

CHAPTER - III

CHARACTERIZATION IN ARUN JOSHI'S NOVELS

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INTRODUCTION

T.Padma calls Arun Joshi 'a psychological novelist of a distinguished category' and adds, "He follows the Indian tradition to go beyond the psychology to the metaphysical roots of human identity in consonance with the Indian tradition of viewing psychology as an integral part of philosophy".¹

All of his novels are splendid, serious and powerfully disturbing. What is most exciting about him is the fact that he attempts a serious probe into the existential problems of mankind by fixing the lens of his focus on certain individualistic characters. In most cases, these characters are the protagonists of the novels - Sindi Oberoi, Billy Biswas, Ratan Rathor and Som Bhaskar, but the minor ones are not ignored, e.g. Bilasia, Mr.Khemka, Meena Chatterjee, etc.

Arun Joshi's novels hover between the opposing pulls of attachment and detachment, action and inaction, love and hate, possessiveness and dispossessiveness, down-to-earth materialism and eternity-bound urges of spiritualism. They constitute the perennial dilemmas of mankind and Joshi explores them in his characters ceaselessly from the viewpoint of an artist.

3.1 THE FOREIGNER

3.1.1 STORY

The Foreigner is the story of the narrator, Sindi Oberoi, a Kenya-born Indian who reaches Boston after a sojourn in England. While working for his doctoral degree, he meets Babu Khemka, the over-sheltered son of

a Delhi tycoon. On his arrival in India, he calls on Babu's family and starts working at the industrial house of his father. When Khemka's tactics of tax-evasion threaten to paralyze his empire, Sindi decides to manage it after an earnest solicitation for the employees.

3.1.2 THEMES:

Arun Joshi has handled the themes of loneliness, meaninglessness, rootlessness and finally, leads to advocate the idea of non-attachment and action without the hope of fruit in this novel.

3.1.3 CHARACTER SCHEME:

Joshi's novels revolve around a single character and The Foreigner is not an exception to this. Sindi Oberoi is the protagonist of this novel and also the narrator. As it is a sort of autobiographical novel, the protagonist is omnipresent. All the remaining characters are subordinate and some are minor ones. Especially, Babu Khemka, Mr. Khemka and June Blyth are subordinate characters while Karl, Muthu, Mr. Ghosh, Mrs. Blyth, Menace are all minor ones. It shows that Arun Joshi's canvass is not overcrowded, only few bold figures are highlighted.

3.1.3.1 The Protagonist, Sindi:

(A) Identification:

Sindi Oberoi is born in Kenya, but unfortunately, his parents are killed in a plane crash near Cairo. His uncle brought him up and enrolled him in a school at London. After the completion of his studies in England, he came to America for Ph.D. work in Engineering. Sindi is an orphan. There is no one to care for him; he, too, does not care for any one. This particular background makes him lonely, cynic, frustrated and turns him into a psychological character.

(R) Features:

Sindi hates the question "Where do you come from?", because it gives him the pain of nowhere-ness. He feels himself a 'stranger'. Not only he but others also think of him as a stranger. June comments, "But I have a feeling you'd be a foreigner anywhere" (p.33). He is not only a stranger in America, but a 'stranger' to his parents also. He hates to talk about them. He says, "I hated to talk about my parents. I hated the pity I got from people" (p.11). Sheila also calls him a 'foreigner', as he never belongs to India and the Indian society.

He projects himself as a lonely man. His family background supports his loneliness. He is also unable to make friends. He has no roots in any particular country and culture. He is hopping from Kenya to England, from England to America and finally reaches India in search of 'meaning' of life. He is obsessed with his own loneliness and accentuates it by withdrawing from the society around him. He wonders: "In what way, if any, did I belong to the world that roared beneath my window. Somebody had begotten me without a purpose and so far I have 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. My foreignness lay within me and I couldn't leave myself behind wherever I went" (p.61).

Sindi's loneliness leads him further to non-involvement. He thinks that involvement is attachment and it leads to possession. But possession gives pain. So he is determined to remain detached. His detachment has a psychological reason. In search of meaning in life, he

wants to do something 'meaningful'. He starts with a job as a dishwasher and thereafter becomes a waiter in a bar. There he had first experience of sex with a middle aged woman, Anna. Then he turned to Kathy. Kathy gave him so much love that it became very difficult for him to forget her. He wanted to marry her; but she left him because she was already married and wanted to return to her husband. This experience gave him tremendous pain and that determined his detachment.

While gathering miscellaneous experiences in life, however, he becomes convinced of the impermanence of things. He says to June, "Nothing ever seems real to me, leave alone permanent. Nothing seems to be very important" (p.107). His entire life is geared around his quest for permanence in life. When they have been together for some time, June suggests that they get married. But he tells her, "We are alone, both you and I. That is the problem. And our aloneness must be resolved from within" (p.126). He argues with himself about the meaning of life and its affairs. Debating on the necessity of marriage, he comes to the conclusion:

"Marriage was more often a lust for possession than anything else. People got married just as they bought new cars. And then they gobbled each other up" (p.67).

All acts like marriage have no significance for him. He has a feeling that "even if he loved her (June) and she loved him, it would mean nothing, nothing that one could depend on". His deep involvement with Kathy, whom he loves with "the piercing, all-caressing love of an adolescent" (p.122) and the subsequent separation make him realise that "all love - whether of things, or person, or oneself - was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion" (p.170).

In an interview with Sujata Mathai,¹ Arun Joshi reveals that he was influenced both by Camus and existential writers on the one hand, and by Gandhi and the Bhagavadgita, on the other.

"It is not only the attributes of different philosophies that are present as an undercurrent in Joshi's fiction but the characters too sometimes discuss various philosophies and philosophers", writes S.K.Sharma.² The protagonist of The Foreigner quotes certain verses from the Bhagavadgita and tries to practise the principle of detachment preached therein.

The protagonist of the novel, Sindi, goes on moving from one land to another because he finds his life meaningless and rootless. Born of an English mother and an Indian father in Kenya, he finds his life a burden after the death of his parents. So he contemplates 'suicide'. To relieve himself of this burden, he went to London but was "very soon tired of the clas-room lectures" and continued his search "for meaning in life" (p.167). In a Scotland village, he discusses his problems with a Catholic priest who does not offer him any solution. Though the books of philosophy, which he reads during his three months' sojourn there give him some light and he comes across some reality (pp.170-171), yet that is not ultimate and permanent. There is no substantial change in his attitude about life that he is living at the superficial level because he does not belong anywhere. He realizes the vanity of his life at the young age of twentyfive. He gives expression to his feelings thus:

"And yet all shores are alien when you don't belong anywhere.

Twentyfifth Christmas on this planet, twentyfive years largely

wasted in search of wrong things in wrong places. Twentyfive years gone in search of peace and what did I have to show for achievement; a ten stone body that had to be fed four times a day, twentyeight times a week. This was the sum of a lifetime striving" (p.91).

Thus, the problem that Sindi is facing is that of finding a meaning in the absurdity around him. Since he considers this life to be full of illusions, he is unable to fix up his roots anywhere in the world. His problems multiply particularly when he feels insecure after his uncle's death.

Arun Joshi successfully portrays the psychological characters. Being an orphan, Sindi is starved of parental love. Though his uncle has done his duty, it was also without love. Sindi says, "He did not particularly miss him". He was too much different from other school boys. His uncle tried to make him normal but in vain. One evening he hold his uncle, "I was contemplating suicide since I was tired of living" (p.165). To find a change, he left Nairobi for London.

Joshi skilfully gives a fine touch to his psyhological character. Unable to find 'meaning' in life, Sindi becomes pessimistic. His particular family background is also responsible for it. He says, "I was not the kind of man one could love" (p.38). Moreover, his first experience of love with Anna and Kathy made him disappointed and inactive. Therefore, he refuses the proposal of marriage. He calls marriage a useless idea; and the very foundation of human society is shaken by his pessimism. June rightly calls him an 'enigmatic character'. "There is something strange about you, you know, something

distant. I'd guess that when people are with you, they don't feel like they are with a human being" (p.33).

Sindi is an intelligent character. But he uses his intelligence for his hypocrisy, petty suspicions and jealousy. Sindi ponders, "Wasn't Babu's child my own, in a way? Hadn't I driven her into his arms. The thought of marrying her crossed my mind again" (p.198). But when he decides to do so he finds her only dead. Mockery derides him into his face and he begins to see in this the undercurrents of his own petty suspicions, jealousy, cowardice, hypocrisy and the way "the eternal joker snickered within me" (p.129). He also fools June by presenting a tragic picture of his separation from Kathy and chokes her with his flashing realization that "all love - whether of things, or persons or oneself - was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion. Love begot greed, attachment and it led to possession" (p.180).

(C) Technique:

Arun Joshi has used different techniques to portray the protagonist, Sindi Oberoi. According to Meredith and Fitzgerald, "narration by the character is too much helpful to reveal the inner reality".³ And in this novel, Sindi, the protagonist, is the narrator of the novel. He has the opportunity to express his notions, interpretations of actions and incidents and impressions about different thoughts and beliefs. This technique is superbly used in the Marathi novel Mrityunjay written by Shivaji Sawant. It seems this technique proved most helpful to reveal such psychological character. This technique can be compared to that of Joseph Conrad and, upto some extent, of James Joyce's in his Ulysses. Certainly, this is not the stream of consciousness technique, because we do not move forward and backward in

the consciousness of the character. The flash-back technique is used in the novel for effectiveness but the actions are continuous and chronological. So in the use of technique of narration, Joshi seems nearer to Joseph Conrad, D.H.Lawrence and to some extent, James Joyce.

The technique of character contrast expresses the character of Sindi more sharply. Babu Khemka is the 'other self' of Sindi's personality. What is there in Sindi, the opposite is there in Babu. O.P.Ehatnagar comments rightly: "Sindi was not different from Babu. They were two aspects of the same psychology - one foolish and other unwise. One could not take decision, the other would not for the fear of involvement. One was undercontrolled, the other overcontrolled. Both were basically cowards, either haunted by the spectre of the presence of parents or by the depressive memories of their absence".⁴

As man is a social being, he must be judged by society. What others say about the character is more important than what the character says about itself, because a personality can be better judged by other persons than by oneself. This aspect of characterization is superbly used by Arun Joshi to reveal the character of Sindi. From June's comments, we know that Sindi is an enigmatic character. His asthma is also first highlighted by June. Not only June but Mr.Khemka also calls him a 'stranger', which strengthens his foreignness. Sindi is better judged by his cook when he says, "You will never make mistake" (p.226). Moreover, Muthu requests him to stay there and work for the company, because according to him and other workers, Sindi has that capacity and he is not selfish like Mr.Khemka.

A mature person must have his own point of view about all major aspects of life. It gives roundness to the personality. Sindi Oberoi, as a protagonist, has his own point of view about love, marriage and style of life. He lives in a style of his own and it helps a lot to reveal his personality. He is presented as an abnormal person right from his childhood. Varied circumstances and experiences are responsible for his uncommon views, but it proves him a psychological character. His attitude, passive response, inactiveness, detachment and pessimistic behaviour are the apparent realities of his point of view. His detachment became responsible for the deaths of June and Babu. It is only in the last incident when he realises his fallacy that detachment not always means non-involvement. He changes his point of view and accepts involvement. He gets the real meaning of life for which he had come to India. Only this act turns the character into a 'round' character.

A character can be good if judged against circumstances. Different incidents and critical situations act on the character. On the basis of response, attitude and behaviour in a particular situation, we judge the character. This technique is very popular and has been used right from the beginning by a number of novelists, from Richardson upto the modern ones. Not only this, but it provides also a chance for the right choice. The happenings in this novel are mostly natural, only a few are man-made. In the case of Sindi, the death of his parents near Cairo in his childhood, his first disappointment in love with Anna and Kathy, June's unexpected love-making and attraction for him, Babu's faith in him as a friend, the death of Babu and June, his decision to come to India by tossing coin, Mr.Khenka's giving him a job, Muthu's offer and request to

put the company on right path, etc., are all natural circumstances. This reveals the character as a psychological character at first and then provides a chance of choice. Sindi chooses involvement rather than detachment. He gets an opportunity to prove himself wise, generous and helping human being.

3.1.3.2 SUBORDINATE CHARACTERS:

1. Babu Khemka:

(A) Identification:

Babu Khemka is an important subordinate character of this novel. He is the only son of a Delhi industrialist, Mr. Khemka. He was sent to America to study Mechanical Engineering. Tall, dark, handsome but unripe in intellect and impressed by America and American girls.

(B) Features:

Babu felt lonely and creepy at first in America. He is interested in people, but no one is interested in him. He complains, "But one would expect them to show some interest in foreigners" (p.20). Sindi is the only acquaintance of Babu's. Therefore, he frequently visits Sindi. Sindi observes him and finds that tears of homesickness glistened in his eyes (p.20). He is a stranger in America because he is a foreigner. It makes him homesick and lonely.

He is the product of well-sheltered, wealth industrialist society. He is cheerful and fond of girls. Unable to concentrate on study, he fails in examination. There are so many reasons for his failure. His homesickness, loneliness, his inability to cope with the system of examination and on the top of it, his immaturity and irresponsibility.

Out of his old whims, he observes girls. Sindi observes, "Babu stared at passing young girls and desire was in his eyes". He never stops talking about girls and home. Babu says, "What is the good of coming to America, if one is not to play around with girls?" (p.22). But he does not want to marry anyone of them, "Of course, I don't want to marry anyone. I just want to gain experience, you know". Sindi rightly comments on his attitude, "He smiled. It was mischievous smile, reflecting some secret image of an Indian Casanova" (p.22).

His condition becomes pitiful when he fails in examination for the second time. His father has very high expectations from him and he is very strict. Shame made him pitiful and fear of father threatened him. Moreover, his old lust for women comes on top in such a dissapointed, lonely and homesick situation. At this point of circumstances, he meets June. As she is attractive, free and of helping nature. Babu is attracted towards her. He knows that Sindi and June are friends, but out of innocence, he asks Sindi about their relationship. Sindi tells him a lie. He believes that June was disappointed with Sindi and because of her helping nature has come near Babu to help him out of the pitiful condition. Babu gets involved in her to the extent that he wants to marry her. Now Babu is placed in a critical situation. It is the typical style of the author that he places the character in a critical condition and makes him choose the right option. Babu wants to marry June, but his father's threat makes him worried. He is torn between love for June and fear of his father. Also, failure in examination, threat of expulsion from the institution made him mad. He does not know what to do.

