

THE ROUTE FROM FANTASY TO FACT

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CHAPTER SIX

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As Arun Joshi moved on from one novel to the other, he realized that fantasy appeals to the reader as it gives scope for imagination, dreams and fancies. Joshi enriches the reader's experience by reproducing a fanciful reflection of life instead of a mechanical copy. In other words, he tries to hide facts under fantasy. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* defines "fantasy" as "the act of imagining things" (def. 2). The novelist imagines and creates fantasy in such a way that it serves as a sugar-coated pill that drills facts into the reader. Harish Raizada's article, "Double Vision of Fantasy and Reality in Arun Joshi's Novels" notes, "Although fantasy is intended to entertain us - to charm with freedom and fancies - it is often the source of deepest truths about the inner life, its desires, fears, and imaginings" (Dhawan 71). All novels of Arun Joshi trace the route from fantasy to fact but it is most evident in the fifth and the last novel *The City and the River*.

The City and the River is a change from the familiar Joshian ground, but the novel falls in line with his earlier novels in its rich texture. This novel deviates from the earlier

theme of the singularity of the heroes to a very universal and political crisis in the society. Joshi indulges in his favourite thoughts of faith, commitment and identity but it is analyzed from a political point of view - a theme new to him. All the same, with his keen understanding and expertise, he successfully manages to give shape to a capturing novel, based on modern politics, corruption and greed for power. *The City and the River* is a story set in a city situated by the river and governed by the Grand Master. It is a parable of the times and at the same time, it deals with how men, create the circumstances in which they ought to live. The novel reverberates with political issues rather than private matters. It is neither private nor autobiographical, but a clear-cut political novel. With a politico-historical background, it examines and exposes the day-to-day problems of life.

The novel is presented as a tale narrated by the Great Yogeshwara, for educating his disciple, the Nameless-One. He is the one who spent thirty years under his master, learning under his apprenticeship, matters like “the secrets of the body” and “the secrets of the spirit” (10). The traits of fantasy can be seen even in the names given to these characters: “The Nameless-One” suggests “anyone,”

“Yogeshwara” stands for “the Lord of Yoga” which refers to the union of the body and the spirit. The Grand Master is referred to as the Grand Master itself, a title significant in many ways, at the same time, creating a realm of fantasy.

The element of fantasy is projected in the celebration of the Nameless-One’s birthday. Yogeshwara and the Nameless-One sat together in a world of fantasy and shared the episodes of a strange story: “The Yogeshwara poured the elixir from the pitcher into two beautiful tumblers and the colour of the elixir was the colour of peacock’s feathers. And it warmed the Nameless-One as it went down his throat and made him feel nice because the nights were still quite cold” (11).

All the catastrophes narrated in the story reflect a dream the Grand Master had one night. He dreamt that he had become a king, and sat on the throne. Then arose a man from the river followed by a number of them, dark and naked, and climbed towards his throne. As per the order of the Grand Master, the Astrologer interpreted the dream as a prophecy of the future, where the Grand Master, the king, would be attacked by the boatmen. The Astrologer warned him of the increased population of the boatmen as well.

Immediate steps were taken in order to prevent the attack. The fact that the Grand Master's dream was the basis for the new situation and all the problems related to it, adds to the element of fantasy in the novel.

The Astrologer spoke to the gathering on the river bank and declared the "law of compassionate righteousness" and the new policy of "one child to a mother and two to a home" (18). Living in an innocent world of ignorance and fantasy, the people of the city did not understand anything. So they decided to ignore the speech. In opposition to the world of fantasy in which the people of the city lived, stood the intelligent Head boatman who was actually a woman. She lived in the world of facts and reason: "Not only did she believe that the speech had been made she felt it had a meaning which was not apparent on the surface" (18). When the Astrologer met her the next day she proclaimed boldly of their "allegiance only to the river" (19).

After seven days, a decree from the palace announced the beginning of a new era, "The Era of Ultimate Greatness." It provoked the people to beware of the enemy within and the enemy without, and reminded them of the Astrologer's Three Beautitudes. The new era was established with the

arrest of a boatman and a clown. The boatman's wife was arrested because she had borne an illegal child, and the clown was arrested because he was heard laughing. With this incident Joshi makes it very clear that the Grand Master lived in a world of illusion and fantasies where he thought he could do anything he fancied.

