INTRODUCTION

The whole question of man’s relationship within society has always occupied a position of primacy in the novel. A great poem may be written on a rock or a cloud or wind, but very few great novels focus exclusively on man’s relation with natural forces. The chief concern of a novel is necessarily with the circumstantial reality, the very web and texture of society as it exists or as it exists. All the great European, English, and even American masters are thoroughly absorbed by man’s place in the social web and his efforts to reject or be assimilated by it. For example, right from Richardson’s *Pamela* and Fielding’s *Tom Jones*, to Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady*, Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom*; and Saul Bellow’s *Herzog*—all are connected with the intricacies of personal and social relationships.

The rise of novel in England coincided with the rise of the middle classes and the general awakening of the public to social issues. Democratization and secularization of society—the two movements that had been slowly taking root in the popular mind—tended to focus attention on the problems of men in their daily social existence. It is not difficult to understand why F.R. Leavis should have located the great tradition of the English novel to lie in social realism, the realism
of George Eliot, for instance, of man defining himself through social relationships.

E.M. Forster was not exaggerating when he said that the theme of all his novels was the problem of connections: “only connect.” Two hundred years of the colonial adventure in India have made the problem of connection particularly relevant between the western educated elite and the great masses of people, most of whom live obscure, quiet and tradition-bound lives in rural India. Historically, ours is one of the oldest continuous cultures with mores and values slowly crystallized through time. Therefore, the problems faced by individuals in their relationships with others are bound to be influenced by the subtle and complex Indian scene changing imperceptibly almost against its will. Democratization, industrialization and modernism have exacerbated the conflicts between individuals. The onslaught of westernization and modernization and its consequences have increased the yawning gulf between the elite and the vast majority in India. It is this changing India that is the locale for the works of these three novelists.

Women condition is no better in today’s society. They have suffered a lot right from the origin of world societies. Let us discuss briefly their struggle for self-identity.
The story of the human race begins with the female because woman carried the Original human chromosome as she does to this day. Yet for generations the historians have always regarded ‘Man’ as the star whereas in reality the woman was quietly getting on with the task of securing a future for humanity—for it was her labour, her skill, her biology that held the key to the destiny of the race.

The early woman was intensely occupied from dawn to dusk. Her major duty was food-gathering and this work kept the tribe alive. At no point in the history did women, with or without the children, relies on their hunting mates for food. Mass evidence also shows that the earliest families consisted of females and their children since all tribal hunting societies were centred on and organised through the mother. The young males either left or were driven out, while the females stayed close to their mothers.

Around 2300 B.C., the Chief Priest of Sumeria sung a hymn in praise of the God (Kerenji 20). It was the world’s first known poem but what is important is this that this first known poem to claim the attention of the world was composed by a woman. Incidentally, the first known priest was also a woman. From the beginning, as humankind emerged from the darkness of prehistory, God was a woman. However, later ages dismissed accounts of Goddess worship as ‘myths’ or ‘cult.’
As women, they were the Goddess on earth, who held power to which man habitually deferred. A man only became king when he married the source of power; he did not hold it in his rights. So in the 18th dynasty of the Egyptian monarchy the Pharaoh Thutmos I had to yield the throne on the death of his wife to his teenage daughter, Hatsheput, even though he had two sons. The custom of royal blood and the right to rule descending in the female line occurs in many cultures (Nevman 15).

Woman owned and controlled money and property. In Sparta the women owned two-thirds of all the land. Arab women owned flocks which their husbands merely pastured for them. In Egypt, a man’s financial independence of her husband was such that if he borrowed money from her, she could even charge him interest.

Marriage contracts, respected women’s rights as individuals, and honoured them as partners. In Babylon, if a man degraded his wife, she could bring an action for legal separation from him on the grounds of cruelty. The Greek historian Diodorus records an Egyptian marriage contract in which the husband pledged his wife to be:

I bow before your rights as wife. From this day on, I shall never oppose your claims with a single word. I recognise you before all others as my wife, though I do not have the right to say you must be mine, and only I am husband and
mate. You alone have the right of departure....I cannot oppose your wish wherever you desire to go, I give you...

(here follows an index of the bridegroom’s possessions)

(Diner 15).

