SEARCH OF SELF-IDENTITY

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 of things above and beyond all that everyday civilisation can provide. A key to Joshi’s whole intent can be found in the words he puts into the mouth of his narrator: “...that the most futile cry of man is his impossible wish to be understood. The attempt to understand is practically even more futile” (Ivasheva 34).

In search of self-identity and to resolve the “conflict”, Arun Joshi through his characters resolves the problem by redemption in various ways. The question is why the author goes for such a plot of story, and then gives a platform to the character to resolve the agony and suffering of the identity-establishment and conflict. It led to subjectivity and suffering. The author finds himself in a perplexed situation which he tries to recreate in his novels. In literature, such situations have been mostly painted in Post-Colonial writings. To analyse the conflict in the novels, the reader has to understand the literary connotations and theoretical aspects of the conflict itself.

The very concepts of nationality and identity may be difficult to conceive or convey in the cultural traditions of colonised peoples.
There are complexities and the difficulty of conceiving how a colonised country can reclaim or reconstitute its identity in a language that is now, but was not, its own language, and genres, which are now, but were not the genres of the colonised. One result is that the literature may be written in the style of the inhabitants of a particular colonised people or area, which language use does not read like Standard English and in which literature the standard literary allusions and common metaphors and symbols may be inappropriate and/or may be replaced by allusions and tropes which are alien to British culture and usage. It can become very difficult then for others to recognise or respect the work as literature.

The analysis of the entire corpus of Arun Joshi’s novels 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 reflected in the novels. They also present the socio-economic and cultural background leading to the literary milieu of the period to which Joshi belongs.

Arun Joshi’s The Strange Case of Billy Biswas shows the process of alienation and rehabilitation via a 3-tier operation, namely, construction, deconstruction and reconstruction. If the characters in the two 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.

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is seemingly a sequel to the first novel, The Foreigner. Sindi and Billy Biswas, the protagonists of The Foreigner and The Strange Case of Billy Biswas respectively, seem to explore the hidden treasure of life. They search for their own bearings of life and death, sorrow and joy. After facing the materialist and anglicised world, they find it meaningless to get involved in that and as a result they get alienated. They fail to relate themselves to the worldly system and relations. Consequently, they develop divided personalities, and fail to reconcile themselves with their self. This failure to identify with the self makes them a seeker...a seeker of truth of the self? The questions like: Where I am from? and What is my destiny?, relentlessly haunt them. They oscillate between the primitive and the modern. Basically, they crave spiritual awakening and reconciliation with the self. Though the protagonists do not attain the ultimate Moksha of Lord Buddha, yet they are elevated to a higher spiritual domain, a highest degree of spiritual world. Generally they are sensitive, have intensity of feeling and a mind that has to confront the dichotomy between the material and the spiritual planes of existence.
The major concern is their real and the inner world—the world of soul. Like Lord Buddha, both the protagonists left the palace—the symbol of lust, power and comfort, in search of the truth as they felt suffocated in the hypocritical world and were disenchanted with it. In the western culture as well as in the Indian culture, they suffer to the point of losing their identity. But there is a difference between the sufferings of the West and those of the East. The sufferings of the West led to nowhere but the suffering of the East are of purifying nature and lead to the removal of maladies and prepare the soul for the higher incoming of values, ethos and culture. This suffering leads to self-awakening and not to disillusionment. The very notion of disenchantment gradually starts disappearing and in place of that a relation of communication starts emerging. The communicative relation is not ordinary because this communication is the communication with the very source of existence. This very communication is also the beginning of the establishment of self-identity, if not the assertion of the identity. This awakening is light that makes the purpose and the meaning of being more apparent.

The voyage from the foreign to the spiritually-rich India makes them feel fresh. In India, after this exposure to the western culture, their values become more cosmic in nature. When they return to India, they are emotionally disturbed, and spiritually broken. But in India
they set forth to enter a new world can provide shelter to the alienated beings. Here they find an opening into a new world--the world of the supernatural and a new beginning of existence as conscious beings. The contrast between the two worlds of the West and the East highlights the contrast between their socio-cultural settings.