Bhumiputra and Dharma Vira are introduced as two special young men in the story. Bhumiputra used to be a teacher and he was ever willing to teach, hence the name, Master Bhoma. Dharma Vira was a police officer who was known for obedience and perfect adherence to duty. Again there is a note of fantasy when the novelist speaks about his grandfather, "Dharma's grandfather lives on a rose farm. His roses are the finest in the city and are said to dance to the sound of music" (23). Dharma Vira and Bhumiputra are presented as natural human beings whereas there is an aura of fantasy in the names given to some characters like Nameless-One, Hermit of the mountain and the grand father. As Sudhin Ghose's article "The Flame of the Forest" denotes: "The boundaries between the natural, between the divine, human and even animal creatures on the one hand and the vegetable and the inanimate world as the other are singularly vague and

undefined.”(Michael Joseph 263) Dharma Vira was given the black card for Bhumiputra. Because he could not find him in his hut, Dharma arrested a ninety-year-old man named Patanjali. In fact, Dharma could not find Bhumiputra because he had already been arrested by another police officer.

Master Bhoma’s sister sought the help of the Professor to find the vanished brother of hers. In spite of everyone’s protest including Dharma’s, the Professor searched for the vanished. Once when he was a student, he felt that the great river had spoken to him, a point that proves the element of fantasy in the environment. The Professor heard the river whisper: “Isn’t it this that you want? Something like me, peaceful and infinite and free?” (29). That was the only time the river had spoken to him and he hoped that the river would speak to him again. The Little Star who accompanied the Professor is also a part of the world of fantasy because he seemed to know many things that even the Professor did not know. When the Professor asked him who he was, his reply was hazed in fantasy: “I saw you looking at me through your telescope that night. . . . you looked so troubled I thought I would come down and inquire what the matter was” (40). About his age also he fantasies, “I am thousands of

years old” but a moment later he uttered in a serious tone a mystery of life, “Everyone is thousands and thousands of years old, tied as we are to the wheel of Karma.

Unfortunately, we forget this. Kings and Grand Masters forget this the most. This is the world’s misfortune” (42).

Later on in the story, the incident of building a straight road from the Grand Master’s palace to the river is narrated. Through the selfish act of the Grand Master, Joshi points out the facts of modern life, where the political leaders are in pursuit of selfish goals. Though the setting and the characters are steeped in fantasy, factual life is well represented in the novel. One day, the wife of the Grand Master looked at the twisty roads and wished that the road had run straight to the river. This queer wish was granted the very same day. As a result, many of the ordinary people became homeless and rootless.

The description of the mud people’s locality is also done with fringes of fantasy. The professor is surprised to see their lifestyle:

And now the professor noticed the strange sight of people, whole families, sitting on the pavement, under the bright lights, carrying on operations that

people normally undertook within the four walls of their homes. Women cooked, husbands sulked, and dogs chased children. (38)

Indicating their rootlessness the Little Star said: “They have no roof above their head, but they carry on as though they had”(39). The peaceful atmosphere created here exposes the dreamy, fantasized life they enjoyed. It is far away from the ‘factual’ life in a modern society where men seem to be extremely busy. The Professor and the Nameless-One carried on their search for Bhumiputra and for that purpose they met the Headman. The Police Commissioner presented a report regarding Bhoma’s disappearance. It said that he simply disappeared from a place between his house and the first lock-up. These reports did not satisfy the Professor. He was determined to find out Bhoma’s whereabouts. As he moved on, he saw the Grand Master’s procession of helicopters. When the Grand Master was on his night watch, he was irritated to hear the boatman’s music. To strike the element of fantasy it says, “The Grand Master’s antipathy to music is considered surprising in a man who possesses the sweetest, the most hypnotic voice in the city” (48). The Grand Master gave the orders and in five seconds every musical instrument

was reduced to ashes.

The Grand Master's visit to the grandfather's rose farm reveals another episode of fantasy. He landed on the farm with another five helicopters and walked through the farm with the grandfather's permission. He asked the grandfather to name a newly-bred rose as 'king' indirectly hinting at the arrival of a new king in the city. On his way back, he noticed a rose bush withered at their feet. The grandfather revealed the mystery in the following words: "A little while back I was standing here and this bush was hale and hearty, enjoying the music, swaying herself to sleep when suddenly there came over the radio, a great lament . . . And right before my eyes . . . this bush withered and fell at my feet" (51). Though the scene is woven into fantasy, it conveys 'facts.' The sudden withering of the flower is a pointer to the momentous life of man.