Throughout the ancient world there is also abundant evidence of women fighting as soldiers, ruling queens led their troops in the field, not as ceremonial figure-heads but as acknowledged war-leaders. Ruling woman also commanded military action at sea as the Egyptian queen Cleopatra did at the battle of Action, where her uncharacteristic failure of nerve cost her war, the empire, her lover, Antony and her life. Warrior Queens were particularly celebrated in Celtic Britain where the great goddess herself always bore a war-like aspect. The pre-Christian chronicles contain numerous accounts of female war-leaders like Queen Medals who commanded her own forces and who making war on Queen Findmor captured fifty of the enemy queen’s women warriors single handed.

At every level women made their mark. There is a record of the first known woman sea-captain in John Langdon Davie’s book A Short History of Woman. In the fifth century B.C. a woman commanded the Athenian fleet in the Persian War in the battle of Marathon so efficiently that a great bounty was put on her head. She survived the
war, but committed suicide for being rejected by the man whom she loved.

Poets, priests, queens, rulers, mothers, lovers, soldiers, captains—these were the first individual woman to take place in human history. These were the women who knew their strength and this strength was recognised because women had legal rights, access to power, education, full citizenship, the right to own money and property, the right to divorce, custody of children and financial maintenance.

No one had yet told them that women were physically weak, emotionally unstable or intellectually ill-equipped. It is only much later that the so-called advanced society made this false discovery.

As societies evolved, male took control through brutal force. One of the immediate measures was to prohibit women leaving their houses at night and during the day so as to confine them more and more to the home. Gradually, women became not only simply the property but legally part of their fathers or husbands.

Husband, home, family—for centuries the life of woman revolved round these three spheres only. In Britain, for example, women in general did not exist as ‘persons’ under the law. Specially, in the case of married woman the non-existence of woman was complete in all the eyes of the law. Her body, her earnings, her children
belonged to the husband. She could not own any kind of personal property. Some men even argued that they could sell or at least ‘lend’ their wives. Of course, this was not the spirit of the law. Women were not allowed to vote. They were not given any opportunity for education. Until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, woman’s education consisted mainly of a training in feminine accomplishments provided by governess at home. There were a few schools for girls but they mainly taught the art of husband-catching to the girls by superficial accomplishments, which mainly consisted of a brief learning, of the foreign languages, singing, dancing, sewing and a preparation for flirtatious courtship.

If working-class girls went to school at all, which they mostly did not, it was to a Charity school, or pan-time factory school.

Hannah Mitchell a suffragette recalled her own experience as a child in a rural area of Northern England in the 1870 in her autobiography The Hard Way Up (1977). The nearest school was five miles away; her father and her uncle taught all the children in the family to read, but it was the privilege of the boys to attend school, however, Hannah managed to attend school for two weeks. She was only eight years old at that time and was not allowed to go to school but felt a strong urge to learn. From the lines quoted below, we find
feminism born in her from the tender age of eight. She writes that while she earned her brother’s stockings:

They read or played cards or dominoes. Sometimes the boys helped with rug making, or in cutting up wool or picking feathers, for beds and pillows, but for them this was a voluntary task, for the girls, it was compulsory, and the fact that the boys could read if they wished filled my cup of bitterness to the brim (Mitchell 45).

If women wanted to achieve something, they had to be quick-witted and make most of the opportunity offered to them. Hannah did the same. She managed to turn her brothers schooling to her own advantage. She writes:

Finding that the school master was willing to lend the boys any book they wished to bring home at weekends, I made a bargain with them. I offered to do several small tasks, such as cleaning boots, or gathering firewood, which they were expected to perform at weekends, on the understanding that they brought me home a book each Friday; no book were forthcoming, the work would be found undone the following week, I told them (43).

The education of Girls for the first time became compulsory in Britain in 1880, which made schooling available for all children upto
the age of ten. But even then education was viewed by parents and employees as less of a necessity for girls than for the boys.

In 1837, Oberlin College opened its doors to the first woman undergraduate. This was in the United States. Its principal purpose was to provide ministers with intelligent and cultivated wives. In 1848, Queens College was founded in London, but its main objective was to teach all branches of female knowledge and to train governesses by providing them with elementary education and certificates of proficiency.

