (b) 1870-1900: The renaissance in the spirit – The age of religious and literary awakening (c) 1900-1920: The period of political awakening.

2. **1920-1947: The Gandhian era.**

3. **1947 – onwards: Independence and after.**
Most of the novels of the first generation did not possess any literary merit. They mostly imitated the early Victorian novel of English literature. These novels were mostly social, historical, detective or romances. The social novels were mainly concerned with religion and social reforms full of philosophy and propaganda. The historical novels of that period had no vision and lacked the sense of historical perspective. The detective novels were not up to expectations and romances were a little interesting as Indians from even the early times have loved romances. The Indian English novels before 1920 have a large number of characters and events grouped around the hero and they generally ended with a happy marriage. They had false sentiments, melodrama and wooden characters with little artistic beauty.

After the first World War, the national conscience of the Indians was awakened and as a result they craved for liberty. This gained further momentum with the emergence of the freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. So after 1920 the Indian English novels were written under this influence. The older tendencies continued, but the realistic novels with a purpose appeared on the scene. They had a vision and were free from didacticism. Political events and the freedom movement is a strong presence in the novels of this period. Gandhiji turned many Indian writers from romanticism to realism. As Meenakshi Mukherji says:
“No discussion of Indo-Anglian fiction dealing with the independence movement would be complete without an assessment of the function of Mahatma Gandhi in these novels. The most potent force behind the whole movement, the Mahatma is recurring presence in these novels and he is used in different ways to suit the design of each writer.”

Some of the novels inspired by the independence struggle are Raja Rao’s ‘Kanthapura’ (1938), ‘Conflict’ (1947) by Amir Ali, ‘The House at Adampur’ by Arthur S.Lall, ‘Inquilab’ (1949) by Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, ‘Motherland’ (1945) by C.N.Zutshi. Raja Rao’s ‘The Cow of The Barricades’ is also about the days of the struggle and Gandhiji is the main figure. Some other novels written even in the post independence period have the echo of the freedom struggle and partition like ‘A Bend in the Ganges’ by Manohar Malgaonkar, ‘Train to Pakistan’ by Khuswant Singh, ‘Sunlight on a Broken Column’ by Attia Husain, ‘Some Inner Fury’ by Kamala Murkandeya, etc.

The Indian English fiction really flowered with the achievement of independence by India. An important feature of the post independence fiction is the rising up of a large number of women novelists on the horizon of Indian English novel. They have made a significant
contribution in this sphere and enriched it. The novelists such as Kamala Markandeya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Namita Gokhale, Bharti Mukherji, Shobha, Shashi Deshpande and Jhumpa Lahiri by their themes, choice of characters and mode of writing have brought forth the creative release of feminine sensibility. The emergence of women writers brought with it a new era of emancipation for the Indian women, an era of increased opportunities and a powerful participation in the social and intellectual life of the country. In fact the earliest attempt by women at writing English novel was in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. These earliest novelists were Toru Dutt, Raj Lakshmi Devi, Krupabai Sathianathan, Cornelia Sorabjee, Swarna Kumari Ghosal, Sita Chatterji. These were early experiments and it was only after independence that the women novelists made solid contribution to the Indian English literature. The women novelists, by the inclusion of new themes created a new awareness of the female society and many have written about larger issues also.

The real surge of the Indian English novel came in the Nineteen Seventies. This branch of literature evolved from a subaltern consciousness; as a reaction to break away from the colonial literature. Hence the post colonial literature in India witnessed a revolution against the idiom used by earlier writers. Gradually the new novelists like Arun
Joshi, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Anita Desai, etc. and more recent writers like Upamanyu Chatterji, Amitava Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, etc. began employing the techniques of hybrid language, magic realism peppered by native themes. Thus from a post colonial era, Indian literature ushered into the modern and then post modern era. The saga of the Indian English novel therefore stands as the tale of changing tradition, the story of changing India.

passing time the Indian English novels gained maturity. It is not just the
daily lives, not just the social issues, the recent novelists have unveiled
the grotesque mythical realities of India.