(C) Techniques:

Babu's typical inner crisis and conflict between love and fear are

best expressed in his letters to Sheila, his sister. Arun Joshi uses effective technique in case of Babu to express his inner realities. In case of Sindi, it was easy, because he is the narrator. But in case of Babu providing this outlet, he proves to be a master artist. He writes, "But here I have no one, no one at all" to listen and to help. His love for Sheila, affection for father and fear and shame due to his failure in examination is nicely expressed in his letter.

Babu has very high opinion about America. Like all other wealthy Indians, he also praises the American way of life and tries to imitate it by drinking, throwing parties, living luxuriously and hating India and Indians. He does not want to mix with the Indian students. Still, he is unable to forget his Indianness. He expects his wife to be virgin. Another situation also contributes to the inner conflict. He loves and wants to marry June against the warning of Sindi and suspects that she must have undue relations with Sindi and other persons.

In such a critical mental situation of disappointment, insecurity about future, rejection by the father, he realizes the truth that June had sexual relationship with Sindi before marriage and after marriage also. He is unable to bear this blow and in a fit of anger rushes to commit suicide.

In portraying this character, Joshi has used the technique of character contrast very effectively. Babu is the other self of Sindi. And also the truth of 'contrast existence' is used here; what Sindi is, Babu is not. One is intellectual, cunning, calculating, detached and decisive, while the other is dull in study, innocent, non-decisive and with a fixed mind. Both of them love the same girl June, but one enjoys

her company and remains detached but the other gets emotionally and innocently involved and meets with tragedy.

Arun Joshi's common practice is to place the character in a critical situation and ask him to make the right choice. Babu chooses wrongly and meets with tragedy. But it is interesting that we accept this choice made by Babu, because he is presented from the beginning as unfit in the American society. His particular family background, emotional immaturity, inconsistency in thinking and indecisiveness are presented very skillfully. Therefore, we believe and accept his tragic choice. It is the success of the novelist that he makes us approve the actions of the character, so that Babu's character looks life-like and living.

According to E.M.Forster, "the character constructed around a single idea and which does not change and surprise is called 'flat' character".⁵ Babu Khemka fulfils all these qualities as he does not change his behaviour. He remains as he is. He is a type and, therefore, seems 'flat'.

2. Mr.Khemka:

(A) Identification:

Mr.Khemka is another subordinate character, which stands for a typical wealthy Indian industrialist-class rather than an individual.

(B) Features:

S.K.Sharma comments, "There are some traces of Marxism too in the novel. This philosophy is made use of by the novelist to highlight the class consciousness and class conflict. Mr.Khemka advises Sindi not to

care for the talk of the workers in his concern".⁶ Arun Joshi hints at the class conflict by highlighting the contrast in the living standards of Mr.Khenka, the employer, and Muthu, the employee. On one hand, there is Mr.Khenka's airconditioned house in the posh locality of the city; on the other is Muthu's one room in the lowliest area. The irony of the matter is that Mr.Khenka keeps himself busy in maintaining fictitious account books, while Muthu works hard honestly. The class struggle becomes even more apparent when Sheila Khenka suggests to Sindi that he must own the responsibility for keeping two accounts and should go to jail instead of Mr.Khenka.

Money is the God in this industrial society, to which Mr.Khenka belongs. They love money more than their children also. So, we read in the novel 'Mr.Khenka loves his son as a factory' (p.50). He has very high expectations from Babu not because he is his son but because Mr.Khenka has invested a lot of money in him. He has no moral scruples. He supports this act of corruption shamelessly and calls it a game. He has pride in being intelligent in making money by hook or crook. He is pompous and overconfident. He thinks that anything can be purchased with money. Therefore, he comments like a villain in a Hindi film, "The man who can get me is not yet born" (p.213).

He behaves with his children not like a loving father but an industrialist who loves only his factories and property. They are always fearful and suppressed. He was never friendly with his grown up son. Babu says, "My father is very strict. He will be very angry if he finds out that his son is running around with strange women" (p.21). Sindi and June suggest, "Babu would be very happy if his father was friendly and also could be saved from his tragedy" (p.91).

(C) Technique:

Mainly this character emerges through dialogue, comments of other characters and letters of Babu written to Sheila. We know Mr.Khemka's behaviour as the father from the comments of Babu and Sheila. It proves that he is not a good, affectionate and loving father. He is orthodox, strict, money-oriented and living in the "wealthy fools' paradise". Also, as the students are good judges of their teachers, workers are of their Malik (boss/employer). Muthu and all other employees of Mr.Khemka's enterprise remark that only Sindi can put the company on the right path and not Mr.Khemka. They very well know that Mr.Khemka's enterprise is based on corruption and as long as he leads, things will not improve.

Sindi directly tears the mask of hypocrisy of Mr.Khemka and tells the truth on his face, "It is you who have been telling lies and fabricating documents just so that you could aircondition this ostentatious house and throw gigantic parties for the horde of jackals who masquerade as your friends" (p.215). Mr.Khemka replies, "People who won't have money are always envious of those do have it. Only clever people can make money, ... I have worked hard for my children ... " (p.215). And Sindi gives the final blow, "Is that why you drove your son to death by threatening to disinherit him?". Mr.Khemka and Sindi both have made mistakes. But Sindi learns from the experience, while Mr.Khemka does not. Therefore, Sindi survives, learns the real meaning of life; on the other hand, Mr.Khemka meets with tragedy. Thus, Sindi is presented in contrast to Mr.Khemka's character.

Joshi is successful in making this character also look life-like but as a type (a typical Indian, wealthy, orthodox industrialist).

Mr.Khenka never learns from experience and fails in life. As the character never changes and as it is just a type, it seems 'flat'.

3. June Blyth:

(A) Identification:

There are only two women characters in this novel, June Blyth and Shiela. June Blyth is more prominent than Sheila. She is a beautiful, sensual and affectionate American woman whom Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist of The Foreigner likes intensely. She lives with her mother, her father had left after divorce when she was a child. She works as a statistician in a private company.

(B) Features:

In the case of only this character, the novelist has concentrated on physical traits. We have perfect description of June from Sindi, "As a rule, I never stare at people. But I couldn't take my eyes off this one. It wasn't that she was extremely pretty or sophisticated or anything. She had those large eyes that shone like marbles and a sweet little moth. And she had a way of shaking her locks that made me want to touch me" (p.23). He always remembers the bright features of her beauty, " I couldn't resurrect her in details but I saw the mass of golden hair, the blue eyes and the pink lips" (p.26).

June seems to be presented as a representative, typical American girl. She is beautiful, sexy, free and straightforward. She herself invites Sindi to dance with her in their first meeting. And also takes lead in love-making in woods and later on, in Sindi's room. In contrast to the Indian girls, she is not shy and freely enjoys sex even before marriage.

Though she is free in her relationship with men, she, nevertheless, wants to get married. When Sindi and June are together for some time, June suggests that they get married. But Sindi still wishes to be free. He frankly does not believe in marriage; but to June, there was nothing wrong "to love somebody, make somebody happy, bring up children who contribute to society" (p.107). This was to her an attractive enough purpose in life. This attitude shows the universal trait of woman in June.

She has the fantastic quality to help someone who is in need. At first, she comes closer to Sindi because of his suffering from asthma. She feels pity and out of pity, she loves Sindi. She understands that Sindi needs a girl. To satisfy his psychological need, she freely makes love to Sindi. Not only this, but she turns to Babu also, only with the intention to help him, when he is in a pitiful condition. She gives him company to draw him out of frustration and homesickness.

June loved Sindi heartily and wanted to marry him. But Sindi remained passive and detached. In between, she came closer to Babu and he eagerly wanted to marry her. She was happy that someone needed her. But Babu also proved incapable of being a good husband. Babu has fantastic ideas about virginity. He expected an Indian girl's qualities in June. He was too innocent to understand June and the American culture. June stood by him in his troubles but was a bit disillusioned. So, when Sindi came to look her up one day, she was overcome with old love for him and once again Sindi made love to her - out of the desire to comfort her, in an ideally detached manner. Babu was suspicious all the time of June. In a fit of anger, June told him all the truth about the relationship between Sindi and herself. Disappointed and frustrated,

Eabu rushed out and drove himself to a suicidal accident. Meanwhile, June was carrying Babu's child. She thought at that time of forceful abortion.

June is presented as a prey to two irresponsible persons, Sindi and Babu. Her life turned into tragedy because of the strange attitudes of these two male characters. Parvati Jeevan comments on her role, "Nowhere in Joshi's work do we find the woman being a role equal to that of the man, although the part played by women in the lives of the centrally placed male characters is very important".

⁷ 3.1.3.3 MINOR CHARACTERS

All other characters in this novel, Karl, Arun, Mrs. Blyth, Anna, Kathy, Mr. Ghosh and Muthu are minor ones. They are used only to support other characters and incidents. They are hardly developed. But still some of them have the quality for which we remember them.

1. Muthu:

'Muthu', Sindi tells the real meaning of detachment and requires him to lead the enterprise for the betterment. He is also representative of the Indian workers, the down-trodden class, living in the dirty slums, crowded with children and tuberculate wives.

2. Mr. Ghosh:

Mr. Ghosh is the former employee of Mr. Khenka. Now he is an income-tax officer. He has an old grudge for Mr. Khenka and he takes revenge on him by sending him to jail.

3. Mrs. Blyth:

Mrs. Blyth is a typical American woman, separated from her husband and

living a luxurious life. She cares for June and wants her to get married to a wealthy man.

These characters, though minor, have much significance in the context of the development of the major characters and incidents in the novel.

3.2 THE STRANGE CASE OF BILLY BISWAS:

3.2.1 STORY:

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas (1971) is dedicated to the writer's father. Billy is a psychological character, given to conscience and sometimes to visions and hallucinations. He is a Ph.D. in Anthropology from New York, with a peculiar bent of mind. When he returns to India, he gets married to a 'mod', Meena Chatterjee, whose only concern is to make much money. A son is born to them but the family bonds make this man all the more restless. During one of his expeditions in Central India along with the students of the University of Delhi, Billy disappears from the camp and all attempts to trace him prove futile. The Police report that Billy is killed by a man-eater. But during one of his visits to village, the narrator of the story, who is the Collector's wife, Sita, falls seriously ill and Billy takes care of her. But she repays him by reporting the whole matter to Meena and Billy's father, who come rushing from Delhi to take Billy back to the civilized world. Billy had already told his friend, the Collector, that any attempt to capture him would prove disastrous. And it so happens that a Police party tries to capture him at the intervention of the Chief Secretary at Bhopal on the request of Billy's old father. Billy defies it and ultimately dies of bullet injuries.

3.2.2 THEMES:

The novel very beautifully illustrates the theme of man's restlessness in modern life and his futile attempt to escape from it. It is concerned with the crisis of contemporary civilization in the upper class Indian society in particular and in the modern world of industry and commerce in general. The narrator seems to suggest that life's meaning does not lie in the world outside but within. It has a direct bearing on this important modern problem, 'the crisis of identity'.

3.2.3 CHARACTER SCHEME:

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas has Billy or Bimal Biswas as the protagonist and the whole novel rotates around him. He renders the reading of this novel a pleasure, but other characters in it do not interest us much, but for Bilasiya, Meena Chatterjee, Romesh Sahai (or Romi), Sita, Billy's father, etc., are mere non-entities in the novel, having been drawn there simply for the expediency of the plot. However, it is possible to categorize the character-scheme in major, subordinate and minor characters: (i) Major character - the protagonist, Billy, (ii) Subordinate characters - Romi, Meena, Bilasia, and (iii) Minor characters - Billy's father, Rima, Sita, Police Superintendent Mr. Rele, etc.

3.2.4 MAJOR CHARACTER:

1. The Protagonist, Billy:

(A) Identification:

Billy or Bimal Biswas is a son of a judge of the Supreme Court of India. He was educated in an English Public School in India and then is sent to the U.S.A. to pursue the Ph.D. degree in Engineering. He studies

instead Anthropology, a subject in keeping with his moral fibre and which creates within him an acute sense of restlessness. He returns to India and marries Meena Chatterjee, who belongs to a sophisticated Bengali family. Most of his behaviour seems erratic. Only those who know him well (and they are barely a handful) know that Billy is not the impulsive man he seems. Rather, everyone of his thoughts, ideas and actions is well reasoned out long before it solidifies into reality.

(B) Personality Features:

Billy is tall, dark and handsome. His eyes are very sharp and have inhuman capacity, so also his ears. His friend and the narrator of story, Romi, often observes the inhuman sharpness of his eyes.

Billy is a man of brilliant intelligence, profound sensibility and extraordinary obsessions. He belongs to a rich respectable family, his father being a judge of India's Supreme Court. His father expects him to take up engineering as a career and Billy goes to America for a degree in engineering. However, he earns his Ph.D. in Anthropology, because that is his first love. Billy is basically an anthropologist and studies deeply the tribal attitudes and customs. He feels deeply interested in the places described in the books he reads. In fact, his whole life is organized "around his interest in the primitive man" (p.14). A look into Billy's library in his apartment would indicate the wide and varied interests of this student of Anthropology:

"Two of the stacks were devoted exclusively to anthropology. The third presented a melange, that to my mind, made no sense at all. It contained everything from old copies of the National Geographic Magazine to the latest pornography that was being paddled in Times Square; from learned treatises on Black Magic and witchcraft to a

critic of the Theory of Relativity. What struck me most was a series of nearly forty biographies, including several on van Gogh, whose turbulent career, I learnt later, held considerable fascination for Billy at one time. On top of the book-cases were piled at least hundred albums of Jazz music. These were played almost non-stop when he was in the apartment" (p.9).