Arun Joshi’s portrayal of the protagonists is singularly individualistic. But symbolises the features of the modern age. The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, Arun Joshi depicts how the process of individualisation destroys a man of extraordinary sensibilities. The novel seems to advocate that the life’s meaning does not lie in the world outside but within the self. The magnetic, mysterious power of the universe brought Billy to hills of Bilasia where he felt free to express his own individual self---unhampered by those ties, which were limiting him. While he was in the midst of the upper crust of society, he staked his life in order to test the validity of some of his intuitions about life. He is driven to death by the mad, absurd world when he tries to retrieve his soul from the labyrinth.

The quest for identity of Billy Biswas is deeper than that of Sindi Oberoi of The Foreigner. It is a change from the Hamlet like introspection to catastrophic but decisive action. Arun Joshi in his debut novel had tried to combine the Lawrentian quest for the essence of life with Upanishadic search for soul’s spiritual reality. Arun Joshi’s
condemnation of post–independent India in the *Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is much severer than that in the first novel. He condemns the independent India’s spiritual uprootedness. At the same time, he tries to link the male-female relationship to that of the Sankhya system of the *Bhagawad Gita*.

Joshi himself confessed, while delivering a lecture at Dhevayaloka, that the first three novels are basically concerned with the questions of identity and ethics and that in them there is something like the life cycle of Hindu Philosophy.

It is the mystical urge like that of Buddha that makes Billy leave his family and relations for the primordial forest in Central India. To achieve self-realization, the way he pursues shown by the sages and seers of the ancient Indian legends. Also he peruses the religious texts for spiritual sublimation. In reality, Billy emulates the seers, mystics and visionaries of all ages and it brings him closer to Mathew Arnold’s Scholar Gipsy. As a result of it, he takes a hard decision to live in the jungles of Central India after shunning the luxurious lifestyle that he could have afforded very well.

The case of Billy Biswas is a case of the rarest of the rare. He has a romantic nostalgia for the simple mode of life which has been described and discussed at length by various philosophers from time immemorial. Billy is completely fed up with the grossly materialistic
society. He feels that it had mistakenly turned away from the traditional values, ethics and culture of India. In fact, he supports the anti-materialistic way of Hindu life.

The first section establishes the character of Billy and his environment which is degraded and sterile, thereby making his escape convincing. It also implicitly contradicts the view that Billy’s decision was sudden, as held by many critics. Rather it makes it look like a natural consequence to what preceded it. Billy was a member of the “aristocratic heritage” (Joshi, The Strange Case 12), and he belonged to the upper crust of Indian Society. Originally from Bengal, his grandfather had been the Prime Minister of a famous Princely State in Orissa. Besides, his father practised law at Allahabad and Delhi and had been ambassador to a European country. While he was in America to peruse his Ph.D., his father was a Judge of the Supreme Court of India. After finishing his Ph.D. he went back to India and became a lecturer at the University of Delhi. Despite such an affluent background, he felt himself to be a misfit in the so-called civilised society and he became interested in exploring the inwardness of life. In the beginning of the novel itself, Romi rightly concludes: “If life’s meaning lies not in the glossy surfaces of our pretensions but in those dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish forever...then I don’t
know of any man who sought it more doggedly and...Abandoned himself so recklessly to its call” (Joshi, *The Strange Case* 8).

Even in his family, he feels alone and alienated like Camus’s outsider. That is why wrote to Tuula Lindgren:

> It seems, my dear Tuula that we are swiftly losing what is known as one’s grip on life. Why else this constant blurring of reality? Who am I? Who are my parents? My wife? My child? At times I see them sitting at the dinner table and for a passing moment I cannot decide who they are or what accident of creation has brought us together?…(Joshi, *The Strange Case* 5).

The aforesaid statements make it amply clear that he was in conflict with his identity. His exploration of the real inner being makes him an existentialist being, estranged and alienated. He never feels himself at home because one thing was clear to him that he was not a man of this civilised society and that his real destination was some other place.