Simultaneous with fantasy, Joshi presents several facts of the modern world, one of them being how the people are put to death with the latest technological advancements. The Grand Master had a dream again. After the initial amazement, most people might have simply put such a dream out of their minds. But the Grand Master always considered himself the

chosen man to rule his city. It is worth noticing here that while he talked about the facts of life, the Grand Master was in a swirl of fantasy: “The little room was always full of incense smoke and darkness. Amidst the smoke antique idols of bronze, ivory, stone and wood stood in their appointed places. Some of them had been exhumed; it was said by archaeologists from the bed of the river” (59).

Another fact unknown to the people and the city is that, at one time, the Astrologer and the Hermit of the Mountain had studied under the same person, the Great Yogeshwara. When their studies were over the Great Yogeshwara gave both of them not only his blessings but also a copy of the prophecy. Later, the Astrologer came to his position while the Hermit continued to live in the city to teach. In due course, The Minister of Trade visited the Hermit with a hope that “the kindly sage would himself provide him with all the necessary help and guidance” (66). In one of their conversations, the Minister tried his best to extract from the Hermit, a clue about the king. Being very clever the Hermit replied, “The world belongs to God, Minister. Let him be the King of what is His” (264). This can be taken as the message that Joshi imparts through the novel. Wrapped in a layer of fantasy, the

facts of life are hidden in different parts of this novel.

Day and night, the Professor accompanied by Little Star, hunted for Bhumiputra. He hurriedly searched along the banks of the river, the hills and the mountain, forgetting to eat and sleep. He visited the Commissioner who asked him to try different designs of handcuffs: "What we have to do, is to decide on a standard interchangeable design that might fit all hands" (80). Fascinated, the Professor moved forward but did not dare trying any. Instead they entered into an intimate conversation whereby the Commissioner opened up his personal grievances. Though the people of the city regarded him as a happy, powerful man, he revealed some painful facts:

These people do not realize that there are thousands of the low whom I too look down upon. I am not a cobbler or a boatman or a pimp or a thousand other things. But these people don't realise this. Just because the Educational Adviser is the high of the high he refuses to note that there are hundreds with whom, I too, do not eat, with whom I do not drink, who dare not look at my wife and daughters. But this little

understanding is beyond his high brains.” (81)

The society is broadly divided into high and low classes; nevertheless, it is further subdivided into higher and lower classes. There are many low castes in the upper class and vice versa. These facts of life in the modern society were vividly brought out by the Commissioner.

Finally the day of the annual festival of the river arrived. All the people of the city attended it along with the people of importance. As the Astrologer began his usual prayers, the Hermit noticed that he took some deviations. The Hermit protested and left at once. The Astrologer continued his speech addressing the gathering as “my children.” Through the example of Master Bhoma, the Astrologer warned the people not to protest. To everyone’s surprise the crowning ceremony of the Grand Master’s son also took place. Even though the Astrologer demanded a loud applause there was only a slight response because “the multitude was either confused or unwilling” (102). Immediately after the meeting, Dharma, the Professor and hundreds of boatmen were arrested by the captain. The reason for the arrest was simple - “their lips during the oath-taking ceremony had not moved at all” (102). Though this sounded absurd, it is a fact in

relation to the present-day society.

The Professor decided to put up a stall and broadcast the truth about Master Bhoma. After they put the banner up, Little Star insisted on knowing the facts: “But the citizens would want facts. The Commissioner and newspapers have given them facts. What are your facts?” (121). The Professor stuck on to the truth and the people lost interest. At that time, a young man claiming to be Master Bhoma’s student, proclaimed, “I am a witness and I have facts” (123). The young man, who was Shailaja’s brother told the crowd, the parable of the naked king very elaborately. Through the story he persuaded everyone to be sensible and strong. But, “None of the boatmen had the luck to win the lottery but their laughter was the loudest” (128).

Bhumiputra’s return gave the boatmen a new life in the absence of the Headman. Staying with the grandfather, he started to work for the boatmen, where he met Shani, Dharma’s sister’s son. Shani underwent a transition in his life, from an atrocious young boy to a decorous boy with the intervention of music. As he listened to the music of the boatmen, he felt a mysterious flower open inside him and he was filled with joy. This experience of Shani is an element of

fantasy in the novel. The incident that sent Bhumiputra to the police, also is a part of fantasy. He was arrested because he narrated the parable of the naked king in the university. The situation in which he delivered the speech is as follows: “In another class, he apparently once again fell asleep and related the parable all over. Once again he awoke with the applause. He was amazed but also filled with dread” (153).