The question of women’s education in relation to men is a topic of debate even today. The theory that biology made woman unfit for education was most eloquently put in relation to higher education by Dr. Edward H. Clarke (35). He argued that, education directly caused the uterus to atrophy. He says that factory work was less damaging to woman than education because in the factory it was the body that was occupied and not the brain. In support Dr. Clarke produced cases from his own practice. One young woman, a student, had fainting spells during her menses and when she graduated she was invalid because of the constant headaches. He further concludes that her reproductive system had its development arrested because of her concentration in education—she was also reported to be flat-chested.
What impact such theories would have had on the women of those days who wished to have higher education is difficult to say. However, a feminist, thanked Mother Carey Thomas, President of Bryn Mawa College, founded in 1889, looked back at her own trepidation in the early days of higher education for women:

The passionate desire of the women of my generation for higher education was accompanied throughout its course by the awful doubt, felt by women themselves as well as by men, as to whether women as a sex were physically and mentally fit for it.... I was terror-struck lest I, and every other woman with me, were doomed to live as pathological invalids in a universe merciless to woman as a sex.... (Thomas 32).

Before Martha herself went to college she had met only one other woman who had done so and Martha’s own family thought her college career as much as a disgrace “...as if I had eloped with a coachman.”

Thus women’s exclusion from medical college was justified not only on the biological arguments given above but also that women would be upset if they consorted with male students and with male corpses and specially if they were to be seen at work on male corpses by male students.
There was a belief among women that education perhaps might help them to escape a feminine destiny but the vision of emancipation through education has not materialised. Even today we find the woman trapped in the triangle of husband, home and family.

Arun Joshi adds a new dimension to the genre of Indian Fiction in English by introducing the theme of alienation in his novels. His fictional world is characterised by the alienation of the individual, shown through a crisis of the self in an emotionally disturbed environment. He is acclaimed for his absorbing novels in which French existentialism coexisted and fused with meditations based on the Bhagavad Gita. A bridge between two worlds and cultures, not necessarily the East and the West, his career followed an ascending line that eventually led him to being awarded the Sahitya Academy Award, India’s most prestigious literary honour. Arun Joshi’s novels, from TheForeigner to The City and River are full of darkness, the darkness of the identity, conflict and personal sufferings. Ultimately there is rejuvenation and elevation from the shadow of the darkness by the arrival of the light in the form of knowledge.

To understand and analyse the novels of Arun Joshi, it is worthwhile to have a subjective understanding of the novels rather than that of the objective reality that shaped the protagonist. This introductory chapter is an attempt to look at the novels of Arun Joshi
from various angles. For this purpose, the Chapter has been divided into various parts to place the issue of “identity” in a larger context.

Joshi’s first novel, *The Foreigner* (1993), depicts the alienation of the protagonist Sindi Oberoi and explores his anguished consciousness of being alienated from the conventions and rituals of his society. This anguish and alienation later on manifest themselves as the reasons for the identity conflict and main causes of the meaninglessness of his life.

Sindi Oberoi was born in Kenya of an English mother and an Indian father. Though his father was an Indian, yet he could hardly call himself a Hindu. As if elaborating the point, he candidly confesses: “Anyway I can’t really be called a Hindu. My mother was English and my father, I am told, a sceptic. That doesn’t seem like a good beginning for a Hindu, does it.”

Sindi remains a foreigner whether he is in London, Boston, or Delhi. He cannot think of himself as belonging to any country in particular and wonders: “did I belong to the world?” (55). But “the sense of foreignness that afflicts him and makes him alienated from others is not geographical, as it might appear on the surface, but that of his soul. Accordingly Sindi remarks:

“Somebody had begotten me without a purpose and so far I had lived without a purpose, unless you could call the
search for peace a purpose. Perhaps I felt like that, because I was a foreigner in America. But then, what difference would it have made if I had lived in Kenya or India or any other place for that matter! It seemed to me that I would still be a foreigner” (55).

This remark of his clearly evinces that he is experiencing rootlessness and alienation that result into the identity crisis.

Living in Kenya, London and Boston, he undergoes various changes through personal experiences. While in Kenya, he contemplates suicide, and when he comes to London, the same despair remains with him. A girl, Anna, seeks to rediscover her lost youth, and lives for him, but in response he gives her nothing and shows his liking for Kathy. Eventually Kathy abandons him. The broken relationship disturbs him, and in America he is “afraid of getting involved” (53) with June Blyth, an American girl.