Romi, his room partner at Harlem in America, opines that Billy was, “a man of such extra ordinary obsession” (Joshi, *The Strange Case* 7). But what even he fails to understand is his real identity and thus the question still persists with Billy--Who am I? Though he was born and brought up in the aristocratic life-style, yet his dislikes the
organised life-style. It aggravates his problem of identity instead of resolving. It is a puzzle to the common reader until it is analysed psychologically. His active preparation for Anthropology, though disliked by his father, is a proof enough of his quest of identity, to overcome the conflict of identity and to understand the unresolved beingness. Hence he frankly admits: “All I want to do in the life is to visit the places they describe, meet the people who live there, find out about the aboriginals of the world” (Joshi, The Strange Case 14).

A glance at his library reflects that it was not only filled with the books of knowledge but also of his passionate engagement with his subject. A close look gives the impression that he is fond of the primitive world. That the primitive world is close to him is testified by the first section’s two instances: Krishna murder case in the hospital and discussion of the play Avocambo with Romi and Billy’s case is a strange one because his personality was split between the modern and the primitive. His case becomes a universal myth of the primitive in the heart of man ever alienating him from the superficial and polished banalities of modern civilization. All of them are shallow, degenerated and self-cantered in the eyes of Billy Biswas. This opinion of Billy makes him feel that he was not meant and made for this world and that this society was not meant for him. This notion made him search a place for residence where he could feel home and he lands at Harlem,
which is a Blacks’ ghetto and considered an inhuman place to live by the affluent sections. But to one’s surprise, the protagonist Billy Biswas it was the place to live he was searching for.

In reality, the first section of the novel provides a background for understanding the psychologically tortured Billy Biswas and how he was in constant conflict with his identity. When he is only fourteen and visits Bhubaneshwar, he notices the landscape of the city. And when he goes to Konark, he is fascinated by the imagery of the sculpture and feels for the first time that the true beauty of imagination is appreciated only by the Adivasis. Also that though the spirit may be very old, older than even the human existence itself, yet the knowledge of truth is embedded with the tribal behind “dark inscrutable faces” (Joshi, The Strange Case 124). His visits to the tribal village with the chauffeur prove to be a turning point in the life of Billy Biswas as he is, for the first time, overwhelmed by erotic energy in the tone and tune of the folk music while dancing and celebrating life.

The aforesaid point is pertinent to understand Billy’s adolescence in many ways. Firstly, the image of the landscape of Bhubaneshwar that he carries itself depicts his inquisitiveness. The curiosity invariably leads to discoveries and innovations. It implies that Billy was rational. But more curious the fact that such notions are a mature mind. On the contrary, he was not product only of nature. One
naturally tends to think that the contradiction is planted to insinuate that Billy was mature beyond his years. Secondly, while at Konark, he tells the reality which only the great thinkers and the philosophers could comprehend. But the protagonist could understand it despite his being only fourteen years old one wonder as to how he could be a visionary or a thinker or a philosopher at last, such but not the least to be analysed is his perception about the tribal and how close he was to the life of tribal reality. The life he was supposed to live was miles away from the life of the tribals in reality. The primitive cultural understanding became clear to Karl Marx only when he was an adult. He was then capable of describing the development of society and talk about the primitive communism free of exploitation or the superficiality, and the absence of materialism. But this great thought is clear to Billy at a too early stage of his life. Thus it can be easily deciphered that the quest for identity was neither sudden outbreak nor an anomaly in the life of Billy’. Instead, it was a natural outcome of the events that preceded.

At this stage it is difficult for the reader to understand whether it was the conflict of identity that was haunting Billy or it was simply the curiosity to know the surroundings. But as he proceeds and Tuula Lindgren comes into force, the picture the reality starts becoming cleared. She is Swedish by birth and has a keen interest in Western
philosophy and psychology. Also, she has kept herself away from the so-called civilised materialistic world with her mastery over hypnotism, intuition and auto-suggestion. Besides, she is western but she has interest in India and that too especially in the tribals. This interest brings Tuula closer to Billy as their interests become common.

As she is an expert in psychology, she can understand what is happening with Billy. It is clear from the intellectual discourse between Tuula and Billy as well as between Romi and her. Billy occasionally has discussions with her and when he discusses his problems with her, and she frankly tells him: “...in a very mild form such hallucination occurred in everyone – all art in a way flowed out of them” (Joshi, The Strange Case 9).