The Indian English fiction has gained much more respect and
acclaim in the last two decades or the post modern period. The thematic
range of these novelists has further broadened and the emphasis has
shifted towards urban centric novels. As the world has become ‘a global
village’, no culture or society is insular in the contemporary period. This
is reflected in the situations and characters of these novels. Love, sex and
marriage or its failure are some of the popular themes. Lack of faith in
religion and declining moral standard and behaviour are some of the
predominant themes of contemporary Indian English novels. The
corruption in public as well as personal lives of individuals too appeals to
our novelists. The new novelists of eighties and after have written good
novels by employing national myths and epics like the ‘Mahabharat’ as
Shashi Tharoor has done in his the ‘Great Indian Novel’. His other novels
are ‘Show Business’ and ‘Riot’. Vikram Seth created history by writing
in verse his first novel ‘The Golden Gate’ for which he got the Sahitya
Akademi Award in 1988. He became a real celebrity with money
spinning novels like ‘A Suitable Boy’ and ‘An Unequal Music’. Amitav
Ghose is another novelist who is full of promise, potentiality and

Although many critics don’t regard Salman Rushdie as an Indian English novelist as he has migrated to the west and is now a British national but one thing is certain that Rushdie fascinated the Indian intelligentsia with his remarkable understanding of Indian history as well as the unification of Indian history with language. This Mumbai born novelist along with many others like Sir V.S.Naipaul, Ved Mehta, Nirad
C. Chaudhari, Saros Cowasjee, Rohinton Mistry, Bharti Mukherji, Jhumpa Lahiri, etc. are known as writers of the Indian diaspora, which means that their origin is India. They have been dispersed to foreign lands and have settled there. Sir Salman Rushdie, who has been knighted in 2007 burst on the literary scene in the nineteen eighties. He achieved fame with his second novel, “Midnight’s Children” (1981), which won the Booker Prize of that year. His style is often classified as ‘magical realism’ mixed with historical fiction. The dominant theme of his work is the story of the many connections, disruptions and migrations between the Eastern and the Western world. His fourth novel, ‘The Satanic Verses’ (1989) snowballed into a great controversy leading to violent protests all over the Muslim world. A death ‘fatwa’ was issued against him by Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme leader of Iran at that time and Salman Rushdie remained underground for almost a decade. He has been awarded all over the world and in May 2008 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Apart from his book on non-fiction, his other novels include ‘Shame’ (1983), ‘The Moor’s Last Sigh’ (1995) and ‘Shalimar the Clown’ (2005). His latest novel is ‘The Enchantress of Florence’ (2008). The same year, Rushdie’s ‘Midnight’s Children’ was publicly voted as the Best of Booker – the best novel to win the Booker Prize in the award’s forty year history.
Arun Joshi has successfully delineated his contemporary philosophical, religious and social problems and issues through his characters and narrative technique. In fact he has focused more on the deeper layers of man’s being than on social or political problems. The actual experiences of Joshi have been a perennial source of all his novels. He seems not to have written only for entertainment. He has written with view to sharing his own experiences with his friends and readers. He studies modern man’s predicament and his psyche and gives his study the shape of novel. Arun Joshi himself observes:

“My novels are essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and of myself

............. If I did not write, I imagine I would use some other medium to carry on my exploration.”