Sindi’s parentage and early life made him a nowhere man. He cultivates a sense of detachment to overcome his painful past, which includes “Being a product of hybrid culture”. He is aware of his rootlessness. He wants to love June but is afraid of involvement and marriage. Hence he remarked: “I was afraid of possessing anybody and I was afraid of being possessed, and marriage meant both” (91).
The mystery of human existence terrifies him when he comes to know about the death of June due to an abortion. Babu’s death taught him only half the lesson, but he learns the remaining half when he comes to know about the death of June. “Consequently, he looks upon the world as a heap of crumbled illusions where nothing is real and permanent” (94).

The nausea Sindi feels in his early days keeps him restless throughout life. He “sees no purpose in life and he finds himself living without a purpose” (97). This sickness remains with him even after he joins London University. He does well in the examinations, but he gets tired and bored with the lectures which, according to him, lack relevance to life. Sindi resembles T. S. Eliot’s “Hollow Men” and “J. Alfred Prufrock”. Lightly does Tapan Kumar Ghosh hold that: “like T. S. Eliot’s straw men, he ekes out an existence which is no better than death in life.” Like Prufrock measuring out his life “with coffee spoons”, Sindi too contemplates:

“My fifth Christmas on these alien shores. And yet all shores are alien when you don’t belong anywhere. Twenty fifth Christmas on this planet, twenty five years largely wasted in search of wrong things in wrong places. Twenty five years gone in search of peace, and what did I have to show for achievements; a ten stone body that had to be fed
four times of a day, twenty eight times a week. This was the sum of a lifetime of striving” (96).

Also like Prufrock, he is unable to understand himself or his life. He too is lonely, all alone in the wild world. Although an Indian by birth, Sindi feels himself to be an outsider even in India. Shaila, Babu’s sister, tries to understand him but she too remarks: “You are still a foreigner, you don’t belong here” (122). There is intense sadness in Sindi which those who come into contact with him, June in America, Sheila, Mr. Khemkar in India, can feel in the very presence of the man. This he tries to explain to Mr. Khemka in the following manner:

You had a clear cut system of morality, a caste system that laid down all you had to do. You had a God; you had roots in the soil you lived upon. Look at me. I have no roots. I have no system of morality. What does it mean to me if you call me an immoral man? I have no reason to be one thing or another. You ask me why I am not ambitious; well, I have no reason to be. Come to think of it I don’t even have a reason to live! (118).

Thus, in The Foreigner, Joshi depicts the alienation of the protagonist Sindi Oberoi. It results into the identity conflict but the post-spiritualism gives him the salvation, an identity, and a meaning to his life. Besides, Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist of his debut novel The
Foreigner, brings back to life many of the experiences encountered in his author’s youth.

While in all Joshi’s novels characters feel the need to confess their wrongs at one time or another, The Apprentice makes the confessional motif the focal point of the work. It is no surprise; therefore, that Camus’s The Fall is the text scholars generally tend to compare to Joshi’s third literary work. It is surely a novel that stands apart in the author’s literary output; of all his books, in fact, The Apprentice is the one that describe the details of Indian society and Indian history--centred as it is on the episodes gravitating around the Indo-Chinese conflict. It is narrated in spicy Indian English by the central character, Ratan Rathor.

The fictional technique adopted by Arun Joshi is another important element that contributes to the uniqueness of The Apprentice. So, that the novel has sometimes been tagged as a fictional experiment. Very ingenuously and with excellent oratorical skill, Ratan pours out the events of his life to a listener, whose name one never learns. Of this imaginary dialogue, however, Joshi brings to the text only the narrator’s speech and not his interlocutor’s, leaving the reader with the impression of a monologue. But, though apparently mute in the text, the listener is extremely active in oiling the mechanisms of the conversation with Ratan. In fact, Joshi’s secret is that the interlocutor is
kept well hidden in the shades of discourse. As the story unfolds, one learns that he is young, well-mannered, patient, idealistic, and proud of being a National Cadet. He pays great attention to every detail of the story he is being told. Therefore, he is able to help Ratan to find the thread of his thoughts again every time the narrator’s unavoidable digressions lead him to forget the starting point of his tale. His questions are wise and sharp and he is even said to take on the role of the inquisitor. However, his esteem for Ratan is so high that he does not hesitate to put all his other chores aside. In short, he is the ideal listener.