The elite foreign society was not congenial to the quest of identity for Billy and he returns to India. But to his utter surprise, he finds Delhi not different from the American society and feels that Delhi’s high hybrid society is equally spiritually deserted and emotionally alienated. Further, he feels that all the rich societies all over the world are superficial. He comes to Delhi to share his intellectual knowledge as a lecturer of Anthropology in the University of Delhi but the spectre of identity haunts him as well. The hallucinations reduce him to such a terrible condition that he regards
marriage to be the only way out of them. He marries Meena Chatterjee, a sensuous, gorgeous and good looking lady.

The time passes and Billy realises that the hurried marriage was a catastrophe rather than a solution to his perennial problems. They seemed be the two banks of the river that are not meant to meet in the lively life, as their choices and interests are bipolar in nature. On one side in Billy, who is non-consumerist and anti-materialistic. On the other side in Meena held is enamored of money. Billy hates the worldly pleasures, but Meena is fond of money, market and the materialism, supposedly the true identity of the elite society. Such disparate interests were bound to end in conflict and hence once again the “Prakriti” fails to be established. The marriage between the two is no more than a martial fiasco. With every passing day, the degree of alienation between Meena and the protagonist mounts, as a result of which the conjugal life turns into the “most precarious of battlefields” (Joshi, The Strange Case 81). Some critics hold that the marriage and the life of Billy could have been saved had Meena tried to understand the protagonist. But the very point is that the nature of Billy was too inscrutable to one who was not steeped in his historiography. It is affirmed when Meena herself accepts it in a letter to Romi: “Perhaps I just don’t understand him as a wife should” (Joshi, The Strange Case 76).
Whatever be the psychological reason for separation between Meena and Billy, it can be safely concluded that the course Billy adopted to start his new identity was a complete failure. Arun Joshi successfully represents here that his protagonist was not an abnormal person. Rather he was very much a part of the human society and had the wish and desire to give a new identity and meaning to life by establishing a family. But, at the same time, he depicts that Billy is destined by his very nature for some other person and places. This brings the character of Billy closer to the character of destiny.

The marriage fiasco has negative impact upon the physic and personality of Billy. His health fails and his intellectual understanding starts declining. Arun Joshi secondly inches Romi describe this situation. He is not a simple and common man but the closest associate of Billy. Romi truly reveals “Gone was the staggering intelligence, the spectroscopic interests, the sense of humour...The Billy Biswas I had known was finished, snuffed out like a candle left in the rain” (Joshi, The Strange Case 70). Now Billy is so much mentally tortured that he dislikes the civilised and wants to get away from the greedy, avaricious and hypocritic world of the civilised. One such instance could be noted from the picnic scenario where Billy has gone with Meena and the friends. When one of the friends remarked: “...all banjaras were
thieves and their women were no better than the whores” (Joshi, The Strange Case 60. Billy almost went mad and picked him up to have fight. It points towards his leanings towards the primitive world.

In reality, Billy is a misfit in both the societies: of the twilight city of charm in America and the elite-like socialising society of Delhi, both of which have gone barren and spiritually bankrupt, madly comforts pursuing physical. They are appropriately materialistic and money dubbed the- centric worlds of technology. His alienation from the civilised world becomes so complete that he blindly supports the superstitions and the blind rituals of the primitive society in the case of child sacrifice by a clerk. His anthropological scholarly study becomes a tool to defend the same when opposed by the father. He cites various examples world around from Africa, Indonesia, Japan and many reports about the same happening in the rural parts of India.

Such bent of mind in the case of Billy Biswas not unusual. A look at the polygraphs from the letters he wrote to Tuula justifies it. His fondness for the primitive society is reflected in his letter which he wrote after his first expedition. In it, he writes: “…. that I am a visitor from the wilderness to marts of the big city, not the other way round” (Joshi, The Strange Case 96).

Other letters are critical of the urbanised westernised Indian society. He regards the men and women in parties to be no more than
the dogs in the kennels. The modern society for him is monster like, taking away all the human qualities from heart and head. The civilized, for him, merely wastes money. At the same time, he finds the thinkers and philosophers not different from the fast-moving world engaged in earning money except the fact that these so-called thinkers and philosophers are the tools of the big corporate sector, who are hired by the rich and the elite to find the solution of the money-hungry civilised society and its people.