Arun Joshi was born on 7th July, 1939 at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi where his father, late Prof. A.C.Joshi was on the science faculty of the University (later on he became the Vice-Chancellor as well). The youngest child of his illustrious parents he had his formal education at Varanasi, Lahore and Jalandhar. After completion of his Intermediate course he got a scholarship from the U.S.A. to pursue higher studies. He obtained a Degree in engineering from the University of Kansas in 1959 and Master’s degree in Industrial Management from Massachusetts
Institute of Technology, U.S.A. in 1960. During his American sojourn, he had also worked at a mental hospital where his uncle was a psychiatrist dealing with chronic schizophrenics for a brief period. After returning to India in 1962, he joined the Delhi Cloth and General Mills Co., Delhi in a managerial capacity, as chief of its Recruitment and Training department. During the later years he worked as the Head of the D.C.M. Corporate Performance Assessment Cell, as Secretary, D.C.M. Board of Management and Executive Director of Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources. In 1964 he was married to Rukmani and had three children — two girls and a boy. He resigned from D.C.M in 1965 but remained associated with Shri Ram Centre for Art and Culture and Hindu College, Delhi, as a Member of their Governing Bodies. Meanwhile he had set up his own separate industrial establishment to manufacture diesel engines. Exceptionally perceptive as a creative artist, Joshi has brought out five novels — ‘The Foreigner’ (1968), ‘The Strange Case of Billy Biswas’ (1971), ‘The Apprentice’ (1974), ‘Last Labyrinth’ (1981), ‘The City and The River’ (1990) and a collection of short stories, ‘The Survivor’ (1975). He won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for his fourth novel ‘The Last Labyrinth’ in 1982. It was very unfortunate that a man of such amazing abilities died of cardiac arrest in April, 1993 at the age of fifty four in New Delhi.
Arun Joshi deserted the short story in favour of the novel and so the present study is based on his novels. His main concerns in them appear to be hypocrisy, bribery, falsehood, drunkenness, womanizing, unjust distribution of money and the problem of adjustment in a culturally degraded and dehumanized society. Joshi’s first novel ‘The Foreigner’ (1968) details the life and activities of Mr. Sindi Oberoi a Ph.D., but an orphan born in Nairobi and educated in London. He finally settled down in Delhi. He seems to be an alienated person from his parents, from his friends and lover and finally from himself.

The second novel, ‘The Strange Case of Billy Biswas’ (1971) deals with a psychic person given to conscience and sometimes to vision and hallucinations. He is a Ph.D. from New York with a peculiar bent of mind. He gets married to a ‘mod’, Meena Chatterjee, whose only concern is to make this man all the more restive. During one of his expeditions in central India alongwith the students of the university of Delhi, Billy disappears from the camp and all attempts to trace him proved futile. The narrator of the story is his friend Romi who is an I.A.S. The collector’s wife, Situ, falls seriously ill and Billy cures her forever. Billy had already told his friend, the collector, that any attempt to capture him would prove disastrous. A police party tries to capture him on the request of Billy’s old father. Billy defies it and ultimately dies of bullet injuries.
In the third novel, 'The Apprentice' (1974), we have the story of Ratan Rathor who hails from one of the revolutionary families of Rajasthan, a well-educated village boy, he goes to Delhi to make his career, becomes a clerk in the Army store department where he gets confirmed and finally becomes an officer of the Government of India. How this honest, hardworking boy becomes a conceited man in the midst of the urban people, this is what the story is about. But he feels the pangs within, and his ever alert conscience keeps on pricking him and he turns "to be of use" to others. He fulfills this desire by becoming a shoe-shine on the staircase of a Delhi temple.

In the fourth novel, 'The Last Labyrinth' (1981) the central figure is Som Bhaskar, a multimillionaire married to a woman of his own choice, Geeta, who has borne him two children. Bhaskar is an ever dissatisfied, restless person, who is relentlessly driven by undefined hungers of possession. Later when he encounters Anuradha a tall, beautiful but obsolete lady, he is irresistibly drawn towards her and frequently flies between Bombay and Banaras to satisfy his passions. In the meantime, Bhaskar is also drawn towards the problem of family life, of god and Death, and he takes a risky trip to high mountains to pay a visit to a sacred shrine. He is still restless and pulls out his revolver to
finish himself off, but Geeta comes forward and rescues him momentarily from the dark mood of depression.

The fifth and the last novel, “The City and the River” is a political fable. Using a mixture of fantasy, prophecy and a startling real vision of politics, this is a novel that is truly a parable of the times. The city represents all cities and the river is the mother of cities. The story of Grandmaster and the fulfilment of the strange prophecy contains many subtle shades of the recent and contemporary Indian socio-political life. It is a vivid commentary on how democratic institutions are corrupted and subverted, until only a deluge is required for its cleansing.

The arrival of Britishers 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 but 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 the western civilization. With its modern approach and changing tactics this civilization has given rise to materialism. With the emergence of
modernism, man's inner self continued to be corroded by discontent, despair and lack of faith in the traditional values that has sustained an entire generation before independence.

In fact, the English did not merely mutilate 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 a consequence of the process of urbanization and modernization under the influence of the west.