The Bhubaneswar episode makes evident how at the impressionable age of fourteen, Billy had experienced the urge to live like a primitive man in a primitive world. He had received intimations of his primitive self from the moments he emerged from the railway station: "It was as though a slumbering part of me had suddenly come awake" (p.22). But at that time, he could not analyze his feeling properly. "I could not figure out what excited or troubled me unless it was a sudden interest in my own identity, who was I? Where I had come from? Where was I going?" (p.122). It seemed to him that the sculptures at Konark could offer him a solution to his questions about the problem of his identity:

"If anyone had a clue to it, it was only the Adivasis, who carried about their knowledge in silence, locked behind their dark inscrutable faces" (p.124). Watching the tribal dance, the young Billy had felt, "Something has gone wrong with my life. This is where I belong. This is what I have always dreamt of" (p.125).

Romi has a glimpse of this urge for the primitive at the music party in George's apartment. As Billy plays on a pair of bongo drums for nearly quarter of an hour, a hush descends on the scene. Romi and others feel the mesmeric pull of the music which holds everyone by its sheer vitality. Billy's Swedish friend, Tuula Lindgren, who had come to the

United States for advanced training in psychiatric social work, is "the second person who had any clue to what sent on in the dark, unscrutable, unsmiling eyes of Bimal Biswas" (p.19). She understands Billy's interest in the primitive life. As she tells Romi,

"Billy feels something inside him, but he is not yet sure ... A great force, Urkraft, ... a primitive force. He is afraid of it and tries to suppress it ... But it is very strong in him, much stronger than in you or me. It can explode any time" (p.23).

Though Billy comes from the upper stratum of Indian society, Billy lives in Harlem because he feels that White America is much too civilized for him. Even in America, he keeps himself aloof and has only a few friends. He returns to India to teach Anthropology in Delhi University. He marries Meena Chatterjee, but their familial relationship goes wrong from the beginning. Billy's preoccupations are such that he travels extensively and comes up with certain social facts that are not normal. For example, when Billy, his father and the narrator, discuss Krishna murder case, Billy says,

"The point, however, is this: is it possible for an ordinary person - a government clerk, let us say - to receive a message from a goddess and having received one, to pass into another world not for an hour or a day but for a week, a month, one whole year, at the end of which, he may return to his normal state. If this happens, as it seems to have happened in this case, what is to be the attitude of the society, of the law, if you please?" (p.53).

Billy seems to be aware of the hostile attitude of society to any event which has supernatural and occult implications. When his father disapproves of his theory, Billy tells him,

"It is only after it happens to oneself that one comes to believe. But, I am afraid, we have got side-tracked. I don't personally care whether the son got well because of the sacrifice or without it. All I am saying is that there are worlds at the periphery of this one, above it and below it, and around it, of which we know nothing until we are in them" (pp.54-55).

Billy's father conducts a trial in which a clerk is accused of sacrificing a boy to propitiate the Goddess Kali, in order that the clerk's young son, suffering from leukemia, should get well. We are not concerned with the problem of justice the case brings to fore; we are interested in Billy's response. The passage just cited amply demonstrates Billy's interest in and fascination for unusual psychic phenomenon. His investigations as an anthropologist confirm his interests as a man and explain why his wife is not happy with him.

Even as a boy, Billy was a rebel. The Bhubaneswar incident in Billy's adolescence, his deliberate choice of Harlem to live in (during his stay in America), his choice of Anthropology as a subject for specialization, his becoming a University teacher against his father's wish and his final rejection of the civilized, urban society - all these explain his rebellious spirit and his unusual temperament.

Billy is totally uninhibited, a trait rarely Indian. His eccentricities are, therefore, all the more conspicuous. He shows total disregard for decorum, which culminates in his alienation from society. At first, his alienation from society seems to be an oddity, a whim, but it accelerates when he gets married to Meena, at which time, he is sure that the twentieth century life is not for him.

What makes the story terribly fascinating and convincing is Billy's brilliant, rational outlook and the Urkraft that triggers off his creative energy which prompts him to do what he does. The most important act of Billy in the novel is, however, his disappearance from home, family and the civilized world and whatever he says or does earlier is but a movement in that direction. He makes this decision not on sheer impulse as it appears to be on the surface. He fails to establish any communication with his wife and the life around him because of his uncompromising character, a distinct originality innate in him. So far as Billy is concerned, it is not an escape from the realities of life but an escape into real life from the sordid meaningless existence in the so-called civilized world. The exit is not contrived, because of the tradition of the character as much as that of the novelist. It echoes Siddhartha's renunciation of wife and child, those precious links, in search of enlightenment. To Billy too, it is an inexorable movement from darkness to light. The dark jungle holds forth immense promise of a primordial force that can nourish him and the relaxed but vibrant life that he leads as a tribal indicates the significant change in Billy serving as contrast to his earlier restlessness.

Billy's withdrawal from the world is in the nature of a reflex action, he withdraws in order to preserve himself from the mendacity around him which had also begun to make inroads into his character (pp. 288 and 190). Long before his physical disappearance into the Saal forests of the Maikala Hills, he had ceased to belong to the world. Billy in a way is driven out by the shallowness of the civilization and by the failure of his marriage, which might have been saved if "Meena had possessed a rare degree of empathy or even a sufficient idea of

suffering" but her upbringing, her ambition, twenty years of contact with a phoney society - all had ensured that she should not have it" (p.135).

Billy is thus a refugee from civilization (p.140). The tenacity with which he pursues his quest in "an incoherent and meaningless world" (p.48) is really astounding. He remembers that all his life he has been confusedly driving towards his real self (p.116).

Though Billy withdraws from the humdrum world, he does not withdraw from the world of love and pain or from the world of sensuality and sensitiveness and this he finds in the Saal forests, among the aboriginals, in his relationship with Bilasia, who reflects the primitive force which Tuula had long ago sensed in Billy. Once he joins the tribals in the forest with whom he had a nodding acquaintance on earlier expeditions, we find Billy behaving just like them, wearing loincloth, drinking liquor, participating in their rituals. He starts actually waiting for the moonrise just like all the others assembled there as if it is the only thing in this world that is worth living for. He soon gets identified with the primitives and even becomes a myth. The primitives weave a number of myths around him, that he is their dead king, that he brings back the dead to life, that he predicts rain and that the Chandentola glows again, etc. The fact that he marries Bilasia and settles down shows that he is not perverted but longs for love and companionship in the primordial form. And it is a kindred spirit that he finds in Bilasia. A.N.Dwivedi rightly calls Billy a "child of Nature".¹

Billy, when he meets Bilasia, feels that "he has suddenly discovered that bit of himself that he has searched for all his life and

without which his life is nothing more than a poor reflection of a million others" (p.142). It is in this life that Billy finds fulfilment and identification and the essence of human existence. Later, when he discloses his identity, there is no underlying motive to return to the civilized world, only a desire to prevent bloodshed. Billy has to pay with his life for this magnanimous gesture, the "only manner that a humdrum society knows of disposing of its rebels, its seers, its true lovers"; all those "who dare to step out of its stifling confines" (p.240). While the civilized world destroys him, the tribal world seeks to perpetuate the memory of the man-god by building for him a shrine. Joshi's novel, and especially the character of Billy, reminds R.S.Pathak of D.E.Lawrence's The Woman Who Rode Away and Graham Greene's A Burnt Out Case. He remarks that Billy's strange case represents the "universal myth of the primitive in the heart of man, ever alienating him from the superficial and polished banalities of modern civilization".²

Billy seems to have realized after a great deal of deliberation that it is the materialistic 'ambition' that shatters the peace of Eden. Though he encountered a number of obstacles, he succeeded in marrying the village girl, Bilasia. Though he lives at the subsistence level, he is happy, that is what he tells the narrator,

"What kept us happy, I suppose merely the same things that have kept all primitives happy through the ages: the earth, the forest, the rainbows, the liquor from Mahua, an occasional feat, a lot of dancing and love-making, and more than anything else, no ambition, none at all" (p.148).

The foreground of such an awareness lies in Billy's letters to Tuula, who alone could understand his anxieties and moods. He confesses

that the wilderness is closer to his heart than the marts of the Big City and that when he returns from an expedition, "It is days before I can shake off the sounds and the smells of the forest". He also wonders if "civilization is anything more than the making and spending of money" (p.96). It is the superficiality of life at home with dull mercantile relatives and the rat race in the world against which Billy revolts. As he tells Romi, he was disgusted with vacuous excitement of the elite in Delhi,

"Artistically, they were dry as dust. Intellectually, they could no better than mechanically outh ideas that the West abandoned a generation ago. Their idea of romance was to go and seen an American movement or to go to one of those wrteched restaurants and dance with their wives to a thirty year old tune" (p.129).

Billy is sick of the frenzied rush of the material world and his deep-rooted 'existential' restlessness drives him far away from the madding crowd of money-minters and property-grabbers. This child of Nature joins the primitive community of tribal in Central India and lives happily there with Bilasia. All this takes place behind the screen of the daily world which is not curious about the mysterious disappearance. Rumours are advanced such as he has eloped with an American girl or Billy has turned a spy for the Princess of Bastar. But the theory adopted by the C.I.D. that Billy was killed by a man-eater is accepted as official and hence, the case is closed. The Strange Case of Billy Biswas - that's how it appears to the civilized world. He defies the attempts to recapture him and dies the death of a noble hero. He is definitely a 'strange case' for the psycho-analysts and psychiatrists for investigation.

(C) Technique:

The name of the character helps to reveal the character.³ Incidentally, the name of the hero, Bimal Biswas, also means "pure faith". An occasional suppression of disbelief, combined with the opening up of one's heart to the breezes, the mountains and the stars can soothe the frayed nerves of the modern man. "While glorifying the 'noble savage'", says O.P.Mathur, "the novel enshrines the merge of Purusa and Prakriti of the Sankhya philosophy and celebrates the nature-worship of Vedas".⁴ The affirmations of the character are of fundamental importance, though they are shrouded in symbols that may appear fantastic to the 'civilized' world.

Joshi often portrays the characters in opposition to one another. The contrast in character plays a vital role in the revelation of the character.⁵ This novel is a tale told with excellent craftsmanship, maintaining the contrast between the impulsive and seemingly eccentric behaviour and actions of Billy and the cool, collected accounts of Romi Sahai, the Collector friend of Billy. The novel begins with a very human and natural association between these two Indian students in America. Billy has firm faith in his friend. Billy is so enigmatic character that Romi confesses he does not understand him thoroughly. Billy has a natural primitive force, Urkraft, and hence creative power. He can do what he wants to do. He is an uncompromising person and a rebel by birth. On the contrary, Romi, though he does not want to remain in the administrative service, compromises himself in it. He has not the extrinsic courage to revolt against the bureaucracy and society. Billy follows sincerely the call of his soul. while Romi does not.

Billy is different from his father also who believes that "man is governed by only engineering and law and nothing else". Billy appears to be an odd-ball to his conformist father, who cannot perceive that "there are worlds at the periphery of this one" (p.55). Since Billy has developed an extraordinary vision of a simpler and purer life-style, he complains of a 'constant blurring of reality' (p.97) in the world of strident self-advertisement. The endurance and resilience of the forest dwellers is sharply contrasted against the barren pleasures of the Delhi's 'smart set', bearing 'drought and famine every summer until it rains'. It is the Spartan nerve of the tribals that impresses Billy. He seeks to identify himself with the tough bony Bhils by flinging away his Western clothes and starts wearing only a loincloth.

This contrast is inherent in Billy's own personality, between his "two selves" - the civilized rational Billy who is bewitched by the jungle girl Bilasia. The contrast that Joshi reveals is not only between the two selves of Billy but also between the two manifestations of 'the female power', observes C.D.Chingre.⁶ Billy tells Romi, "She seemed like another vision, elusive as a gust of wind". She represents that primitive force that lies in ambush in Billy's own personality. Perhaps that is why there seems to be a strange bond between Billy and Bilasia that pulls them together. Billy rebels finally and decisively against the civilized world, its norms and values by obeying the call of the primitive force in Bilasia.

In this novel, the writer has used the technique of first person narration. At the beginning of the novel, we read, "This is the strange story of Billy" and not of the narrator friend Romi. Romi is presented as a close friend of Billy and thus the opportunity of close observation

is provided to him. He gives all the account of Billy's strangeness from the beginning. Moreover, he is the only link between Billy and civilized world after his disappearance in the jungle. He has the curiosity and sympathy for Billy. Therefore, he himself takes part in the search of Billy. He is the only witness to all the happenings in Billy's life (at least, a patient listener). Unlike in the first novel The Foreigner, here Joshi has used the modern technique of narration. Romi's narration is balanced and objective.

The story has not a trace of sentimentality but, all the same, one can sense the deep concern of Romi, the Collector, who is involved in the official search. It is with Billy's reappearance not on the face of open world but only in Romi's presence that the second phase of the novel begins. We are gradually introduced to Billy's new life which is starkly simple and vital at the same time. Billy's own narrative which has the same modesty and sense of humour, as well as Romi's seemingly formal report, reveals this important phase of Billy's life. The night before Billy took the momentous decision to escape is presented as if it were some sort of a mystic experience:

"I came out of my tent and once against on the rock ... I was as though I was not Bimal Biswas, graduate of Columbia, the only son of a Supreme Court Judge, husband of Meena Biswas, and father of a handsome child ... The wind cried in the leaves, the little insects in the underbush ..., they all said, Come, come, come, ... It is we who are the inheritors of the cosmic night". (pp.118-119).

Another interesting thing is that different versions of the same incident or action are presented through the narration of different

characters. Thus, Billy's strange behaviour, as observed by Romi, is different from Tuula's version. Tuula, being a psychiatrist, observes and understands Billy more correctly than Romi. Billy is observed as a tribal by Dhunia, also in his own way. We gather from Dhunia, Billy's closest friend among the tribals as well as Bilasia's uncle, that Billy has been a priest and some kind of a magician to these tribals:

"He is like rain on parched lands, like balm on a wound. These hills have not seen the like of him since the last of our kings passed away" (pp.157-158).