On the other hand, Ratan is the ideal orator, who needs a public to fully achieve his goal. One knows very little of his present situation until nearly the end of the novel, when his predicament is fully exposed. In the meantime, however, he grips the reader’s attention, thanks to his brilliant use of a variety of rhetorical devices. Sentimental, self-cantered, as much a prisoner of his own telling as is his listener/reader (if not more so), an astute orator-deceiver; he is the one who, for instance, humbly declares: “Let me not, however, get on the pulpit again. I have not the right” (102), while knowing full well that he would not go on was he not relentlessly in a commanding position. Ratan Rathor is a little past middle age, talks with the self-
confidence of an experienced man, and is educated, sensible and extremely intelligent.

‘The Strange Case of Billy Biswas’ is the story of a young, rich, America-educated Indian who ends up in the wilderness of central India living as a semi-naked “tribal” seeking a meaning to things above and beyond all that everyday civilization can provide. A key to Joshi’s whole intent can be found in the narrator’s realisation that the most futile cry of man is his impossible wish to be understood.

The City and the River, Joshi’s last novel, came out some ten years after The Last Labyrinth, a considerable span of time if one takes into consideration that the novelist took only a little more than a decade to publish his other four novels, a collection of short stories and a book illustrating the history of the philanthropic institution he worked for. The City and the River, the city is not the Delhi or the Bombay Joshi has elsewhere described so concretely but a wholly intangible place, removed from time, where nonetheless a man can be seen wearing jeans. Joshi, in his search for a way to describe the meaning of things, has now come to a world akin to those of science fiction or perhaps to the mystical poetry of Blake writing of “Golgonooza the spiritual Fourfold London eternal.” But all the while there are digs or sly hints at the current ills of Indian society and, by implication, of all societies. And in the final pages, where the wild
river sweeps over the whole complex city, there is, again, sounded that
faint note of hope. The question is not of success or failure, an old yogi
tells his disciple; the question is of trying.

Of all the author’s novels, in fact, The City and the River is the
one, which can best be described as “fictional experiment”, despite the
fact that this label was used for other works of his, The Apprentice in
particular.

The novel records the gloomy story that the Great Yogeshwara
recounts to a disciple, the Nameless One, in order to explain who he is.
In it too, Joshi makes use of the same device of one-sided dialogue that
he employed in The Apprentice, where Ratan emptied his conscience
to the National Cadet. Different from the former novel, however, the
teller’s detachment from the story, due in part to the fact that he is now
a witness of the events rather than the protagonist, runs the risk of
mirroring the author’s attitude. As a consequence, the narrative fails to
grip the reader’s attention and the critical reception it was given was
lukewarm. Following the vogue of Midnight’s Children, The City and
the River tries to exhume the legends of ancient Indian epics -- chiefly
the Upanishads, in which an old sage teaches a lesson of life to a
talented disciple--and incorporate them within a postmodern structure
and significance. As is already evident in the title, the book emphasises
two separate and hostile worlds, another interpretation of the typical
dichotomy in Joshi’s vision: the Bombay and the Benares of *The Last Labyrinth*, the Delhi and the Maikala Hills of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. The passage from the eighties to the nineties in India, however, marks a significant shift in the taste and orientation of the reading public as far as the fiction written in English was concerned. The arrival, and enormous success, of Rushdie’s novels had caused ferment in what had been a static situation and it is likely that *The City and the River* embodied a turn in Joshi’s literary output, partly in an effort to exploit the new world.

The story told here is that after a disturbing dream, interpreted as a harbinger of problems by the Astrologer, the Great Master of the City resolves to strengthen his authority. Surrounding himself with a group of ambitious, sycophant ministers, he tries to win the boatmen’s sympathies. They represent the other pole in the city, the poor who still live according to tradition and have made an alliance with the River. Nevertheless, they are not taken in by the Great Master’s cajoling, who consequently feels the need to employ stronger measures to make the boatmen submit: mass imprisonment, torture, even total destruction.

His novels, delving into existentialism along with the ethical choices a man has to make, won him huge critical appreciation in India, but remained largely unknown in the West.
Arun Joshi, a writer in the pre-Rushdie era, deals with the mystery and darkness of human mind. His novels, probing into existentialism along with the ethical choices a man has to make, won him huge critical appreciation in India, but remained largely unknown in the West. Psychiatry was the basic interest of Arun Joshi. Most of the writings by Arun Joshi are filled up with his personal experiences right from his youth. Perhaps this is the reason that most of his writings have an array of autobiographical elements.