The description of the Gold Mine is fantasy mixed with fact. It is an underground dungeon where not a single ray of sunlight could go in. Once a man is trapped there, “the night enters the man’s soul, blotting out the light behind his eyes” (162). The Headman was taken to this dungeon because of her reluctance to swear allegiance to the Grand Master. Straightforward in the matter of allegiance the Headman says: “My fate is my own, Astrologer. And your fate is yours. The wheel turns and as we have sown so shall we reap. My reply is as before: I spit on you and I spit on the Grand Master” (164). As a punishment to this the guards fell upon the Headman and carried her away. They pierced her eyes and poured acid into the perforations. The Professor refused to eat after that and he put forward two demands. But after seven days, with a guiding message to the Little Star and the

Headman, the Professor passed away, saying: "There will be a new world, a new race of men will be born" (167). That was the piece of optimism he handed over to them, from the world of fantasy to lead them towards facts.

Immediately after the Professor's death, a new decree was declared. Dharma's father completed the documents and began searching for his brother. But nowhere, he could gather information about the Professor. Only Bhumiputra realized that the new decree was an 'eye-wash' (174). Every night he travelled in an oarless boat and reached the boatmen who depended on him for their future. Bhoma's humble withdrawal was not allowed by the boatmen. He politely told them: "Brothers and sisters, I do not deserve to stand where you have made me stand. As I said before only a boatman knows a boatman's sorrow" (177). But, Bhoma was again under the spell of a fantasy and his tongue moved in spite of his will. Finally he got them all ready to utter the vow:

Oh my mother, I am a nameless boatman of this city of gold. Oh, my mother, I have become the plaything of my oppressor who is blind and who is deaf. Look at me, my mother, my back is broken. And now with all that is sacred, in you

and in the Kingdom of Varuna, I vow that until my oppressor opens his ears to my lament not a boat, not a leaf not even a piece of straw shall pass down your sacred waters. So the great river be my witness. (178-179)

The council considered the ill-advised boatmen's strike to be the action of traitors, and immediately ordered for Bhoma's arrest. Meanwhile the Minister for Trade and the Advisor formed a separate alliance to protect themselves and the Advisor's brigades, by not getting hold of Bhoma. To the boatmen, now the shock-brigades offered an unconditional alliance. And as their fate would have it, much against Bhumiputra's advice, the boatmen accepted the offer.

Within no time the uprising spread from the great river to the pyramids systematically burnt shops, schools, buses and railway station. And it turned the Gold Mine "into a heap of rubble" (183). A battle started between the police on one hand, and boatmen and shock-brigades on the other. The police party arrived at the boat work at night, and charged them with machine guns, and cabinned them in the hall. Two hundred dead men were taken to the river in four trucks. The newspaper report said the boatman went back home. At the

end of the novel nature annihilated everything. It rained continuously for seven days and seven nights, and washed off everything and everyone except one man to retell the story to the coming generations. As it is seen, though fantasy incidents abound in the novel, it is not devoid of facts.

The title itself indicates the opposing powers of fantasy and fact. The city is made and ruled by the fantasy of man, whereas the river stands as a monument of fact, originated from nature. Man creates the city gradually. He puts within a certain boundary all that he needs, and names what is within the boundary, a city. Thus the city becomes a symbol of the growing civilization. In course of time, it turns into a place of corruption, and the corruption is effected by those very people who inhabit the city. This city and this river in *The City and the River* also undergo the same change. They are inter-related. The city depends on the river, for it is the city that is born out of the river and not the river that is born out of the city. G. S. Amur's words are quoted in *The Novel of Arun Joshi: A Critical Study*:

. . . as an affirmation of India's wisdom and the value of the fable as a mode of comprehension, *The City and the River* has a unique place in Indian

Fiction in English. But he expresses his doubt about the future of Joshi as a novelist - 'where can he (Joshi) go from here?' The answer to this question is now quite clear but probably Joshi knew that after writing this novel he had to go nowhere else but to the abode of Great God, leaving behind his search for rootlessness.

(Bhatnagar 129)

In this novel Joshi's individual concern gains wider vision as he deals with community as a whole and individually to an extent. When the people of the river were no longer strong enough to fight back, with the Grand Master, the Divine intervened and showed His might, proving that He is the ruler, and that he can create and he can destroy in order to purify for creating further. The strength of nature here, is a reproduction of the words of The Holy Qur-an: "Nature proclaims the glory of Allah. Lightening and Thunder are signs of his might as well as his mercy" (Surat 13: 1-18).