Dhunia refers also to the legend of a king who lived thousand years ago in those parts, and he insists on Billy being that king, after whose return Chandantola has started glowing again. Also, different mysterious acts of Billy are narrated by Dhunia to Romi. Thus, it helps to reveal the character minutely. What we also notice here is that the novelist has no recourse to images and symbols to achieve objectivity in his art, but that he relies solely on the controlling force of the narrative to achieve such an objective, which perhaps is the chief merit of the technique. Throughout the narrative, there is a creeping scepticism of the narrator, which acts as an antidote to the possible sentimentality arising out of situations such as Dhunia's interpretation of Billy's powers and his identity with the mythological King. C.N.Srinath rightly comments, "Mr.Arun Joshi has exploited the resourceful technique of the first person narration in this novel, more than in his other two novels - the pulls, the checks, the seemingly meandering yet controlled style and on the whole, a technique which creates which it enacts, are all evident in the work of this gifted writer".⁷

Billy had always felt drawn towards tribal life which he thought

held the answer to his quest for the purpose of life. Even as a boy, he becomes deeply concerned about the problem of his identity. When he was of fourteen, he got an opportunity to watch the dance of tribals at Bhubaneswar, which made him feel 'a great shock of erotic energy' (p.125). He said to himself then, "Something has gone wrong with my life. This is where I belong. This is what I have always dreamt of" (p.125). Such hallucinations continue to haunt him as he grows up. In one of his letters to Tuula, Billy writes,

"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 look at 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" (p.97).

The self-questioning that is noticeable in this passage is caused by Billy's dreams, in which he sees a strange woman who appears to be both familiar and unfamiliar. The narrator learns the significance of Billy's dreams and his psychic disturbance from Billy himself, when he visits a hamlet ravaged by a terrible drought. Billy appears in rags and after exchanging formal courtesies, narrates his experiences since his disappearance from Delhi. In one of his expeditions to the rural area in Central India, when he was asleep, he had a dream, "a dream so erotic like of which I did not know could still be conjured up by my unconscious" (p.125). The whole hilly forest appeared to call him to its primitive world, "Come, come, come ... Take us" (p.121). Pressurized by the psychic trouble and an inexplicable erotic compulsion, he sat under a Saal tree and gazed at Bilasia's dancing. Bilasia was a rural girl,

whose face Billy could identify as that of his dream-girl. Though he encountered a number of obstacles, he succeeded in marrying the village girl and became one of the tribals.

Joshi has been successful in portraying Billy's psychic disturbance and his erotic behaviour through references to his dreams and hallucinations. Moreover, it is the sharp weapon to distinguish Billy from all the rest.

The most important act of Billy in the novel is, however, his disappearance from home, family and the civilized world and whatever he says or does earlier is after all a swing in that direction. The following extracts from his letters have a ring of sincerity and a remarkable sharing of his innermost feelings which Billy in his modesty would have brushed off with a natural shrug:

"When I return from an expedition, it is days before I can shake off ... the other way round (p.92) ... I sometimes wonder whether civilization is anything more than the making and spending of money? What else does the civilized man do? And is there are those who are not busy earning and spending - the so called thinkers and philosophers find solution, throw light, as they say, on complications caused by this making and spending of money" (pp.92-93).

As a technique, these letters achieve the desired effect in lighting up the inner recesses of Billy's mind without his having to verbalize such vulnerable thoughts even in private conversation. These things support Billy in his exile from the civilized world when he escapes into the jungle in the company of Bilasia, who symbolizes the

primitive culture, the untapped subterranean resources of psychic energy.

The Ehils adore the mysterious Chandantola rock of Kala Pahar and ask no questions, "It is like asking why man dies or why at night the stars come out" (p.163). Billy chooses to become a part of this believing unvarnished world with its pagan joys and agonies. Like an older and educated Huck Finn, or Henderson, the Rain King Billy chooses to move to the 'territory ahead' and explore its life-sustaining resources. As he points out to the narrator, "Deep down, we are afraid that the price of making such choices is terrible, not realizing that the price of not making them is even more terrible" (p.190). His affair with Rima Kaul and his marriage with a tribal girl obliquely suggest that he is prepared to take a great risk in order to test the validity of some of his intuitions about life. After his death at the hand of the predatory world, the narrator rightly remarks that Billy was "someone for our civilized world had no equivalent" (p.236), "a man-god of the primitive Pantheon" (p.236). Billy's retreat into the tribal life needs to be viewed as an act of aggression against the gilded social order and his ultimate stature is appropriately summed up by Dhunia, "He is like rain on parched lands" (p.236). "Billy's character", writes D.R.Sharma, "is significant not for the deification by the tribals, but as a potent gesture against the dehumanizing forces of modern life".⁸

Though Billy's choice seems to lead him to tragedy, it proves that he is the forerunner of the modern civilized world. Thus, the choice the character makes often proves helpful to reveal the personality.

The points of view of the character himself and of the other

characters also help to reveal the character. In this novel, the narrator, Romi's point of view in telling this story is detached and free from imagination. Therefore, it helps to portray an objective picture of Billy Biswas, the protagonist. Romi never exaggerates the deeds of Billy but tries to explain them sympathetically. Romi's disposition, both as an involved friend and as a detached narrator, helps the story in fusing a considerable degree of truth, warmth and immediacy of the felt-experience. The novel is about Billy Biswas, but it is also Romesh Sahai's story; it is the interplay of these two psychic universes.

Billy's own point of view also is of immense importance. His heightened awareness as to the nature of the ultimate Reality is misconstrued by the narrowly defined vision of the technologically advanced society. Billy's attitude towards the convict in the Krishna murder case is quite sympathetic and strange to the civilized world. His hate for the money-oriented civilized society and longing for the primitive world also helps to reveal the character. The points of view of Tuula and Dhunia also help much to reveal the character of Billy.

'Hero' and 'protagonist' are two different concepts, though sometimes the protagonist of a novel may be its hero, but not essentially, because the hero must have heroic qualities, distinct from those of the common man. The hero presents an uneven combination of all the great qualities and moral values in his personality, while the protagonist is only the chief character around which the novel revolves. The Strange Case of Billy Biswas has been hailed as a tragedy; but except for the pathos that centres around Billy Biswas' death - the futility of it, the waste of it, there is very little of the tragic in

this story. Sudhakar R. Jamkhandi rightly remarks, "Billy is no tragic hero; he does not rise to noble height from which he might fall. He does not possess noble traits - the tribals believe him to be the reincarnation of a past king, but he does not himself believe this - nor does he have that necessary flaw which might cause his downfall".⁹ Since his whole being strives for self-fulfilment, no one, other than the members of his immediate family, will suffer his loss. His is a case well presented by a well-meaning sympathetic friend.

Therefore, Billy seems to be the protagonist of the novel rather than the hero. The only plus point of his personality is his heroic death to follow the call of soul.

"Billy is a new type of character in the whole range of Indo-English fiction" says O.P. Bhatnagar.¹⁰ He is not a stereotype of a traditional Indian hero posing wisdom through philosophical speculations, but a character effecting metaphysical manifestations. He is a rebel. He makes not cowardly compromises like Sindi, nor has pity for himself. Unlike Sindi, he has a strong will and determination. V.V.N. Rajendra Prasad calls him "a highly idiosyncratic character".¹¹

The presentation of the character also plays an important role in the effectiveness of it. In this novel, Billy is presented dramatically and, therefore, he appears a dazzling figure. He surpasses all the other characters. C.N. Shreenath writes, "The important achievement of the novel is the dramatic presentation of the complex character of Billy Biswas, whose values are profoundly human and yet aspiring after something beyond the human".¹² Billy's narration of his disappearance and his experience in the company of the tribals is full of dramatic

qualities. It creates the real acting figure of Billy before our mind's eye.

There are so many things which make Billy's case strange. This America-returned professor, who later on becomes a perfect tribal, is compared to Matthew Arnold's Scholar Gypsy. O.P.Bhatnagar writes, "In the character of Billy, Arun Joshi opens a new vista of Matthew Arnold's Scholar Gypsy and Lawrentian search for the essence of life".¹³

Thus, Billy Biswas seems to respond to the call of his soul and changes completely from the civilized, sophisticated, America-returned young teacher to a primitive tribal. This transformation surprises the readers and, therefore, he may be called a 'round' character in the true sense of E.M.Forster's term.

3.2.5 SUBORDINATE CHARACTERS:

1. Romi:

(A) Identification:

Romi or Romesh Sahai is the close friend of the protagonist Billy Biswas. He is a sincere friend and a responsible officer of the Indian Administrative Service. He marries Sita and lives happily.

As an IAS officer, he is presented as an intelligent person. He has the rare capacity of observation. He observes minute changes and expressions on the face of Billy. He observes the uncommon and inhuman sharpness of Billy's eyes. He is always curious to know the causes of the unexpected behaviour of Billy. He feels, there is something wrong with Billy, and, therefore, discusses these matters with Tuula.

He is also interested in reading. We come to know how he carries a big trunk (full of books) with him in his working town and utilizes his spare time in reading the classics.

Though Romi is a Collector, he lives like a common man. He follows the usual path of education, service, marriage, children and involvement in making money and spending it. He wants to do so many things, but has not the courage to rebel against the social system. He proves himself as a responsible officer, a good husband and a loving father. We do not observe many ups and downs in his personal life, except the tragedy of his friend Billy Biswas. Moreover, he is a sensitive and sentimental man. He feels the agony of Billy, the grief of Bilasia, and the misty future of Bilasia's children.

Romi is a sincere and good friend of Billy. He has known Billy for a long time. Billy is an enigmatic character and only a few (especially, Romi and Tuula) are able to understand him. Romi always considers the erotic acts of Billy sympathetically. He tries to understand and help him. Billy also has firm faith in him. Out of love, Romi involves himself in the search of Billy in the hills along with the Police. He becomes very happy when Billy himself reappears before him. He promises him not to disclose the fact of his existence to his family.

One day, Billy himself comes to his house and cures Sita's migraine. Out of curiosity, Sita tries to find out the person who cured her. Romi tries his level best to keep the secret, but, at last, becomes helpless before the sick Sita and discloses the secret to her, but only on her assurance not to disclose it to anyone else. However, it happens that Sita discloses the secret of Billy's existence to Meena and his

father. Mr. Biswas, Billy's father, a retired judge and a friend of the Chief Secretary, obtains orders to search Billy in the forest. Romi quarrels with his boss Mr. Secretary and expresses readiness to resign from the job. But Mr. Rele, the Superintendent of Police, gets the direct orders from the Chief Secretary. Romi becomes helpless. To save Billy, he also goes along with Mr. Rele in search. But the overpowered Police kill Billy before Romi. Romi tries his level best to save Billy. The last words of Billy are, "You bastards", which makes Romi very sad. He concludes,

"The strange case of Billy Biswas had at last been disposed of. It had been disposed of in the only manner that a humdrum society knows of disposing its rebels, its seers, its true lovers" (pp.240-41).

Contrast in the character is the favourite technique used by Arun Joshi. In this novel, Romi's character provides the best contrast to the protagonist Billy. But Romi is used to give more details about Billy. Romi is a common, responsible, compromising person; on the contrary, Billy is unusual, rebellious, uncompromising and a psychological character. Billy has the strange force, called 'Urkraft' by Tuula. He possesses creative power and can do what he wants to do. The object of the novelist is to highlight the protagonist's character and, therefore, Romi's character is portrayed as secondary to Billy's. Romi says,

"If ... I propose to relate Billy's story, it is not so much because I claim to have understood him as it is on account of a deep and unrelieved sense of wonder that ... there should have lived a man of such extraordinary obsessions" (p.7).

His confession sounds true in its context. Romi's deployment as the narrator is useful because Billy is so involved in and obsessed with his thoughts and actions that he renders himself unfit to comment on his own conflicts and tensions. Romi's role is to examine the thoughts and actions of Billy. In this way, the narrator enlarges his texture of experience. The reader too is equipped with experiential reality as he enters into the narrator's mind. Romi is invested with a perspective with which he judges and comments upon the limited perception of others as to the role of Fate and Chance, of heredity and environment, of primitivism and civilization, and about the nature of Ultimate Reality.

Romi's disposition, both as an involved friend and as a detached narrator, helps the story in fusing a considerable degree of truth, warmth and immediacy of the felt-experience. The commanding centre of consciousness, to be sure, is Romi. The strange experience of Billy is refracted through his consciousness. The novel is about Billy Biswas but it is also Romesh Sahai's story.

Romi relates the story of Billy Biswas in an objective and detached manner, because he has "neither the imagination nor the obsessive predilection of Billy Biswas" (p.152). He is armed with a vision, with whose help he is able to portray Billy's thoughts and actions. Billy's strange behaviour is accounted by the narrator not only to his primitive force, but also to the environment. Romi highlights the deep desire of Billy to know the roots of man's existence, Billy's interest in studying Anthropology was mooted by this near obsession to go down the tribal areas; in this way, he could verify the facts.

Although Billy is assisted by Tuula and Dhunia, it is through his point of view that the strange case of Billy Biswas emerges as a tour de force, a feat of great artistic skill rather than an attempt to present the author's complete vision of experience. O.P.Saxena comments, "Romi's point of view provides Arun Joshi with a convincing and objective means of exploring the enigmatic character of Billy Biswas. Although the narrative accounts for personal limitations in comprehending the objective truth, Romi is able to depict it faithfully."¹⁴

Thus, Romi plays a very important role in revealing the protagonist and the theme of the novel. But his own personality is not revealed fully. He does not develop as a 'round' character as Billy does and so remains 'flat', incomplete character.

2. Bilasia:

(A) Identification:

Bilasia is a tribal girl. She is a niece of Dhunia, the headman of tribal village situated in the Mikala Hills of Central India. Billy is attracted towards her and finally marries her.

(B) Personality Features:

Bilasia is beautiful, no doubt, but her beauty is not the so-called cosmic beauty. She belongs to the tribals and has the natural beauty. Joshi depicts the matchless beauty of Bilasia with an unforgettable lyrical fervour, fusing myth and nature so remarkably:

"She had that unmatched beauty that comes to flower only in our primitive people. It was as though nature were cooking a snook at Meena Biswases of the world, informing them once again how little it cared for their self-proclaimed superiority. Looking at Bilasia,

one could well believe that these were the children of kings condemned to exile by those rapacious representatives of civilization who had ruled the thrones of Delhi and still continued to do so. Where else could be found that proud carriage a figure so graceful, eyes whose brightness made your pulse quicken. Where else Had I seen a grief so tragic that it might well have brought tears to the eyes of stone god ..." (p.143).