The following section of the letters is more related to his quest for identity, because the women in his dream constantly haunt him and the reason why she haunts him is unknown. It implies that he has to find as to who the woman is and why she is constantly haunting him. The fifth letter is more significant to highlight his identity-crisis. In it, he raises questions like: How am I? Where have I come from? Who are my parents, wife, child, etc.? It is also to be noted that he fails to make any mental communication with himself, his family and the people surrounding him.

The aforesaid statements not only reflect his psychological status, but also his acute aversion to the modern society and seemingly the reason of his disappearance from the society. The aforesaid points that affirm his disappearance was not sudden. Rather that with the passage of each day, he was waiting for the ultimate day when he
could leave the family and friends for the search of Moksha. He felt himself to be an exile in this world because he belonged to the other world. R. K. Dhawan aptly observes: “In a bid to seek communion with the primitive world, Billy opts out of the modern world” (20).

A great change takes place within him when he reaches Dhunia’s hut and sees Bilasia. It seems to him for the first time that the objective of his life is about to be fulfilled and he is soon going to realise his identity was going to be completed. A new sense of beingness starts emerging within and outside him. He felt that he could find there right meaning of life, that he had not found anywhere else. The American society could have provided him all the charm and what a common man aspires throughout life. But in America he was an alien. The cosmetic city of Delhi could have made him settle with beautiful women and elite society. The post of lectureship in the department of Anthropology of the University of Delhi could have given him a new identity but it could not.

Meena could have provided him congenial bliss, with a future happy family, but everything was in vain. It was not merely a coincidence that he could not do all that because he was destined for something else, and that he was not created for the comforts of life in the developed modern-world because he was born with an instinct for the primitive world. His going to Satpura and then to Maikala Hills
was also not accidental. Rather it was pre-determined. He finds a meaning to his life there where, in modern sense, everything was literally absent. There were neither the gizmos of the city, nor the well-furnished corridors, nor the city of joy, nor the best-decorated world of less women but still what was unique for Billy was the originality in every sphere of life in Maikala and at the tribal Bilasia’s hut.

The love that emerged in the eye of Billy for the first time was only and only for Bilasia and it seemed that it was the love at first site. After seeing Bilasia, Billy’s inner self manifests itself and he remarks to himself: “It was I who has changed, or rather, quite suddenly and unaccountably, I had ceased to resist what was real in me” (Joshi, The Strange Case 17). Billy goes through his “final Metamorphosis” (Joshi, The Strange Case 17). Billy could see only and only Bilasia and nothing else. His description of every part of Bilasia’s physiology reflects his immense devotion to her. Only true lover can give such a classic description of her beloved. The red flower at her ear if appealing sensuality was visible to Billy only and perhaps that meant for him only alone.

On having eye contacts with Bilasia, Billy was automatically called by her and the simple, sober and god-made lover of Bilasia, Billy went straight to Bilasia. He forgets that he was the son of the Supreme Court justice. He forgets that he could have found hundreds
of Bilasia like girls in India. Instead he goes and the amalgamation of the two separate identities which were longing so far for the unification takes place and they become whole the complete whole for the first time. On contact, he finds in himself that bit of himself that he had searched all his life and without which his life was nothing more than the poor reflection of a million others. Bilasia was his missing self and the union with her makes him complete.

Here Arun Joshi is suggesting that a new identity of Billy was emerging in the union of male and female -- the ultimate embodiment of the human spirit, as laid down in the Hindu philosophy of Sankhya, according to which the completeness of the human being takes place only when there is the union of the prakriti-- the female and purush-- the male. Bilasia is Prakriti and Billy is the Purush. Prakriti is the Shakti of Purush that Bilasia was to Billy. Bilasia plays the pivotal role in defining the identity of Billy.