Arun Joshi is a novelist who, more strongly than most, has brought to his work the detachment from the everyday, while still acknowledging its existence, which is perhaps India’s particular gift to the literature of the world. The rising up into the transcendental is a trait that has increasingly marked out his novels from his first, The Foreigner—where the young hero, after experiencing life and love in America, is, back in Delhi, at last persuaded by a humble office worker that sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved up to The City and the River, which takes place wholly in an imaginary land.

To venture as a writer into such territory, it is necessary to be equipped with the means to make the everyday credible and sharply present. This Joshi was from the start well able to do, as his early short stories, subsequently collected in Survivor, clearly show. “The Gherao” tells simply and effectively of how a young college teacher
arrives at maturity when his aged Principal is subjected to that peculiar Indian form of protest action, the gherao, the preventing of a target figure from moving anywhere or receiving any succor.

In The Last Labyrinth, the hero, if that always is not too strong a term for the men Joshi puts at the centre, is a man crying always: “I want! I want!” and not knowing what it is he desires, in some ways a parallel figure to Saul Bellow’s Henderson, the rain king. His search takes him, however, to infinitely old Benares, a city seen as altogether intangible, at once holy and repellent, and to an end lost in a miasma of non-understanding. But the way there is gripping. Joshi writes with a persuasive ease and illuminates the outward scene with telling phrase after telling phrase.

From the above short description of Arun Joshi’s work, one thing is very clear that the all the works of the writer revolve around the twin aspects of “conflict” and “self identity” which are interwoven and inseparable. In search of self-identity and to resolve the “conflict” Arun Joshi through his characters resolves the problem by the redemption in various ways. The question is why the author goes for such plot of story and then gives a platform to the character to resolve the agony and suffering of the identity chins and conflict. This point leads to the approach of the subjectivity and suffering where the author himself finds in a perplexed situation which he brings out through the
expression of literature. In literature such situation has been mostly painted in the Post-Colonial writings. To analyse the conflict in the novels, the reader has to understand the literary connotations and theoretical aspects of the conflict in literature itself.

A struggle between a character and an outside force is an external conflict. Characters may face several types of outside forces. The outside force may be another character. It may be the character and the community. The outside force may also be forces of nature. For example, a story might describe the main character struggling against the arctic cold.

A struggle that takes place in a character’s mind is called internal conflict. For example, a character may have to decide between right and wrong or between two solutions to a problem. Sometimes, a character must deal with his or her own mixed feelings or emotions.

Conflict is necessary to every story. In short stories, there is usually one major conflict. In longer stories, there could be several conflicts. Conflict adds excitement and suspense to a story. The conflict usually becomes clear in the beginning of a story. As the plot unfolds, the reader starts to wonder what will happen next and how the characters will handle the situation. Many readers enjoy trying to predict the final outcome. The excitement usually builds to a high
point, or climax. The climax is the turning point of the story. Something has happened to resolve the conflict.

For an in-depth analysis of conflict, the following steps may be taken:

1. Identifying the main characters,
2. Deciding what conflict they face.
3. Looking for steps they take to settle that conflict.
4. Seeing if the steps cause other conflict.
5. Watching for clues and try to predict what the characters will do.
6. Enjoying the build up of suspense.
7. Putting self in the story.
8. Deciding if all would have solved the conflict in the same way.

The conflict in Arun Joshi’s novel plays a decisive role. However, the “conflict”, as theme itself, is multidimensional and has theoretical background and historical significance in various authors. Having defined the bounds of the term post-colonial, one must determine how the works of these authors utilize such a construct. Such constructs are created and utilised by the writers using the conflict--necessary elements of the fictional work. It is often classified according to the nature of the protagonist or antagonist. Conflict is the struggle between the opposing forces on which the action in a work of literature depends. There are five basic forms of conflict: person versus
person, person versus self, person versus nature, person versus society, and person versus God.

Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy once commented that all happy families resemble each other, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own unique way. Tolstoy’s observation may be the reason why no one writes stories about perfect harmony. Conflict is simply easier to scrounge up, and it is almost always more interesting.

Person versus self is the theme in literature that places a character against his own will, confusion, or fears. It can also be where a character tries to find out who he is or comes to a realisation or a change in character. Although the struggle is internal, the character can be influenced by external forces. The struggle of the human being to come to a decision is the basis of person versus self.