Billy is madly in love with Bilasia, the "untamed beauty that comes to flower only in our primitive people" (p.145). He feels that she is the essence of that primitive force that had called him night after night and year after year. Her sensuality lures Billy,

"Her hair was loose. Just behind her left ear, there was a red flower. The necklace of beads glowed a little in the darkness. Her enormous eyes, only a little foggier with drink, poured out a sexuality that was nearly as primeval as the forest that surrounded them" (pp.141-142).

The sexual union with Bilasia is the climatic moment of Billy's life for which he had searched all through his life. Billy himself describes it as that fleeting moment that rarely comes in a man's life, when he feels that "he has suddenly discovered that bit of himself that he has searched for all his life and without which his life is nothing more than the poor reflection of a million others" (p.142). If the forest and hills had earlier beckoned Billy from a distance, Bilasia now leads him by the hand. And, yet, all the while Billy cannot believe that she is real. To him, she seems like another vision elusive as a gust of passing wind. "The primitive Bilasia represents the Satpura Hills and through her, the author aims at connecting culture with culture and

tradition with modernity" comments Parvathy Jeevan.¹⁵

(C) **Technique:**

Bilasia is very well contrasted with Meena, Billy's wife in Delhi, a true representative of that phoney society which makes Billy sick. Meena's opening of shop shows how she is in love with the civilization built on currency which Billy rejected long ago. Bilasia represents the primitive force and tribal beauty of jungle. Nature freely gifted beauty and natural essence to Bilasia. Moreover, she refuses to come into the civilized world. Romi offers to shoulder the responsibility of her with children, but Bilasia firmly says, "The forest had looked after me until now. The forest will look after me for what little remains of life" (p.237). Thus, she is presented truly as a child of Nature. Still, it is rather difficult to call this character 'round', because she does not change in the course of time and also does not surprise us. Therefore, the character seems to be 'flat'.

3.2.5 MINOR CHARACTERS:

All the remaining characters, i.e. Meena Chatterjee, Sita, Billy's father, Tuula Lindgren, Rima Kaul, Dhunia, Mr.Rele are minor ones. They are there only to support the plot and help to portray the protagonist more boldly. They all present 'types' and, therefore, may easily be described as 'flat' characters. A.N.Dwivedi comments, "Billy Biswas renders the reading of this novel a pleasure, but other characters in it do not attract as much but for Bilasia. Meena Chatterjee, Romesh Sahai, Sita, Billy's father, etc., are mere non-entities in the novel, having been drawn there simply for the expediency of the plot".¹⁶

3.3 THE APPRENTICE:

3.3.1 STORY:

Arun Joshi's novel The Apprentice (1974), dedicated to his mother, runs into twelve chapters. In this novel, we read the story of Ratan Rathor, who hails from one of the revolutionary families of Rajasthan, but now settled in the foothills of the Himalayas. Ratan, a well-educated village boy, goes to Delhi to make his career, becomes a temporary clerk in the Army Stores Department where he gets confirmed in due course and rises to become special assistant and finally becomes an officer of the Government of India. How this honest, hard-working 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 fulfils this desire by becoming a shoe-shine on the staircase of a Delhi temple.

3.3.2 THEMES:

This novel deals with the following themes:

- (i) Man's everlasting search for meaning in life;
- (ii) Man's alienation in civilized world and man's progress from alienation to community;
- (iii) Importance of money in this world;
- (iv) Corruption in our civilized world.

3.3.3 CHARACTER SCHEME:

The Apprentice is a solo-character novel, a novel with only one character that matters. Here in this novel, Ratan, the protagonist, is such a major character. The Brigadier may be described as a subordinate character and the remaining characters are minor characters.

3.3.3.1 Major Characters:

1. Ratan Rathor : the Protagonist:

(A) Identification:

Ratan Rathor is a well educated village-boy who comes to Delhi in search of a job. After a great struggle and humiliation, he gets a job as a temporary clerk in Army Stores. Finally, he becomes an officer in the Government of India.

(B) Personality Features:

Like all other boys, Ratan was innocent and happy in his childhood. He had a good friend who afterwards became a Brigadier. They both shared the pleasures of childhood and youth during college days. They were good runners and champions in their college. He remembers his early days,

"There were other things we did, things that young men do, things without meaning, except the meaning they acquire when youth is spent. What meaning is there in cycling ten miles, towards the setting sun, your hands on another man's shoulders or swimming across a river before dawn or going to village fair to look at the girls; ... or laughing at nothing until tears roll down your cheeks. What meaning is there in all these unless it is the meaning of youth itself" (p.17).

Ratan is a child of double inheritance; the idealism of his father is matched by the pragmatism of his mother. He is greatly inspired by his father's active participation in the country's freedom movement. When he was only ten years old, his father responding to the call of Mahatma Gandhi had abandoned his practice as a lawyer and given away most of his wealth to join the revolutionaries. And he had been gunned down by a British sergeant as he stood at the head of a procession of

freedom fighters. The incident, which Ratan had witnessed, made an indelible impression on his mind.

While he studies in college, Ratan is haunted by the memory of his father who had advised him to be good, to be respected and to be of use. He intends to make a mark in life, a mark as visible and striking as his father's. He toys with the idea of following his father and even decides to join the clandestine army of Subhash Bose. His mother, however, vehemently dissuades him from taking such a step. She advises him not to make a fool of himself because "a man without money was a man without worth". She asserts, "Many things were great in life, but the greatest of them all was money ... Money succeeded where all else failed. There were many laws ... but money was law upto itself" (p.20).

Ratan leaves home to seek a career in the metropolis of Delhi, for it was "a city of opportunities". "To fail in Delhi would have been the sign of the greatest incompetence" (p.31). Contrary to his expectations, Ratan fails to get help from his father's friend. Alone, disheartened, deflated, the world appears to him as "a bundle of mirrors, tempting and somehow held together, but on the brink always of falling apart" (p.18). He undergoes a humiliating experience while hunting for a job. Getting a job proves to be by no means an easy task, for no job can be had without manoeuvring. Ratan Rathor makes a dig at the way vacancies are filled by people who had, in some manner, been pre-selected" (p.30).

When Ratan comes to Delhi, he has two hundred rupees given by his mother - almost all of her savings. Within a month, however, he realizes the left-over money may not last him another month. So he starts skipping his breakfast and lunch and saves on transport. He also

discovers that his references are all fakers. The Mirzapur Brothers and the turner helped him a lot in his illness. He was penniless, unemployed and severely ill by sun-stroke. They all looked after him more than brothers. Anyhow, with the help of a room-mate, the stenographer, Ratan gets a job as a clerk in a Government office for War purchases. But he still refuses to be intimate with low-status room-mates. Later reminiscing his past, he reflects,

"I was, of course, thankful to my roommates for what they have done for me, but that did not mean that they and I were to be clubbed for all time to come. No matter if I was starting out only as a temporary clerk, getting a salary half the turner's. I was a different cut; educated, intelligent, cultured, and it was my right that I should rise in life to levels higher than the others aspired for" (p.32).

Henceforth, his only aim in life was to make his career. Quite often, Ratan remembers his father's mocking reference to an average man's desire to prosper in life, to make a career, which his father devisively called "bourgeois filth" (p.33). The irony comes full swing when his son devotes himself wholeheartedly to building his career by fair or foul means. He is, in fact, shattered by the breakdown of faith:

"What hurts is the collapse of the faith that they destroy. You believe there is justice in the world. You go about the world for fifty years. This belief sitting in your heart. Then something happens and you go seeking justice. And justice is not there. Or, you assume your wife is faithful, your children love you, your boss fair, or that God exists. And then, some day, proof comes along that nothing is so. That is what hurts" (p.24).

In order to get confirmation of his job, Ratan has to agree to marry the boss's niece. By now, he knows only too well that the world runs on the basis of deals and "if men forget how to make deals, the world would come to a stop ... It is not the atom or the sun or God or sex that lies at the heart of the Universe, it is deals" (p.51).

Ratan's humiliating experiences of job-hunting make him realise the cruelty of the human lot. He himself becomes at the age of twentyone "a hypocrite and a liar; in short, a sham" (p.28). Ratan undergoes thus a profound change. The man who grew violent and rebellious even at the thought of "careers and bourgeois filth" (p.41), becomes in due course "a thick and washout" (p.41). Though he progresses upward in rank, he becomes increasingly fraudulent and unscrupulous, "The more money I accumulated, the more I was dissatisfied and the more I was determined to enjoy life" (p.89). He confesses that he has become a "master faker" (p.28). He readily accepts bribes and now owns a car, a flat, a refrigerator and also has twenty thousand rupees in the bank.

Though all his colleagues call him a 'whore', he turns a deaf ear to their sarcastic comments and concentrates on getting ahead of others in pursuit of his ambition. As an officer in the Military Stores Department, he clears spurious War material after taking bribe from Himmat Singh, a notorious character. He has a friend, the Brigadier, who absconds from the Front when the Indian Army is suffering reversal and humiliation at the hands of the Chinese. After the ceasefire, the military authorities suspect that a shady deal was responsible for sending useless war materials to the Front. Not only has it caused loss of life and disaster, but it also humiliates the country. Ratan Rathor

is very much aware of it. But his ambition makes him blind and he refuses to confess, though it would help to save his dearest friend, the Brigadier, from court-martial.

Ratan begins his life with high ideals to be honest, true to himself and to make a mark in the world like his father. But he finds himself a misfit in the modern world. All his education and intelligence did not help him; he had to abdicate his true self to fit in the corrupt society and eke out a living. He is thus alienated from his true self and his ideals. In his feverish pursuit of careerism, he submits himself to all sorts of corruption that the modern world offers. In spite of all the material comforts available to him, discontentment becomes a way of life. He leads a frustrated and exhausted family life. The more money he accumulates, the more dissatisfied he is. A strange fear of death haunts him all the time. He feels restless. His corrupt deal at the end costs the life of the Brigadier, his closest friend. He realizes the gravity of his sin. At last, his alert consciousness alienates him from the degenerated society. Ratan himself describes his own aberrations with a sense of self-awareness and objectivity,

"Twenty years and nothing gained. An empty life-time - What had I learned? Pushing files? Manouvring? At fortyfive, all that I knew was to manouvre; a trickster, that was what I had let make me. Did I know the meaning of honour, friendship? Did I ever know it? Would I ever know it again?" (p.139).

While he tries to seek "solace from the annals of corruption" (p.112), his dying conscience keeps on pricking him. At every stage, he puts up an initial resistance only to discover the futility of his efforts. The whole business of living in a muddle confuses him all the

more and he fails to differentiate between right and wrong,

"The feeling generated in me a great confusion. What had I done which I should not have done? What was right, what was wrong? What was measure for doing things or not doing them?" (pp.72-73).

Ratan is keen on finding out the "purpose of life and all its activities". But he takes almost a life-time to free himself from the shackles of the valueless urban civilization. In his eagerness, he visits the temple to derive courage from the world of religion. To his horror, however, he discovers there that even religion is not free from corruption; it is corrupt and can hardly be expected to provide any solutions to various problems of this meaningless world. He is shaken out of his moral inertia when he sees the faceless head of his friend, the Brigadier.

The War is allowed to be lost and the Brigadier, upon his return from the battlefield, has a nervous breakdown. The Brigadier has deserted his post during the war and this desertion was due to the fact that he had been supplied with defective war materials, which had been approved of by none other than Ratan. Significantly, during Ratan's boyhood days, the Brigadier himself a teenager then, had once saved the former's life when he was attacked by a band of hooligans. The Brigadier, yelling and swearing, had leapt across the fallen bicycles to "fight for me, me, who no one had ever fought for" (p.17). It is a strange irony of Fate that the same Ratan becomes responsible for the Brigadier's death.

Shocked and shaken by this tragedy, Ratan resolves to take revenge on the Sheikh. To his utter disbelief, he learns from him that he alone

has not been responsible for the deal; the Secretary and the Minister have also been party to it. Ratan has been made a scapegoat because he is "a spineless flunkey" (p.136). He is merely a tool in the hands of higher-ups. The Sheikh makes a shocking and candid observation of Ratan's character:

"You are bogus, Ratan Rathor, he drawled in a voice that had begun to go out again Bogus. From top to bottom, your work, your religion, your friendship, your honour, nothing but a pile of dung. Nothing but poses, bundle of shame: (p.137).

Having viewed his rapid moral downfall in the background of his glorious heritage, Ratan grievously realizes the futility and hollowness of his whole life and plans to repent his misdeeds sincerely. He becomes an apprentice to his moral and spiritual reconstruction and begins to learn 'to be of use', as his father would say, "Whatever you do touches someone somewhere" (p.208). Each morning before going to work, he goes to the temple, he wipes the shoes of the people who go inside the temple and then begs forgiveness of all those whom he harmed,

"... Each morning, before I go to work, I come here. I sit on the steps of the temple and while they pray, I wipe the shoes of the congregation. Then, when they are gone, I stand on the doorway. I never enter the temple. I cannot be concerned with what goes on in there. I stand at the doorsetep and I fold my hands, my hands smelling of leather and I say things. Be good, I tell myself. Be good. Be decent. Be of use. Then I get forgiveness. Of a large host; my father, my mother, the Brigadier, the unknown dead of war. Of those whom I harmed; with deliberation and with cunning, of all those who have been the victims of my cleverness, those whom I

could have helped and did not" (pp.206-207).

In this novel, Arun Joshi has used the technique of contrast to reveal the character more skillfully than in the earlier novels. Here, he presents the contrast in behaviour of the protagonist himself and the contrast between the protagonist and other characters.

The contrast between the earlier Ratan, the apprentice who has been climbing the ladder of success having regard to none, and Ratan, the apprentice, who has passed through the dark night of soul, is brought out effectively in the narrative. Ratan who is not an intellectual as his predecessors Sindi Oberoi and Billy Biswas are, appreciates the distinction between zero as negative and zero as positive and this speaks for the character's development. And to make it impressive, the distinction is brought home through the mouth of a colleague of his.