She (Bilasia) is not merely the symbol of beauty and charm, but she symbolises the nature that has emerged from the primitive society, so to say. She reflects that primitive ethos will not be wrong in her case. Her beauty is not the product of cosmetics, but it is grown up with the flower in the jungle where the oxygen is the freshness not in the environment but also in the nature and behaviour. She is honest and innocent, far from the dust of the city of joy.
She lives a simple life and sleeps in the leaves of the trees. But still she is like the Apsara sent from the heaven, probably to meet the angel of the earth, who is none other than Billy. Bilasia is different from Meena, not because the skins are different, or the body odour is different, but she is different and unique because she is not money-centric and wicked like Meena of the cosmopolitan Delhi. Here, in the hills of Maikal, the free and fresh air has brought a meaning to the life of the Billy. The identity that was so far from the dream has gradually started taking the shape in the union of missing other half of the protagonist Billy Biswas. In terms of the psychoanalysis: “Billy and Bilasia are two selves of the same personality” (Prasad 47).

To some critics, the disappearance from the city to the forest, from Meena to Bilasia, is nothing more than escape from responsibility. But this stand is not valid because in response to the question from Romi regarding the responsibility to the family and friends, he counters that he has even more responsibility to the self and its identity--the soul. The question of the soul was even more important than family and friends because it is through one’s own identity that relations are born. If the very existence of the self is under question, all relations are bound to tumble like house of cards. If that does not justify the stand of the Billy, one has to accept that Lord Buddha was
an escapist. And if Buddha was not an escapist, how can Billy be called one?

Once the union between the Prakriti and Purush has been established, the new identity stars showing its effects. The wholeness of identity is emerging as that of the priest, the way lord Buddha had emerged after he gains the Moksha. It is called the emergence of avatara. He is considered as the man-god by the tribals of Maikal hills.

The Indian mythological aspect is reflected here, that the East sees the God in the man, a contradiction of the western notion of the God, according to which the God and man are unbridgeable. The question is not here of right or wrong but it is of the new power that has come to the hands of Billy. Why it was not recognized earlier that in the hands of Billy lies the mystic power to cure people, which is recognised by the tribals of Maikal hills. It implies that in reality he was not to be born in the urbanised metropolitan city of Delhi or to stay in the American elitist society. It further gives a clue as to why the son of the judge of Supreme Court of India was not staying in Manhattan or the Silicon city of California but in Harlem--the black ghetto.

The second aspect that emerges from his disappearance from the anglicised society is that he does not reject the civilisation, when he comes into the Primitive Civilisation. But he rejects the dust of the
civilization--the dust in the form of westernization and urbanisation which has gone sterile and deserter spiritually. He still believes in the society and civilisation as an intellectual and philosopher believes in, but what he is not ready to accept are hypocrisy and deceitfulness that are being developed by modernisation.

To him, civilisation means what Karl Marx means by the Primitive Communism. But the modern intellectuals are merely trying to find solutions to the questions of the elite class--how to earn and spend money in this fast-moving mechanised world. Where the soul and soul-mate are not involved the notion of the atma and parmatama is incomplete. It is nothing except sleeping with an enemy and tasting the flesh like an animal does.

The second part of the novel starts with a new vision, though it is linked with the first part. After the gap of ten years, the things have changed and so the reality has also changed. Civilised world is unaware of the life of Billy and his whereabouts. Billy has settled in the hills of Maikal with Bilasia as his future and Dhunia--the village headman--as his master. Billy has found the identity of the king and priest in the tribal village, far from the urbanised but dehumanised world.

On the other hand, Romi after the completion of his studies has joined the administrative services and becomes the District collector.
On his field trip to the hills, he finds Billy and this finding brings a new turn in the novel. Billy has completely changed. He was found by Romi in the lion cloth—typical of the way primitive lives in the jungle. On having a meeting with Romi, Billy narrates his vision of the primitive world and the urge of the life for the tribal people and how he has gone for a new meaning to the life. Meanwhile, Billy keeps visiting Romi and he treats the wife of Romi, Situ—who was suffering from Migraine with some herbs. Here Billy takes the promise from Romi that he will not disclose the whereabouts of Billy to anyone else, but Romi was not a man to keep his commitments and discloses the reality of the whereabouts of Billy to Situ, when forced by Situ to disclose the same.