In *The Foreigner* the elements of fantasy and romance intermingle in the depiction of the personal life of the protagonist, Sindi Oberoi. When he was a child, Sindi lost his parents and he was completely deprived of their love and

care. Left with his uncle and friends, who considered him a grown up, Oberoi missed his childhood innocence: "I saw myself as a child listening to the conversations of my uncle's friends. They had all treated me as a grown up" (69). At the same time, his uncle passed on to him a personal message before he died, "To love", is to invite others to break your heart." Consequently, Oberoi created a world of fantasy out of these words, and became incapable of loving anyone selflessly. An intelligent boy at London University, Oberoi performed very well in his examinations, but soon he was trapped by a fantasy-world. Losing interest in the school subjects, he hunted for a meaning in life: "I didn't have any trouble with my courses and I passed the exams creditably enough when they came, but the question that bothered me was very different. I wanted to know the meaning of my life" (71).

His love affairs with Anna, Kathy and June also reveal the route from fantasy to fact. Anna's love was a reality in Oberoi's life and he embraced it as though he was in a world of fantasy. He liked Anna, and she, in turn had fallen in love with him ever since she saw him. The reason behind their later separation, has a tinge of fancy, "She knew it and

thought it was her age that discouraged me. She couldn't have been further from the truth. The thing I liked most about her was her age" (143). Oberoi's attraction towards her age is a matter of curiosity for the readers. Foolishly enough, he left her the moment Kathy showed interest in him. They just imagined that they were in love with each other. Again, the facts of life knocked at the door of her consciousness and she turned back to her husband. These incidents scarred the fantasy-world of Oberoi, "But at the same time it marked a new beginning in my thinking" (144).

Oberoi's contact with a Catholic priest encouraged him to read about God, and was awakened to a truth of life: "All love - whether of things, or persons, or oneself - was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion" (170). Talking to June, he further elaborates his fantasy:

Absence of love does not mean hatred. Hatred is just another form of love. There is another way of loving. You can love without attachment, without desire. You can love without attachment to the objects of your love. You can love without fooling yourself that the things you love are indispensable either to you or to the world. (170)

Oberoi followed strictly the principles of indifference

and of detachment until he was overpowered by June's love. He bluntly owned how he had become a prey to her love.

I received a pretty bad beating at your hands. You don't know how hard I struggled before making love to you that evening we came from the beach. That night you had set off an avalanche that I had no means of stopping. I was lucky you left me. I was miserable when it happened, but I would have been completely bankrupt if you had not done so. (146)

His views on love were more of fantasy than reality, and his outlook on marriage was more strange than serious. He did not believe in marriage as he says: "marriage was more often a lust for possession than anything else" (67). His world of reality was different from June's. It was strange that though he was not willing to marry June, he was deeply depressed and agonized when she was engaged to Babu.

The tragic deaths of Babu and June helped Oberoi to perceive the facts of life. The fantasy of his love, indifference, detachment and relationship, in the final run, did not rescue him at all. He was a different person on his way back to India. He observed Muthu's life and realized the

ultimate fact of life that one lived not only for himself but for those who needed him. Though he was a poor labourer, Muthu looked after his jobless brother and a dozen children. They all shared a one-bedroom hut with joy and peace. With new concepts regarding facts of life, Oberoi took up the responsibility of Mr. Khemka's business and tried to be of use to the workers around him.

The route from fantasy to fact is also found in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. Living in the heart of Delhi's smart society, Biswas had an extraordinary obsession for a life in the lap of nature. Consequently, he shifted to central India and lived among the primitives there. The description of the house he lived in, recreates the fantasy of the Arabian Nights: "I went inside the house. Even though it was day the bungalow seemed not a structure of brick and mortar where a hundred collectors had lived before me but some cardboard creation out of the pages of the Arabian Nights" (152). Romi narrated the story of Biswas's life in New York and Delhi from his own observations. They were both around twenty-two when Romi met the inhumanly sharp eyes of Biswas in New York and stayed with him during the period of his higher

studies there. He was also impressed by Biswas's "poise without pose" (11).

Biswas had a royal family background, his grandfather having been the Prime Minister of a famous princely state in Orissa. His father who was the judge of the Supreme Court of India, had earlier been the ambassador to a European country and Billy who was fifteen then, had studied for some years at an English Public School. In New York he was busy completing his Ph.D degree in Anthropology though his father believed he was studying for a degree in Engineering.