The character of Brigadier is presented to highlight in fictional terms the victimization of the innocent in a corrupt society. Ratan Rathor shuns the consequences of his action and allows the devil to take the hindmost. His Brigadier friend who has been made the scapegoat is shunned and is almost hysterical at the impending court-martial on the charge of desertion on the battlefield. His life is a journey from innocence to experience and also from self-love to self-remorse. It is now that he who thinks himself "as a martyr, not as a common criminal" (p.118), learns the lesson of humility.

Joshi has used first person narrative technique in this novel also. According to Meredith and Fitzgerald, "All the first person narrative novels employ the principle of confession". "The Apprentice reads like a

confessional" writes S.R.Jamkhandi.¹ Joshi experiments with the technique of dramatic monologue to unfold the life of the protagonist. Ratan Rathor, who struggles for a career in the corrupt society of the pre-Independence India. While he gradually ascends and is exalted on the ladder of social and material life, on the moral scale he goes down and suffers diminution. The technique of dramatic monologue suits the narrative, for it enables the protagonist to lay bare his soul before a silent listener, a young student (symbolic of young readers), and relate to him the story of his material rise and moral decline. "The device of juxtaposing and equating these two kinds of values, material and moral, in the consciousness of the hero, also lends semi-serious tone to the narrative" says Harish Prasad.²

V.V.N.Rajendra Prasad comments, "The Apprentice is a fictional experiment - a confessional novel, which employs psycho-narration".³ Ratan Rathor narrates the way in which he became a victim of corruption in a metropolitan society during the war between India and China. His audience is a student, who just listens; the narrator himself puts questions and expresses the doubts that may arise in the listener's mind. The narrative runs like a monologue of Browning, in which there is an audience whose participation is just passive.

Arun Joshi has experimented with the technique of stream of consciousness upto some extent in the narration. It seems that he is not successful in using it compared to the master artist of this technique - James Joyce. In this connection, Joy Abraham comments, "He uses the streams of consciousness technique in Joycean style. The frequent use of stream of consciousness device mark the narrator's soliloquies sound like the ravings of an upstart".⁴

Arun Joshi successfully delineates the inner conflict in the mind of the protagonist. It helps much to reveal the character. The division of Ratan's self all the more sharpens when he agrees to marry the niece of his Office Superintendent. That, of course, he does under circumstantial compulsion. But he is not happy. He suffers from humiliation and mental agony: "After having passed several nights of humiliation or nights when you are ashamed of something, ashamed of yourself, when the darkness is full of insults, pointing fingers and mocking laughter" (p.149), Ratan finds himself in a conflicting situation: his 'higher self' "trying to hold a check on his strange bargains with the world" (p.66), his 'lower self' dictating him for the pursuit of career and thus making him thick-skinned. The novelist describes this inner conflict in the words of the protagonist:

"I felt ashamed and, in a way, frightened; of the future of men like those clerks, of myself, that part of myself which kept pushing me, making these strange bargains with the world" (p.52).

Thus, Ratan Rathor is a man divided against himself and painfully aware of the duality of his 'higher' and 'lower' selves.

A particular choice of the character helps to reveal the character. This technique is very often used by Arun Joshi.

Once again, under the predominance of the 'lower self', he, as a free individual, exercises his 'choice' to pursue his material ends. Consequently, after marriage, he becomes an officer two days after the Indian Republic was declared. But the tragedy of Ratan lies in his consciousness that in spite of promotion and success as a government official, he is gradually sinking into the abyss of darkness, of

corruption, exploitation and bourgeois filth. Yet he has the satisfaction of swimming and not sinking. Arun Joshi makes an ironic comment on this aspect of human existence, "We sink and we think we are swimming" (p.53).

While focusing our attention on the protagonist's consciousness, Arun Joshi also aims at exposing the 'obscure' cult that rules this country and of which the Office Superintendent is the high priest. In a world characterized by the 'reversal of values', a fluid society without any moral foundation, gradually disintegrating and falling apart, Ratan does not feel at home. His 'higher self' makes effort to bring about the entire change in his conduct and behaviour. He begins to behave as if he were one of the greatest patriots in India, always talking about the miserable condition of the country, collecting donations for the soldiers at the warfront and donating blood. He also writes an article entitled 'Crisis of Character', in which he considers various factors responsible for the country's downfall, the chief being the Indian character. Thus, he becomes an advocate of Truth, Dharma and Love. While concluding his article, he regrets the miserable plight of the Indians after Independence and points out moral degradation and corruption at all levels.

The Apprentice shows a remarkable self-awareness in ruthlessly exposing Ratan's fads, preoccupations, self-deceptions and the dark phase of his life. It is this and his capacity to laugh at his past life which make him a complex character. His article on 'Crisis of Character' reveals that fact:

"I sent this article to many newspapers, but none of them published it. This did not prevent me from having it cyclostyled and distributed among a large number of my friends. I also presented it in the form of lecture to a couple of Associations in our area" (p.59).

Here we perceive an element of foolish sincerity side by side with hypocrisy. He lacks the moral courage to put into practice what he preaches. A situation arises when he is trapped into becoming the indirect executioner of his Brigadier friend. He accepts a bribe not because of any need but because of the confused values in the society in which he lives:

"What was right? What was wrong? No one seemed to know or may be they knew but when it comes to practice, no one seemed sure whether what was right was practicable, that is where the rub lay" (p.64).

In the end, his moral decency is completely eroded and he finds it difficult to confess even in order to save his friend who is more than a brother to him.

The novel is set in Indian setting, familiar to the urban middle class. Though Ratan does not feel at home in society, he does not abandon it as Billy Biswas has done. Interestingly, he embodies the very world of material values, which his predecessors Sindi Oberoi and Billy Biswas had rejected. He is neither a rebel nor a dissident; he is a victim. After feeling alienated from society, he adapts himself to the ways of the world. He has a powerful instinct for survival. He knows that some people survive through defence, while others do so through their abilities. And there are still others who survive by sycophancy

and by being servile to those in power Ratan fully succumbs to worldly pleasures. At every stage, he puts up an initial resistance only to discover, like so many of his kind, the futility of his endeavour. R.K.Dhawan rightly remarks, "Ratan Rathor is both the hero as well as the anti-hero of the novel".⁵

Having lived for two decades, as he says, "in smog : confused, exploited, exploiting, deceiving" (p.138), he is tired in body and spirit. He has neglected India's rich heritage and not created the new order he once envisaged. Penitent, especially after he learns that even the temple priest condones bribery, he takes to cleaning the shoes of the congregation. Each morning before going to work, he goes to the temple and wipes the shoes of the people and then begs forgiveness of "my father, my mother, the Brigadier and all those he has harmed", "with deliberation and with cunning" (pp.148-149). This symbolic act of penance, he thinks will bring him humility.

Though the future of the country looks grim, the young, as Ratan tells the listener, "might yet hold back the tide" (p.150). Arun Joshi pins his hope through the protagonist on the new generation and ends the novel on a positive note. There is hope as long as young men are willing to learn and ready to sacrifice as they have done many times before. Ratan exhorts the young to rise to the occasion and make a new start. It is never too late.

Ratan Rathor, the protagonist, may be compared with Conrad's Jim. O.P.Mathur, in this connection, writes, "Ratan Rathor bears a striking resemblance to Conrad's Jim. Jim, who is full of revolt against the bourgeois ideal of self-preservation, loses his dignity and honour in a

moment of crisis".⁶

Arun Joshi delineates all the hidden contents of the protagonist's inner realities. He uses different techniques for this purpose and becomes successful in portraying the character life-like and living. Ratan Rathor changes in the course of time and with the experiences which he faces in his life. It is surprising that an officer of Government of India starts cleaning shoes at the staircase of the temple to wash his sins. Thus, the character who changes his behaviour and also surprises is 'round'.

3.3.3.2 Subordinate Characters:

1. Brigadier:

(A) Identification:

The Brigadier is the son of a grain merchant, who was a friend of Ratan's father. The Brigadier and Ratan Rathor were close friends, right from their childhood. After schooling, the Brigadier recruited himself in military and rose upto the post of the Brigadier.

(B) Features:

Ratan remembers his childhood days of happiness in the Brigadier's company. They both loved running and exercising. They shared the joy of wandering aimlessly, cycling in the remote areas and swimming in the river. Ratan remembers,

"There were other things we did, things that young men do ... your hand on another man's shoulder, ... going to village fair to look at the girls ..." (p.17).

The Brigadier's family always helped Ratan in his bad times, when

his mother was ill and when his father was killed by an English sergeant. The Brigadier himself also loved and helped him a lot.

The Brigadier is brave and devoted. Also, he is a good friend; at school, he had fought with other boys for Ratan Rathor. Ratan remembers:

"What I can not get rid of is that moment in the dark against the still fields of sugarcane, when the Brigadier, yelling and swearing had leapt across the fallen bicycles, to fight for me, me, who no one had ever fought for" (p.17).

He shows the same spirit in his service also. He always fought to win on the battlefield. That made him rise from a sergeant to the post of Brigadier. He is proud of his courage and spirit of fighting devotedly for the cause of nation. He really inherits the spirit of patriotism.

The character of the Brigadier is presented to highlight in functional terms, the victimization of the innocent in a corrupt society. The terrible predicament of the Brigadier, who has paid heavy price for no fault of his own and who is stunned and almost paralysed having to face court-martial on the charge of desertion on the battlefield. The Brigadier is very sensitive and he is not able to bear the blow of court-martial for the act of desertion. Actually, he is not responsible for that but the circumstances and the worst material supplied by the corrupt beauracracy. Unable to face the humiliation, he kills himself by firing a bullet in his head.

(C) Technique:

This character emerges only through the retrospective narration of the protagonist.

Though the character of the Brigadier touches our mind, it can hardly be called 'round', because it is not fully developed. It looks like a type. Also, it does not change. Therefore, it seems 'flat'.

3.3.3.3 Minor Characters:

All the remaining characters in the novel are not developed fully. They help only to support the plot and highlight the protagonist. A.N.Dwivedi comments, "In this novel, there is hardly any other character worth the name - the Brigadier, 'you', the Office Superintendent, Himmat Singh and the Sheikh being only cogs in the wheel of the story".⁷

3.4 THE LAST LABYRINTH

3.4.1 THE STORY:

The fourth and the last novel. The Last Labyrinth (1981) is dedicated to the three children of the writer. Here the central figure is Som Bhaskar, a multi-millionaire married to a woman of his choice, Geeta, who has borne him two children. But Bhaskar is an ever dissatisfied, restless person, who is relentlessly driven by undefined hungers of possession of an object, a business enterprise and a woman. Later, when he encounters Anuradha, a tall, beautiful but obsolete lady, he is irresistably 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 makes a risky trip to the high mountains to pay a visit to a sacred shrine, to get possession of the business files and the jewellery of Anuradha. Though he gets possession of these things, 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.

3.4.2 THEMES:

Arun Joshi has handled different themes in this novel. They are as follows:

- (i) Alienation, loneliness and quest for identity;
- (ii) The self's involvement with the family and the society, making life meaningful;
- (iii) Suffering of the modern man because of the hunger of body and spirit.

3.4.3 CHARACTER SCHEME:

The Last Labyrinth is differently cast on a grander scale than the previous novels. The mystery shrouds the action here right from the beginning. This mystery relates not only to the taxing questions about life, love, death and God, but also to those pertaining to the stars of the characters. Still, the character-scheme of the novel remains the same as in the previous novels. It may be given as follows:

- (i) Major character: the protagonist, Som Bhaskar;
- (ii) Subordinate characters: Geeta, Anuradha, Gargi, Aftab;
- (iii) Minor characters: Mr.K., Som's father, Mr.Thapar, Azizun, Taraki, etc.

3.4.3.1 Major Character:

1. The Protagonist, Som Bhaskar:

(A) Identification:

Som Bhaskar is a multi-millionaire, married to Geeta out of his

own choice, she bears him to children. But Bhaskar is a dissatisfied person. He is excessively driven by the desire of possession, whether it is an object or a woman. Later, when he encounters Anuradha, he cannot resist her charm and frequently goes from Bombay to Banaras to satisfy his lust.

(B) Personality Features:

The novel presents Bhaskar's story, an extended series of the spots of his personal experience, a montage of his reflections on his own life. Bhaskar's story finds its contours and his dilemma gets an intenser focus, if we explicate his relationship to other characters. His grandfather was a man of town, fond of women and drink. His father, a different sort, a scientist trying to delve deeply into truths that lie at the heart of the Universe, was seeking to find out the First Cause. Bhaskar inherits inflections from both, for he is a womanizer and a boozier. Another dimension of Bhaskar's life is outlined by his mother and his wife who are emblems of endurance. His mother died of cancer and Krishna, to quote Bhaskar's own words. His wife, Geeta, intelligent and sophisticated, has "trust like birds fly, like fish swims" (p.63). Bhaskar believes that his is a happy marriage and he cannot imagine a life without Geeta and yet has fornications.

Som could not find any satisfactory answer to his questions. Being a highly rational person, he would not accept any readymade solution to his problems, such as irrational belief in the supernatural elements, of blind adherence to fatalism or determinism. His father, a chemist-turned-businessman, emphasized "everything happens in cycles - Birth, Growth, Decline and Death" (p.27). He wondered if there could not

possibly be a First Cause behind the creation of the Universe, which he regarded to be "the expression of a will, though he had no evidence to believe that there was a divine will" (p.204). He was subsequently pushed off to the age of melancholia by these 'bigger interrogations' and 'a knowledge of varieties sparsely known among ordinary men' (p.156). Som has no "explanation" to life's problems and as an ardent believer in Darwin, feels bogged down when he finds that Darwin did not say "how we are supposed to evolve future" (p.132). His search for life's secrets becomes hopelessly complicated because of his yearning to have the best of both the worlds - the world of matter and of spirit. He maintains, "What I needed perhaps was something, somebody, somewhere, in which the two worlds combined" (p.82).