The discloser of the whereabouts of Billy to Situ by Romi brings tragedy to the life of Billy. The long awaited peace and serenity, which was found by Billy after so much suffering and misery, was again in peril. The civilized world’s interventions into the primitive society have always led to the destruction of the primitive world, its ethos and culture. The classical example of which can found in the fact of the colonisation having destroyed the third world in past. The colonial nations had lost their identity, culture, folklore, music and the history. Today, when the developed nations are celebrating the concept of the
post-modern society, the subalterns have to find their identity and the history leading to the Rewriting of the History.

Protagonist Billy has nothing to come back to the city. He has no emotions for his family, friends or anyone else. When Meena and Billy’s father come to know about the reappearances of Billy, they start the hunt for him. They do not realise the state of Billy’s soul and insist on meeting him without his consent. On refusal by Romi, Mr. Biswas complains about it to the Chief Secretary, who later threatens to punish Romi. Following it, the Chief Secretary orders Rele, the Superintendent of Police. The order to leads to the hunt like the Witch hunt in the village. In the village, no one tells the whereabouts of Billy. It shows the respect and love the village people have for Billy Meanwhile a rumour spreads that Billy has killed a constable. Then the atrocious torture of the state machinery operates in the jungle and ultimately Billy is killed. At his tragic death, Billy remarks You Bastard. The bastard symbolises the hatred of Billy for the civilised people of the urbanised society.

The death of Billy was unfortunate in many ways. The search of truth has always been crushed. None wonders about the fact that a person who takes birth in the upper crust of society has the will to find the truth--the truth of the self, the quest for the identity and the identity which gives meaning to life. Not many of the civilised people can
answer questions about identity, origin or the reality of their father and mother? The civilised people have gone bankrupt not only in their hearts but mentally too, they are all alone and alienated. They just live and live anyway. There is no use of living like anyway. Even an animal lives anyway. Then there is no difference between an animal and a human being.

A human being is endowed with rationality which seeks to establish the causal relationship between everything that takes place in human life. But none cares it. It is a fact that the human beings have become the most irrational creatures in the civilized world. The quest for identity was the prime motive of Mr. Billy Biswas. The death of Billy prevents the endeavour which was to enlighten the civilised world to come out of the mockery of hypocrisy and deceitfulness of the world where every day people die for one reason or the other. The Buddha said that life is full of sufferings and the sufferings have a cause and the cause is will/greed, and to be salvaged, one needs to overcome the will and desire. It was also an attempt by Billy to find the way to overcome the greed and desire but before he could enlighten the civilised world, he was killed.

The whole novel is devoted to the search of. The novel has given the true picture of the post-Independence India. At the same time, it deals with western mode of living. The post-Independence India has
moved to a higher level of development, but this progress is not achieved. As a cost of urbanisation and westernisation, India has lost a lot of things and, most importantly, it has lost its roots, history, culture and ethics. The protagonist was not against civilisation or the development, but he was against the wickedness, cosmetics cover and the moneycentrism. The development brought about human rationality in good but there is no use of rationality if it fails to give happiness and peace to the human soul and mind.

The life of Billy from childhood was filled with the inquisitiveness of the world reality. From the age of fourteen, he had started having philosophical thoughts. He continuously struggles with the conflict of identity, everywhere, from Orissa’a Konark to Harlem of America and then in the upper crust of Indian society which is valueless, but laden with its own irrational values. He was constantly in struggle with self and could not find the safety valve that he found in his disappearance and living in the Maikal Hills. Maikal Hills for him are a symbol of the truth of the origin of the self, culture and values. Thus the Maikal hill for him is the identity. Bilasia for him is the supplement, the other half of the male. A complete whole requires the mating of the two half having the same thoughts. It’s not that Meena is not the other half; she is also other better half, but she was not the
better half to give the wholeness to Billy. She could have been the other better half for someone else.

The so-called civilised world, “Bastard” in the language of Billy, needs to be more practical and rational in its thoughts and behaviour, instead of merely rather to be indulging in money-hunt. They should also learn a lesson from the death of Billy that every society and civilisation has its independent way of living and that they should intervene in its workings.

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 twentieth century, only to be succeeded by another fantasy, that of the reinstated 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.