Biswas loved distant places, and was attracted to the subject of anthropology, because as he told Romi: "All I want to do in life is to visit the places they describe, meet the people who live there, find out about the aboriginalness of the world" (14). His obsession for distant lands and primitive man led him to the wilderness. He explained to Romi the glimpse of the other world: "Most of us are aware only of the side on which we are born, but there is always the other side, the valley beyond the hills, the hills beyond the valley" (18-19). This other side was the primitive life, untouched by the sophistication, inhibition and restraints of the civilized world. That world of fantasy was his haven of peace.

Romi, perceiving a rare combination of intelligence and wit in Biswas, appreciated him deeply:

His conversation was not clever or brilliant but it was full of surprises. It twisted and turned like a firefly in a garden lighting first this flower, then that, revealing not only the mind of the speaker, but also the dark unknowable layers of the mysterious world that surrounded us. It stretched the ordinary in to cosmic, pulled the ethereal down to the tangible and infused everything with an intelligence that was easily the sharpest that I had ever come across. (20)

Tuula, the Swedish lady of thirty years, describes fantasy in Billy as follows: “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” (23).

Biswas surmised that the tribals held the answer to his quest. Even as a boy he was deeply concerned with the problem of his identity. He asked himself questions like: “Who was I? Where had I come from? Where was I going?” (122). When he was fourteen, he visited Bhubaneswar and

while watching sculptures there he felt: "If anyone had a clue to it (the spirit) it was only the 'adivasis' who carried about their knowledge in silence, locked behind their dark inscrutable faces" (124). When Biswas got an opportunity to watch the dance of the tribals there, he experienced, "a great shock of erotic energy" (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" (125). Such hallucinations continued to haunt him as he grew up.

On his last expedition to the hills of central India with his students at Delhi University, Biswas met Dhunia, the headman of the village, who became very close to him because he had saved the life of his niece earlier by giving her antibiotics. Biswas met this niece, Bilasia, now grown into an untamed and voluptuous village beauty. As he left for his camp, Dhunia invited him to watch their community dance the next day. He was not sure of going to the village the next day, but as he slept he had a dream, "a dream so erotic, the like of which I did not know could still be conjured up by my unconscious" (120). The fantasy world of the hilly forest seemed to beckon him and he stood motionless at the

voluptuous beauty of the place, thinking of its contrast to the civilized society:

Had he not known that every four weeks there was a moon like this, that there were hills as blue as these, and people in the hills that were all that he had ever wanted to be. Why did it take him thirty years to discover this. For all his so-called courage, he thought, even he, had been afraid and foolish, squandering the priceless treasure of his life on that heap of tinsel that passed for civilization (102).

Biswas yielded himself to the fanciful temptation and enjoyed taking alcohol with the primitives in the moonlight. At that time, Bilasia just looked up into his eyes with a smile on her lips, and his fancy was aroused: "Her enormous eyes, only a little foggier with drink, poured out a sexuality that was nearly as primeval as the forest" (102). He watched their dance till it turned into a sort of 'orgy' with the feverish beats of the drum. His fantasy-world became a reality as he married Bilasia and had a son by her. He liked this new life, the fantasy-world of the primitives in contrast to the factual

world of the modern society. His scorn towards the civilized world is explicated in the following lines:

I don't think I have ever met a more pompous, a more mixed-up lot of people. Artistically, they were dry as dust. Intellectually, they could do no better than mechanically mouth ideas that the West abandoned a generation ago. Their idea of romance was to go and see an American movie or go to one of those wretched restaurants and dance with their wives to a thirty-year-old tune (128).

In the final episode of the novel, Biswas appears as a sage or magician who is capable of curing illness, a knowledge he gained by his communion with nature.

In *The Apprentice* the story itself is an imaginative tale. The reader finds the smartly dressed middle-aged Ratan Rathor with an expensive limosine waiting to take him to his office and towards the end, the same Rathor is engaged in the manual work of a shoe-shiner on the standway of a Delhi temple. While wiping the shoes of the devotees he talked to a young student who had come from the fort hills of the Punjab to Delhi to rehearse for the N.C.C. parade on the Republic Day. They grew intimate and Rathor told him the

tragic-comic tale of his life. Telling his life story to a stranger also has a touch of fantasy.