Bhaskar enjoys happy married life. Both Bhaskar and Geeta are happy and satisfied. Yet, he has fornications. he runs again and again to different women. Leela Subnis is an exception. A scholar's child trained in philosophy, a believer in free love, she is the clear spirit of reason and she tries to explain Bhaskar's sickness through analysis. She embodies Descartean Principle, "I think, therefore, I am" (p.30) and asserts that intuition or faith or even soul could be reasoned through. Bhaskar's affair with Leela Subnis fizzles out because Bhaskar does not have the stance of clarity and certitude which she has. In her, the worlds of matter and spirit did not meet.

Bhaskar's relationship with Anuradha is, however, the most complex tenet of his dilemma. Anuradha has mysterious beauty. She attracts Som Bhaskar and gradually becomes the centre of his life. He visits frequently the Lal Haveli, which seems as the last labyrinth of life.

Bhaskar desires frantically for Anuradha and undergoes undefinable experiences in the blue room of the Lal Haveli at Banaras. To get rid of her, he goes on a tour to Europe with his wife, but there also in Tokyo, has trance-like flash of Anuradha in her erotic moods. He rushes back and opens his heart to Gargi, the daughter of the Sufi. Gargi is the sublimated form of his wife and mother and she tells him that Anuradha is his Shakti. He returns to Lal Haveli and both he and Anuradha possess each other with singular ferocity, neither willing to loosen the clasp. He hustles Anuradha off to the hills to possess her wholly and throws on her his entire desperate weight, the turbulence of his forty years.

Gargi, like the narrator's mother, incarnates Lord Krishna's language. But all Som Bhaskar listens to is the language of the woman's body. At the news of his mother's death, he thinks of the erotic responses of his headmaster's wife. He is attracted to the women not merely to gratify his carnal appetite; in each one of them, he finds a different quality to fill a different need. With his wife, Geeta, he finds a reassuring trust. In Leela Subnis, a philosophy professor, he finds a blend of his impulse for freedom and his father's scientific outlook of First Cause in everything. Like him, she is "muddled by her ancestry, by marriages, by divorces, by too many books" (p.77).

The Last Labyrinth is basically a love story. Som Bhaskar is captivated by the beauty of an ex-actress now living with Aftab Rai, a rival industrialist. Som's only desire is to possess Anuradha. For a while, he is lost in the labyrinth of his emotions for her just as he is lost in the mazes and labyrinth of Lal Haveli, the house she lives in. At first, Som thinks that in the last labyrinth, only death resides, but upon Anuradha's eventual desertion of him, Som survives through a

near-fatal heart attack to become a melancholic man as his father had before him.

Som Bhaskar is a jet-setter at least by Indian standards as he impulsively travels from Bombay to Banaras, to see Anuradha, all the while, on the slightest of business excuses. She is for the most part an elusive lover, giving into him on only two occasions and for a few months for each time. After she leaves him the second time, Som can only seek revenge by buying the overpriced shares of Aftab's company. These shares he retrieves from the temple to which Anuradha has donated them.

Som's irresistible passions go on in violent intoxication till his anti-climatic fall with a massive heart attack, from which his question of survival would not have come at all, had not Anuradha and Gargi come to his rescue under miraculous circumstances. Thereafter, he loses sight of Anuradha and even his attempts to talk to her on phone prove to be of no avail. It is the most crucial turning point in the life of Som Bhaskar. Anuradha slips out of Som's hand, and her unseen presence works upon Som's mind. Yet, he cannot accept the rush of events as he suspects a foul game unleashed against him by Aftab. Now all his energies of desire and lust are converted into anger, greed and hatred, and he hatches plans to cripple Aftab's business, for his failure to meet Anuradha. He mortgages his plant and lands to purchase the outstanding shares of Aftab's company. He knows that one greater and deeper part of him belongs to Anuradha. His very root shelters the physical body of Anuradha - her breasts, thighs, sari-clad body, her Mehandi, the tattoo mark on her forehead as a permanent Birdi, and her scented body. Of Krishna, he takes no notice and his intellect seems to accept Darwin's

evolution theory. His religion is to worship body and he takes shelter in Kama. He says,

"... We coupled high above the earth, independent of time and space, like a pair of asteroids, locked in each other's gravity ... We communicated through the thrust and push and pull of our bodies ... the most intimate dialogues" (p.107).

The Last Labyrinth concerns Som Bhaskar's existentialist angst and agonized mystical craving that remains unfulfilled till the end of the novel. "He is psychosomatic case and consequently, he is tormented by his ill-defined hungers which Joshi has tried to describe as 'mystical'", writes Madhusudhan Prasad.¹ Leela Subnis, one of the married girl-friends of Bhaskar, aptly describes what he is. She remarks, "You are much too high-strung. Without reason. You are neurotic. A compulsive fornicator" (p.80). Certainly, this remark of Leela Subnis amply illuminates Bhaskar's basic character.

Bhaskar is a new Indian with a crisis of consciousness. Arun Joshi deepens in him his awareness of man's restlessness in modern life and his futile attempts to escape from it. In this novel, his existential stance has assumed a metaphysical dimension and mystical proportion. In Bhaskar's case, it is the failure of neither human relationship nor the society. Bhaskar is in communion with other characters and is hardly at odds with or seriously aware of the sordidness of the society. Bhaskar's crisis is not a crisis of emotion or ethics. It is the crisis of consciousness. The march of human evolution and the development of civilizations down the ages have brought modern man to a point of consciousness where he can not believe. Bhaskar does not know what lies in the last labyrinth. He is both akin to and different from the earlier

heroes of Arun Joshi. Bhaskar is a continuity in his anguish of alienation, in his existential problem, in his question, but he effects a departure in the realization of the fact that man's dilemma now is no longer merely a consequence of cause or situation, but is rooted in man himself. Bhaskar's dilemma lies deep down in his own self and consciousness. It is not the outer world, the objective reality but the world within, the subjective reality which is essentially the fountain-spring of despair and anxiety. This is a metaphysical awareness of human loneliness, of human inadequacy, of human unfulfilment. In this connection, Hari Mohan Prasad rightly comments, "Joshi's odyssey has been from man suffering from a cause to man suffering for being man with consciousness. Bhaskar's dilemma has crystallized the sociological, psychological and metaphysical dimensions of human existence into Joshi's unique vision of modern man's predicament. Som Bhaskar is an archetype of the new man and The Last Labyrinth is a fictional tour de force on the chaos of existence and the crisis of consciousness".²

A notable feature of Som Bhaskar is that while he is placed both by training and by profession in society, he is not society's man. He is driven by forces unknown and irrational and all his actions are not intelligible to the rational mind. He is an individual who has very rich life-within rather than life-without and is subject almost by instinct to an unconscious link with the primal world, the original picture of the world. Som Bhaskar may look preposterous, but his complexity has other facets of his illusive character. Som is searching for a labyrinth within labyrinth. His English education and Western degrees are of little help to make him discard his unconscious bond with the age-old Indian ethos and cultural heritage. Joshi's heroes - especially Som and

Billy - seek refuge in a mystical primitivism, physically running away from the fact-finding, mechanized, urban, sophisticated life. Som's faith is in the intuitive religion based on the fundamental instincts of man, which vent themselves upon an immediacy of fulfilment of a strong primitive desire. "In him alone one can see," writes M. Mani Meitei, "the two kinds of men as found in Hardy - 'the gentleman and the peasant' and also Lawrence's sophisticated, rich, intellectuals and unintellectuals, highly sexed characters full of smouldering, sullen energy".³

In Som's wild hunt for physical pleasure, reason hardly enters, and again, when he talks of God, his intellect seeks the proof of the existence of the God. This amounts to his disbelief in God or his existence. He attributes the death of his mother to her wrong faith in Krishna, which prevented others from taking her to a hospital to cure her cancer. Later, he comes to know that Anuradha's mother also was a victim of the same false faith in Krishna. When she said that she was married to Krishna, the man in a fit killed her with a broken whisky bottle. Lack of faith, however, does not do Som any good. He is suffering from tension, unhappiness, disturbance, hysteria, neurosis and some strange dreams and insomnia, while all others around him are happy even in suffering and in the face of death.

(C) Technique:

The points of view of the novelist and of the character help much to reveal the character. We come to know that the protagonist, Som Bhaskar, inherits afflictions from both his father and mother. Still, he has his own views about life and God. He is highly rational and lacks faith. He firmly believes in Darwin rather than in Krishna. He is like

the modern, educated, intellectual and sceptical man. He wants to enjoy life by possession. He is not satisfied even with much wealth, good business, faithful wife and two children. His fantastic longing to possess Anuradha by hook or by crook shows an aspect of his personality. He suffers a lot on account of his whims. He becomes restless, unhappy and insomniac. He does not accept his father's quest to understand the First Cause or his mother's immovable faith in Krishna. At last, frustrated and defeated, he wants to kill himself and is saved by Geeta, his wife.

A number of characters in the novel serve to highlight Som Bhaskar's restlessness by their apparent calm. Geeta is one of them and Aftab Rai another. But Leela Subnis, the Michigan-trained psychologist, is different. She analyzes too much. But her analytical zeal does not make any sense to Som Bhaskar. He wants to say in his shadowy impulse, "I want. I want. I want" (p.11), about which Leela is concerned:

"If man can go to the moon, surely he can make a dent in understanding himself, he can at least make a dent. What can you do with mysticism? Take it or leave it. What good is doctrine that says: Take me or leave me, do not analyze me. It is Descartes that you need to understand, Som Bhaskar" (p.79).

Anuradha is an important character in the novel. She attracts Som, also satisfies his lust occasionally. But she is unable to live with him forever. She wants that Som should visit God on the mountains. Her role in the novel is to lead Bhaskar through the subconscious.

Gargi also tries to show him the path of faith. She behaves like a mother, a spiritual guide for Som. But Som Bhaskar, though impressed by

her personality and intelligence, never believes in her words. Moreover, Aftab tells him, "You have to sacrifice before you are given. You can't have your cake and eat it too ... You want to have faith. But you also want to reserve the right to challenge your faith when it suits you" (p.166). The points of view of all these characters help to reveal the character of Som Bhaskar.

Like Billy Biswas, Som is also obsessed with hallucinations. He also has fantastic dreams. These hallucinations and dreams help to show the restlessness and inner conflict of Som Bhaskar. This is the technique used by the psychological novelist to reveal the inner reality of the character. Som listens to mysterious and undefined voices 'mostly of the dead' (p.68). He tells Leela Subnis that he hears the song, "I want. I want. I want." in the voids "for all the time" (p.78). In his conversation with Anuradha, he again refers to these voices, "a great thrashing of the wind way up in the sky" (p.106). Leela Subnis considers these voices to be his delusions and tells him, "You are much too high strung without reason. You are a neurotic. A compulsive fornicator" (p.112) and feels "May be what you want is a mystical identification, identification with a Godhead, as most Hindus want, sooner or later" (p.113). However, being a sceptic, Som has no such divine yearning.

As a disturbed, neurotic man, Som Bhaskar seems dreams. His dreams are fantastic and also symbolic. He fears the dreams and is unable to sleep a natural sleep. He always uses tranquilizers. Finally, there is a recurrent dream with its mountain against which he crashes in a plane. He is never far from nightmares and fantasies, despite all his unwavering faith in nationality and his unwillingness to believe anything readily.

Arun Joshi uses the technique of contrast in his novels to expose the character more sharply. In this novel, he is more successful than before in using it. Especially, in the case of the protagonist, the other characters do effectively act out their roles in bringing about the clash of opposites which finally imprison Som Bhaskar in the labyrinth of his own mind.

By the time the events Som relates have taken place, both his parents have died, but Som reconstructs his relationship with them, a relationship affected powerfully by his Western attitudes. Som recollects that when his mother, dying of cancer "believed Krishna would cure her and flushed her capsules down the toilet" (p.57), he had in a rage, knocked all the gods and goddesses onto the floor. His mother did eventually have her own way, Som recalls, for "Krishna sat on top of her bureau and smiled and smiled and smiled until she was dead" (p.57). His father died of no such dramatic illness; rather, he suffered from melancholia, which finally proved fatal. An equally absurd way to end one's life, Som believes, "Melancholia! For God's sake!". Som thinks to himself, "I could not imagine a more ridiculous, foolish, humiliating death" (p.82).

In spite of Som's annoyance with his parents for allowing their lives to slip away from them while seeking the unattainable, he not only thinks of them with fondness but also appears to be following in their footsteps, albeit unintentionally. His mother sought healing from Krishna, but failed to receive it. Yet Som must have recovered from his heart-attack, his personal physician tells him, by means of some kind of divine intervention. Even though Som scorns his father's melancholia and

swears to eliminate any such nonsense from his life, he, too, falls into similar state. Outwardly, of course, Som relies on modern cures for physical illness and mental depression, including cardio-grams, intensive care, Valium, tranquilizers and so on.

Just as opposing forces affect his attitude towards his parents, so do they work in his relationship with women. Although Som brags that he has always been a successful womanizer, just three contrasting types have been given. First, his wife Geeta stands as the perfect, understanding and long suffering wife. Geeta, he admits, after ten years of marriage remains, the same loving, marvellous 'woman'. His only criticism of her stems from the sudden enthusiasm she has developed for "Sadhus and astrologers and such like" (p.70).

The second woman he mentions emerges in an altogetherly different context. She is Dr. Leela Subnis. Som and she are engaged in an affair, intensely physical at first, but turning quickly into an intellectual exercise. When Leela spoke, Som was never sure whose voice he actually heard - the Western philosopher's or of Leela herself. He concluded finally that Leela was 'a muddled creature' as muddled as he was, in spite of her vast reality, her analytical ability, and her intellectual detachment regarding the mysteries of life, those mysteries with which everyone else he knew seemd to be grappling.

So Leela, gradually disappears from his life to be replaced by the third woman, Anuradha. She possesses neither the refinement of Som's proper upper class wife nor the intellectual breadth of his former mistress. In fact, Anuradha should have been repugnant to the modern Som who finds so much of traditional India distasteful. Yet she ignites a

physical longing in him that turns into an obsession; and this longing continues even after they carry on a lengthy affair, an unusual response for Som. Nor he is free of his desire once she has irrevocably ended their relationship, even when she has disappeared. There exists within her a strange woman, one time a film actress, something deeper than the source of physical satisfaction, for Som comes to believe that she may well hold the answer he has begun to seek in spite of his better judgement. One night when they are in the mountains, he laments, "She did not even talk of God, which, perversely, disappointed me. For some reason, as I rose higher, it was about God that I wanted to hear" (p.128). Som marvels at the depth of this woman's thinking, yet he is unable to separate the physical from the spiritual; thus he never learns from her what he might have.