Person versus person is when, in a novel, there is a conflict of two forms of like beings. An example is the hero’s conflicts with the central villain of a work, which may play a large role in the plot and contribute to the development of both characters. There are usually several confrontations before the climax is reached. The conflict is external.

Person versus society is a theme in fiction in which a main character’s, or group of main characters’, main source of conflict is social traditions or concepts. In this sense, the two parties are: a) the
protagonist(s); b) the society, the protagonist(s) are part of. Society itself is often looked at as a single character, just as an opposing party would be looked at in a person verses person conflict.

Person vs. Supernatural is a theme in literature that places a character against supernatural forces. When an entity is in conflict with his, her, or itself, the conflict is categorized as internal, otherwise, it is external. Such stories are often seen in Freudian Criticism as representations of id verses superego.

As with other literary terms of conflict, these have come about gradually as descriptions of common narrative structures. Conflict was first described in ancient Greek literature as the agon, or central contest in tragedy. According to Aristotle, in order to hold the interest, the hero must have a single conflict. The agon, or act of conflict, involves the protagonist (the “first fighter”) and the antagonist (a more recent term), corresponding to the hero and villain. The outcome of the contest cannot be known in advance, and, according to later critics like Plutarch, the hero’s struggle should be ennobling.

Even in contemporary, non-dramatic literature, critics have observed that the agon is the central unit of the plot. The easier it is for the protagonist to triumph, the less value there is in the drama. In internal and external conflict alike, the antagonist must act upon the protagonist and must seem at first to overmatch him or her. For
example, in William Faulkner’s *The Bear*, nature might be the antagonist. Even though it is an abstraction, natural creatures and the scenery oppose and resist the protagonist. In the same story, the young boy’s doubts about himself provide an internal conflict, and they seem to overwhelm him.

Similarly, when godlike characters enter, correspondingly great villains have to be created, or natural weaknesses have to be invented, to allow the narrative to have drama. Alternatively, scenarios could be devised in which the character’s godlike powers are constrained by some sort of code, or their respective antagonist.

While writing in conflictual mode and all about conflict, one should understand the various facets of the conflict. The analysis of the conflict requires identification of the conflict as it appears in the literature, at the same time distinguishing between internal and external conflict followed by placing the conflict in one of the three subcategories:

Internal conflict is a struggle that takes place in a character’s mind. It is not a visual or tangible opposition but a character deals with his or her own mixed feelings or emotions. It is often referred to as the conflict with the self because the base of the conflict is in one’s own head and mind.
An external conflict is a struggle between a character and an outside force, which could be of several types. It could be another character or the community or the forces of nature.

The idea that the post-colonialism involves collision of two sets of values or notions about what modes of living are and that they are not worth preserving and promoting implies that individuals and communities must resolve the conflicts inherent to this situation. These authors present a range of resolutions to these conflicts through characters that represent the prevailing attitudes of different groups within a community, those of unusual yet believable individuals, and their own attitudes as men who have dealt or continue to deal with such conflicts. Since conflict defines the post-colonialism, resolutions and reformulated conflicts dictate its future definition. Therefore, conflicts and their resolutions enable the author to create, and the reader to discover, the nature of the evolving post-colonialism.

The analysis of the entire corpus of Arun Joshi’s writings demonstrates that there is a pattern in his works. The innate urge to determine life’s meaning in positive terms leads Joshi’s protagonists to wage an incessant war against challenging situations. The author’s capacity of critical judgment is himself out through an analysis of novels. The socio-economic and cultural background leading to the
literary milieu of the period to which Joshi belongs is pushed to further establish the basis of conflict in his novels.

The socio-historical realities from two divergent cultures (West and East) got embedded in the psychological niche up of Arun Joshi. It has resulted in the issues of identity and conflict creeping into the characters and protagonists of the novels of Arun Joshi.

The issue of conflict is very important to understand and analyse any of the work of Arun Joshi. The characters of Arun Joshi’s novels reflect the in-persona character of Arun Joshi himself. The life-sketch of Arun Joshi is itself complex and complicated on various grounds. It was for the ultimate quest that Arun Joshi shifted from the corporate horizon to the unexplored mystic world of religion varying from Buddhist philosophy and Upanishadic values to Bhagvad Gita’s Karma yoga.