Rathor was full of wonder for his dad. He considered the world of freedom fighting a heroic deed. When his educational career came to an abrupt end, Rathor decided to follow the path of his father, by joining Subash Bose. But his mother tried to shake off the fantasies out of his mind, by advising him about the facts of life: “Don’t fool yourself, Son. . . Man without money was a man without work. Many things were great in life, but the greatest of them all was money” (20). She further tells him: “It was not patriotism but money . . . that brought respect and bought security. Money made friends. Money succeeded where all else failed. There were many laws . . . but money was law unto itself” (20). Upholding his mother’s advice, Rathor cycled towards the town gloating over his glorious future but halfway ahead his enthusiasm waned and fantasy gave way to facts and he cycled back to his village. Then he landed in Delhi in search of a career.

When Rathor acquired a job as a temporary clerk in the department of war-purchases, he began climbing up the ladder of success. Attuned to the ways of the world, he shrewdly

manipulated his success. He became accustomed to the 'docility' of the job and was willing to do anything that pleased the boss. In no time, Ratan was confirmed and upgraded as an assistant with a dozen clerks working under him. He pleased his superintendent and was made an officer in the department. He was not aware of his awkward situation though his colleagues mocked him and called him "a whore", and "an upstart" who shamelessly kowtowed to the bosses. But he was hardened as he disclosed to his young friend, how he mixed up facts with fantasy-desires:

I am a thick-skin now, a thick-skin and a washout but, believe me, my friend, I too have had thoughts such as these. But what was to be done? One had to live. And, to live, one had to make a living. And, how was a living to be made except through careers. Thus the turbulence always died until it ceased to erupt altogether. (41)

Later on, Ratan came into contact with Himmat Singh, a prince of the underworld, who was popularly known as the Sheikh. He gave an enormous bribe to Rathor and ensnared him into a shady bargain which later on ruined the life of his best friend, the Brigadier. This brought about a sudden change in

Rathor's own life. The incident helped him to descry the strained world of foolish fancy which he had created for himself out of his inordinate ambition. Finally he was willing to face the facts of life.

The strangeness in Singh's character, not only surprised Rathor but also subdued him. The Sheikh "conducts his operation for neither money nor power but in order only to destroy" (81). According to him, there were two types of people- the rulers and the ruled: "The rulers were a fraud . . . phoney people who knew only how to make speeches, be cruel, and feather their nests, people who made a mess of things, then went off without knowing how, to clean it up, the ruled were brainless" (84).

Singh hated both these groups. He set Rathor at rest by telling him that fools like him believe that there is a law book laid down by God which they must follow: "There was no such law book, Rathor . . . What existed . . . was not written by God but by a silly society that would do anything for money" (76). While leaving for Bombay, Rathor had been "engrossed in fantasies of pleasures that awaited him there" (78). Now with enough money in his hands he fell an easy prey to drinking and whoring. On returning home Rathor

learnt how the Brigadier had had a nervous breakdown and was on the verge of a mental and physical collapse. He was so deeply affected by the pathetic condition of his best friend who was an honest and brave army officer, that he wrote his confession. But later he decided not to send it. Two weeks later he learnt that his friend had killed himself.

This incident moved Rathor considerably and he longed to take revenge on the Sheikh. On reaching his house, he found him dying. To his utter surprise he learnt from him that he alone had not been responsible for the deal. The secretary and the Minister too had had their hands in it. They had made use of Rathor's overambition to reach their personal goals. The revelations that Sheikh had made use of him, created a strong impact on Rathor's life. He dragged himself out of the frivolous world of fantasy to learn the facts of life. He understood that the ultimate reality of life is God and he devoted himself to the service of Almighty God by visiting the temple every morning and wiping the shoes of the worshippers.

The *Last Labyrinth* also traces the route from fantasy to fact through the narrator-protagonist's life. His world of fantasy was created around a woman Anuradha, who made him

forget his family, his business and everything else. His world of fantasy turned out to be the labyrinth of his life from which he escaped narrowly at the end of the story. The novel reads like a fantasy tale because of the intriguing juxtaposition of the sensual and spiritual locales, the Haveli and the summit of the hills.

At the age of twenty-five, Bhaskar became an immensely affluent man when his father, a rich industrialist of Bombay, died leaving him his entire business. He married an extraordinary woman, Geeta, by whom he had two children. Bhaskar's father had spent a quarter of a million on his education by sending him to the world's finest universities. He had therefore grown into a clever and successful businessman who expanded his empire and made a name for himself in the industrial world of Bombay. He was an egoist, stubborn by nature, and always trying to have his own way. These are the factual sides of his life.