Another relationship, by far the most fully developed in the novel, is the one between Som and Aftab, the owner of the plastics company Som is attempting to take over. "Aftab is the 'common-law' husband of Anuradha, Som's great passion" says Robert Ross [3]. On the surface, these two men appear to be total opposites. Som once took pride, at least outwardly, in his efficiency as a business executive, in his Western ways, his travel, his rationality. Aftab, conversely, ignores business, lives in an atmosphere described as 'depraved', loathes travel and shuns any rational approach to what is good or what is right. Once again, the opposites clash, the two men outwardly living in different worlds but in truth dwelling in the same darkness, unable or unwilling to learn one from another.

Som, forced on quest for truth confronts over and over again the conflicting forces, the clash of opposites, the appearance and the

reality. No one can lead him out of his self-imposed internment in the labyrinth, for he is doomed, as are all men, to the last labyrinth, death - the final opposite he will face.

In a work of fiction, the particularly narrative technique employed to project an experience depends on the nature of the theme explored and the kind of effect intended. "The narrative technique is not arbitrarily decided upon by the author. But, in The Last Labyrinth, Joshi seems to have rather arbitrarily chosen the first person narrative technique to explore the distinctly individual consciousness of Bhaskar", writes Madhusudan Prasad.⁴ The whole story of this novel revolves around the protagonist. Therefore, it is natural that the internal reality of the protagonist should be exposed to the readers. It can be achieved only by these interior monologues. All the major incidents and developments are narrated by the protagonist through his own impressions. These impressions include also his confession. It is well known that in a first person narrative, confession is very important to reveal the character and also the theme. Thus, Som Bhaskar admits so many things - his weakness, his inability to accept the dogmatic faith, confusion between reality and mystery, etc.

"But", as Madhusudan Prasad observes, "Bhaskar's consciousness is not the only thing in the novel - had it been all important, Joshi should have cast the whole novel in the form of a monologue which he has not done".⁵ The theme, as depicted in the novel, also suggests the consciousness of certain other characters such as Anuradha, Aftab, Geeta and Gargi, which the author fails to explore because of the employment of the first person narrator. This first person narrative technique

proves highly injurious to Geeta's character that is not developed at all. Whatever little we get to know about her is depicted from the point of view of her husband, the narrator. Considering the ample scope of the theme, Joshi should have employed the narrative technique of multiple points of view. Had he used this technique of shifting point of view, he would have been able not only to explore the individual consciousness of other characters but also to focus on interpersonal relationships - Anuradha-Aftab relationship, Bhaskar-Geeta relationship and Anuradha-Geeta relationship, that are left neglected in the novel. Of these relationships, Bhaskar-Geeta relationship would have certainly been the most effective and significant. Had Joshi developed this husband-wife relationship, concentrating on Geeta's mental tensions stemming from Bhaskar's infatuation with Anuradha, the novel would have undoubtedly gained an intensity and a forcefulness.

In The Last Labyrinth, the world of dreams, illusions and doubts have been juxtaposed with that of reality and understanding. We are reminded of "the miasma of Lal Haveli" (p.113), where most incidents take place, and of the "morass" of this "tawdry, sensual den, a dead house in a dead city" (p.108). Banaras, Aftab, Anuradha and their Haveli, all appear to Som as "bores, frogs stuck in their ancient marshy wells" (p.113). Som suffers from delusions and is condemned to an existence in which "at some point on the horizon, all is mixed up" (p.75). Anuradha, too, looks 'mysterious' and there is a 'mystery' within Som.

In this "mysterious world", everything is in "a haze" (p.108) and there is "a mystery into which everything fitted" (p.161). Som's efforts are directed towards perceiving and explaining this very mystery of the

world. His struggle, however, is rendered "futile" by his nagging, enervating doubts" (p.53). "Of late", says he, "I doubted everything and everybody" and "my fears real or imagined, had exponentially increased" (p.152). He is torn apart by his doubts, "the wolves that are going to eat you up" (p.164). In such circumstances, one can hardly perceive the reality of life in true colours.

As against this benighted world of dreams and doubts, we have the world of reality and understanding. The river Ganga is seen by Som as 'leading to a reality' that he has not yet known (p.49). But is it easy to see this reality clearly? Even Geeta admits that "everything is so complicated" (p.70) "Reality", as Som realizes later, "was so like an iceberg. You never saw the whole of it" (p.161). An unswerving appreciation of reality is possible if one possesses an understanding born of tolerance and acceptance of all the facts of life with nonchalance. This with the use of mystery with reference to places like Lal Haveli, Banaras and Ganga and characters like Anuradha and the protagonist himself, the novelist is successful in showing the mysterious side of the human character.

Bhaskar is a product of twin-worlds - the Western world of science and rationalism and the Indian world of faith and transcendentalism. Both these worlds are tangible carved out by a juxtaposition of symbols. Each character is a living being in his or her context and yet each is a symbol. Bhaskar's mother, his wife and Gargi form a series, a facet of reality, and a mode of endurance and faith, Anuradha is a symbol of the undefinable, the elusive, the life-spirit in woman and also of the spirit of sacrifice, which is the highest gift of Hinduism. Anuradha is

a saint-sinner-adulteress endowed with love and compassion. Krishna is a symbol coming in many forms - Krishna on the cabinet shelf in the mother's room, Krishna whom Anuradha's mother believes to have married, Krishna whom Anuradha gifts in a silver statue to Bhaskar, Krishna whom Anuradha finds in the purple mountains and Krishna in the form of blue flame in the temple. The Western world is spelt out by Descarte, Kant, Darwin, Freud and Jung, Bombay by Leela Subnis, the Indian spiritual world of faith by Anuradha, Gargi, Banaras and Krishna. Here is an authentic dilemma of a Indian with a Western-orientation and education. Hari Mohan Prasad states the character of Som as the mouthpiece of the author as Arun Joshi had his education abroad and stayed there for quite sometime imbibing in his thoughts the ways of the Western world. "Both the hero and the novelist are made out of these dual force", comments Hari Mohan Prasad.⁶

'Labyrinth' is used as a metaphor in this novel. Aftab Rai's Lal Haveli is the symbol used as a labyrinth. In their conversation, Aftab and Som seems to provide an initial clue to the mystery of labyrinth. According to Aftab, the last labyrinth refers to death. This implies that the first labyrinth is birth. Som Bhaskar's cry, "I want, I want, I want", goes unheard and unheeded in life's labyrinths. His problem, as he states, is, "I want, I want. If only one knew what one wanted. Or may be, to know was what I wanted. To know. Just that. No more. No less. This then was a labyrinth, too, this going forward and backward and sideways of the mind" (p.53). For the sake of the clarity of the argument, it may be argued that while birth and death are the first and the last labyrinths, human psyche itself is a labyrinth and its contours and movements, always, fascinating, always inexplicable. Som's

'obsessions, voids and his 'little fornications' are a part and parcel of his problem to know what he wanted which even the best psychiatrists he consulted could not explain coherently, let alone cure. Leela Subnis tries to help him by prescribing Descarte's Cogito ergo sum without much success, for the simple reason that she kept the two worlds - the world of matter and the world of spirit separate. As Som puts it,

"In the world of matter, we had fed on sex ... In the world of spirit, we still enjoyed conversation. The two worlds, by her lights, did not meet, could not meet" (pp.81-82).

A.Ramkrishna Rao writes, "The image of 'soul-making' is 'a great therapeutic process' when one refuses to submit oneself to this great process, there is only a void to face".⁷ The word "void" occurs too often in Joshi's novels to go unnoticed. We see in Joshi's novels the subtle juxtaposition of 'void' and 'labyrinth' as two modes of making sense of life. Whether one should choose to apprehend the void or the labyrinth is left to oneself. Any choice worth its name is drastic and leads to a labyrinth. 'Conventional expedients of the age' lead to a void. Labyrinths are meaningful and make sense of life. Labyrinth is a total explanation. Wastelands and voids are, at best, only half truths. Labyrinth, as a metaphor for various levels of awareness imminent in Krishna's legend unfolds the novel Minotaur that one has to face in life's labyrinth is ultimately the self, may be, the naked self. Som, a modern tycoon, while chasing a charming woman in Aftab's Haveli (labyrinth) sees in the dance of two little girls his self and sadly reflects,

"So, here too, Krishna ruled. Why could not they put into dance the problem of people like me? Weren't there masters who could work out

the choreography of my lust for Anuradha unless they considered the love of Radha and Krishna to include all overs, all lusts, all disappointments" (p.54).

In this novel, Joshi successfully portrayed the protagonist, using mysteries, images, symbols and metaphors. This is the most complicated character to expose, because here the traditional concept of a well-made novel and character is not followed. The protagonist remains unchanged. Therefore, the action of the novel is termed as 'circular' by A.N.Dwivedi.⁸ It seems that Som Bhaskar's character cannot be measured by the scale of E.M.Forster. But one thing is clear that Joshi is successful in depicting the psychological turmoil in the mind of the protagonist and also his restlessness, voids and the labyrinth.

3.4.3.2 Subordinate Characters:

1. Anuradha:

(A) Identification:

Anuradha is a daughter of a disreputable woman, who was killed by one of her desperate lovers with a broken whisky bottle. Anuradha, an orphan, grows up under the guardianship of her aunt in Bombay. Her original name is Meera. The name is very significant, because of the various visual and aural images of Krishna that proliferate throughout the text. Renamed Anuradha, she spends sometime in the film-world and gets out of it with the help of Aftab Rai, who introduces her to Gargi. She meets Som Bhaskar in one of the meetings of the shareholders connected with the production of plastic goods. Even in their first meeting, she fascinates Som, and he is prepared to lose anything to retain her love. "Anuradha is a labyrinthine woman, at once young and old, ancient and modern, and furious in lust and divine in love. She is

every man's woman and no man's wife", comments A.Ramkrishna Rao.⁹

(B) Features:

Anuradha is another symbolic character of Arun Joshi's, who represents the elusive, the unattainable in life. She was, indeed, a woman "gifted with a special vision, a vantage point high above the earth, from where she could see the confusion of people below, which ordinary men could not" (p.127). She is extremely beautiful. Som comments,

"I had noticed Anuradha like one notices a monument - tall, handsome, ruined. Her eyes, just a little slanted, had that inky blackness that fills the eyes of the victims of smallpox. She might have been thirty, thirtyfive. She could have been from Bengal, Sikkim, from the valley of Nepal" (p.12).

She wears antique jewellery and costumes of a bygone age - brocades, large old borders, sleeves upon the elbow. Her beauty has an enigmatic power to attract Som Bhaskar.

Som's interest in Aftab's company is largely the result of his obsessive passion for Anuradha about whom there is a strange aura of the sacred and the profane. Som Bhaskar is irresistably drawn towards Anuradha who casts a spell on him. In the beginning, she appears to him, "a monument - tall, handsome, ruined" (p.12). Later he is drawn towards her body, of whose grace and sensuousness she seemed unaware" (p.41). Som has an in-built hunger for something vague and undefined. Even though scarcely educated, Anuradha has a wisdom higher than Som's and to some extent, she understand his problems. On one occasion, mistakenly assuming that his unidentified hunger is actually carnal desire, Som

tries to make love to Anuradha. Then Anuradha says, "I know. You want something. You badly want something. I could see that the first time we met. But it is not me. That, too, I can see" (pp.58-59).

Som has such an overpowering passion for Anuradha that he neglects his business, his family and his health in order to win her. Anuradha returns her love in her own way and she yields to him on many occasions. Som says,

"We possessed each other with singular ferocity, neither willing to loosen the clasp ... Yet each meeting, far from cooling my passion, served only to fuel them" (p.121).

Gargi calls her a Shakti. At the height of their love affair, Som persuades Anuradha to live with him, leaving behind Aftab and Haveli. But Anuradha disappears mysteriously. She constitutes the concept of sacrifice and explaining this, Joshi writes, "Anuradha's role in the novel is to lead Bhaskar through the subconscious. Then he loses her. I was hinting at the old classing dictum that you do not get anything without sacrificing something. So she is to be taken away from him".¹⁰

(C) Technique:

In this novel, Joshi has used first person narrative technique. Therefore, all the characters, including Anuradha, are revealed through the narration of the protagonist. Though sometimes Anuradha has been given a chance to reflect herself, it is inadequate. The relationship between Anuradha and Som is depicted through the impressions of Som Bhaskar.

Anuradha is an important character, but it has limitations. The

character only supports the protagonist's character. It plays an important role in the development of Som's character. It does not change or surprise. Though 'flat', it has the charm and force of a living character.

3.4.3.3 Minor Characters:

All other characters - Mr.K., Som Bhaskar's father, Mr.Thapar, Aftab, Gargi, Leela, Azizun, Taraki, etc., are minor ones. From these characters, Mr.K., Gargi and Aftab, to some extent, contribute directly to the action in the novel. The major work of these characters is to support the development of the main character. Sometimes the characters like Aftab are presented in contrast to the protagonist. But even then, their role is to highlight the personality of Som Bhaskar. We have only a few glimpses into the personalities of these characters; they tend to stand for certain types. Dr.Kashyap is a man of science; still, he has some faith in the cosmic power. Leela is purely the product of modern education, Western philosophy and psychological analysis. Gargi is the daughter of Sufi saint, deep, mute but intelligent and mysterious, representing the spiritual cure for unrest. Aftab Rai is a rival plastic industrialist. He presents perfect contrast to Som Bhaskar. Som Bhaskar is perfectly a modern man of science and modern philosophy. He firmly believes in Darwin. He hates the unchallenging faith. On the contrary, Aftab is a faithful and religious man who believes in Fate and God. Both of them want to possess her, for different reasons. However, Som develops into a complete 'round' character, but Aftab's character does not develop fully.

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