Like the Buddhist fourfold philosophy, the protagonists of Arun Joshi have to suffer and suffer internally and externally and then to find out the salvation for which redemption is necessary. Psychologically speaking, when a man is torn apart it is redemption that works for the peace of mind. This redemption has been achieved through different means. For example: in The Foreigner it is found in action. Redemption through knowledge in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, redemption through devotion in the case of The Apprentice,
dilemma of a Doubting Thomas in *The Last Labyrinth* and finally, vision of the ultimate truth in *The City and the River* are the various modes highlighted by Joshi for its attainment.

Arun Joshi’s *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* shows the process of conflict and alienation and rehabilitation via a 3-tier operation, namely, construction, deconstruction and reconstruction. If the characters in the novels fail to experience rest and joy, it is because they do not accept the Upanishadic truth that a man’s destiny is to keep journeying non-stop.

Arun Joshi represents a consciousness that has emerged from the confrontation between tradition and modernity. The colonial fantasy of British India was finally dissolved in the first half of the 19th century, only to be succeeded by another fantasy, that of the reinstituted sovereign nation-state. This study argues that the two phases of history--like the two phases of Indian writing in English--together represent the socio-historical process of colonisation and decolonisation and the affirmation of identity.

In analysing Arun Joshi’s ideas, one finds that his experience is based on his vision of life. He minutely observes the conflict between the traditional values and the modern materialistic approach to life. He notices the chaos and hollowness in the mind of the contemporary younger generation. With his deep knowledge of Indian philosophy, he
suggests in his novels an entirely Indian solution to the spiritual crisis of the youth.

The thesis comprehensively examines Arun Joshi’s delineation of commitment to life and action as against passive detachment in The Foreigner. His treatment of the conflict between the civilised and the primitive norms of life along with spiritual quest through primitive passions in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, his portrayal of humility and penance as essential conditions for atonement in The Apprentice, his demonstration of the clash between human values and possessiveness in The Last Labyrinth, and his focus on human predicament and salvation of mankind through divinity in The City and the River are some of the means suggested by him for men’s emancipation.

Arun Joshi’s fictional world is strange. Peeling the multiple layers of artificiality, his protagonists seek to confront the mystery of life beyond the last labyrinth. His work represents a unique depiction of the dual between the internal and the external, the intuitive and the imposed (Bhatnagar 24). He catches the bewilderment of the individual psyche, confronted with the overbearing socio-cultural environment and the ever-beckoning modern promise of self-gratification/self-fulfilment. In the face of this dual onslaught, his protagonists—Ratan,
Billy Biswas, Som, Sindi Oberoi and others—are seen poised tantalizingly at different junctures of the philosophic spectrum.

One of the most significant contemporary Indian novelists writing in English, Arun Joshi has focussed not on social or political problems but on the deeper layers of man’s being. With critical attention centred more on his protagonists suffering from the “the same disease, discontent and discontent” (Iyengar 749), their conflict, alienations, dilemmas and frustrations, the implicit and explicit affirmative aspects of Joshi’s work tend to be wholly or partially ignored.

The novelist himself is quite clear about his content and intent and succinctly affirms: “My novels are essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and myself” (Dhawan 18).

The very core of the thesis, Conflict is not one-sided. It is multidimensional and multifaceted, encompassing philosophy, psychology and sociology.

The nature of the conflict reminds us of the language of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan who once thus remarked on the verse of the Gita: “Man is a two-fold contradictory being, free and enslaved. He is godlike, and has in him the signs of the fall…But the man desires to get the better of his fallen nature” (Radhakrishanan 31). It seems to distil the essence of the dilemmas and quests of Arun Joshi’s protagonists’ conflicts.
The conflict that erupts in the protagonists of Arun Joshi’s novels has the forms of craziness, pain, agony, the selfishness of love and the mystic realities of life. It centres upon various aspects of life, bringing out its vitality. It highlights the normal and the abnormal, the ordinary and the extraordinary, illusion and reality and resignation and desire.

Applying sociological, psycho-analytical, structural and other approaches of formal textual analysis, the thesis takes a fresh look at Arun Joshi’s works, revealing areas and stances, hitherto left unexplored. It offers critical insights into the working of the protagonists’ minds, besides scrutinising the rhetorical devices and formal strategies, deployed by the novelist for coalescing the matter with the manner.