Arun Joshi is exposed to both the cultures. The present generation is facing the conflict between modern civilization and primitivism. Joshi's novels deal with these two themes. We can find a solution to the torn personality of the entire modern generation. Arun Joshi has explored the reality of cultural interaction locating its significance in Indian life. In his fiction the encounter of cultures does not come up directly, it is wrought in the concept and conflict of tradition and transition and in the juxtaposition of the materialistic, empirical, rational view of life and spiritual stance of life.

Joshi's characters are trapped between the Indian ethos and western influence. They are set against the post Independence socio cultural milieu with moral and spiritual problems of the contemporary Indians. According to A.N.Dwivedi:
“He presents the aspects of Indian life so skilfully that it becomes universal in his creative smithy. We read the novel of Joshi and feel that the writer is opening out what is going with in our own hearts. All of his novels are splendid, serious and powerfully disturbing. Through the simple knitting of the story, the novelist tries to explain, to make us understand Life, Love, God, and Death.”

In spite of the scientific and technological advancement which have increased the sources of his pleasure and comfort, the contemporary man finds himself in tragic mess. He is estranged from his innermost nature as well as his fellowmen and has nothing within or without him to depend upon in the moments of crisis. The disillusionment of the present day urban civilization which results in the withering of lives, hopes and joys is powerfully projected in the novels of Arun Joshi. He protests against the dehumanizing influence of our civilized life and emphasises on the worth and dignity of the individual. Ultimately, in Joshi’s novels, the higher self of the protagonists, scrutinizing and condemning his lower self, breaks loose from its shackles, illustrating Colin Wilson’s remark that:

“as long as a man is not horrified at himself, he knows nothing about himself.”
Joshi's fiction demonstrates the universal lessons of our spiritual heritage that might have been temporarily relegated to the background but are still relevant despite the materialism and rapid westernization of our country. Commenting on a verse of the Gita, S.Radhakrishnan states:

"Man is a two-fold contradictory being, free and enslaved. He is god like, and has in him signs of his fall........... But man desires to get the better of his fallen nature"\(^8\)

This seems to distill the essence of the dilemmas and quest of Arun Joshi's protagonists, who threading labyrinths of life, reach chinks of affirmation, thereby fortifying one's faith in man's ability to survive as man.

Arun Joshi's thematic concern in his novels has perhaps grown out of the positive and negative influence upon him of many of the American novelists and continental existentialist philosophers. It has also developed out of the philosophical idealisms preached in the perennial schools of Indian philosophy and their decadence in the context of our modern consumer culture of the enmasse and the prevalence of the anarchic forces. There are instances of the awareness regarding literary identity as well. The Hindu psyche of Arun Joshi is always active; despite all his
western acquisitions, he never loses ground and comes back to the nest of the Hindu heritage.

As we shall see in detail in the next chapter, Joshi’s works show a strong influence of Camus and Sartre, apart from his deep rooted upbringing on Indian religious and philosophical texts like Upanishads and Bhagwat Gita. His fictional world is characterized by frustration, disintegration and a sense of alienation. Like Joseph Conrad and V.S.Naipaul, Arun Joshi seems to be preoccupied with the themes of man’s existence, bad faith and aimlessness in life. In the words of Hari Mohan Prasad:

“His novel is both a chronicle of chaos and a mode of quest.”

Joshi delves deep into the dark recesses of the mind which are the inscrutable region of uncertainty and inscrutability. As R.K.Dhawan writes:

“Reading Joshi’s novels is not always a smooth experience; there are moments when one is assailed by doubts and questions. There is “something” that attracts one’s attention and then grips. Joshi delves into the inner recesses of human psyche where he finds instincts and impulses at work; he seeks a process of the apprehension
of reality which may lead him to the world of the core of
the truth of man’s life.”

In his novels, Arun Joshi has successfully delineated his
contemporary philosophical, religious, political and social problems and
issues through his characters and narrative technique. His presentation of
the tormented and conflicting self of the contemporary man has added
new dimensions to the Indian English psychological novels. By mingling
social phenomenon and spiritual element, and the physical and
metaphysical aspects Joshi has presented a vision of life highlighting the
ancient Indian cultural values. This makes Arun Joshi’s novels so
relevant in the present context as they present a criticism of civilization.
Notes and References

3. K.R.S. Iyengar, ‘Contemporary Indian Literature’; Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, p.35