The element of fantasy strikes the reader as he learns about the mysterious and undefined 'voices' Bhaskar listened to, "mostly of the dead" (68). Bhaskar understood his problem of restlessness and he disclosed it to Leela Sabins, a scholar, with whom he had had an affair for six months. He told her

that he used to hear the song, “I want. I want. I want” in the void, all the time (78). She considered these voices to be his fantasies and told him: “You are much too high strung. Without reason. You are a neurotic. A compulsive fornicator” (80). She even attributed them to his problem of identity” and made him conscious that what he wanted was “a mystical identification, with a god head, as most Hindus want, sooner or later” (113). She tried earnestly to help him understand the power of his self and the meaning of his life. Being a sceptic, Bhaskar had no such divine yearnings. A friend of him gave another explanation for his life and predicted when it would come to an end:

A soul might also imagine that his wants, desires are best met through another soul, if that soul is the right one. That, no doubt, is a big if. Until he meets this right, Som there is no peace. When you meet the right soul then, of course, things might be peaceful, may even more on towards a higher goal. (74)

His health deteriorated because of a minor heartattack which he had at a young age. Along with this, his hallucinations also added to his gloom. It is at the age of thirty-five that he

encountered Anuradha and Aftab on whose business he had an eye and whose shares he had been buying for quite sometime. In the beginning he was fascinated by Anuradha's antique model of dressing. Later he was attracted towards her by "the unquenched fires that constantly burnt in those haunted eyes (13).

Bhaskar perceived fantasy-world when he visited Anuradha and Aftab in Benaras at the latter's Lal Haveli. He was bewitched by Anuradha's dark, sexy eyes and her body, the grace and sensuousness of which she seemed to be unaware. Aftab sensed that it was to see her and not to negotiate for the shares that Bhaskar had really come there. He got deviated from his purpose only out of his attraction for her. He forgot the fact that he had come there for business. Unknowingly he was enthralled by her beauty and was relieved to learn that she was not married to Aftab.

Later while sleeping in Aftab's Haveli, Bhaskar was restless, and haunted by the mysterious voices again. When he woke up suddenly, he found Anuradha standing by his bedside. He told her about his dream of the undefined voices pestering him, and further added, "May be, its you I want" (106). He succeeded in having her that night. He found

Anuradha indispensable to him and realized the significance of what Gargi had once said: “Don’t quarrel. She is your Shakti” (121). From then he was led to Haveli over and over again. They lived in a world of fantasy by possessing each other with unlimited strength each time they met.

On returning to Bombay, Bhaskar had a massive heartattack which nearly killed him. When he recovered he contacted Anuradha who expressed her inability to see him anymore. Dr. K. told him not to hound Anuradha because she had suffered more than any other human being: “Illegitimate child, insane mother, no home. Molested as a child, witness to murders, suicides every conceivable evil of the world can you imagine what a childhood she must have had” (190). The description of Anuradha’s childhood could not have proved that she was capable of alluring a person like Bhaskar out of his world of fantasy. Aftab allowed him to meet Anuradha who entreated him to go away for his life would be in danger: “You don’t know these people. Anything may happen to you in this Haveli, and none would ever know” (219). He left the Haveli, that night only to return and claim Anuradha, the next morning. He was, however, shocked to learn that she had disappeared by then. Suspecting a foul play he reported

against Aftab to the police who made a thorough search of his house to trace her but in vain. Bhaskar was thoroughly depressed to find that the centre of his fantasy-world had vanished. He decided to search for facts of life, that is the God in the mountain as Anuradha had once told him.

The interested reader of *The City and the River* is extremely delighted when the good wins over the evil. He deliberately warns the Grand Master against the consequences of living in a fantasy world. When reality dawns, the interested reader's expectation comes true and he rejoices in it. The disinterested reader is carried away by the different phases of fantasy and enjoys the different realms, but is not willing to believe any incredible aspect of life. The uninterested reader does not agree to the supernatural interference in the world of fantasy which winds up in a tragedy.

The interested reader of *The Foreigner* observes closely Oberoi's life, full of fanciful thoughts and deeds. The interested reader also perceives the beauty of the turning point in his life wherein he begins to assess life through a realistic perspective. The disinterested reader watches Oberoi's detachment and then his attachment to June, but he does not

agree to the story-ending where things go wrong for Oberoi. According to the uninterested reader Oberoi is not capable of starting a new life with Sheila. The uninterested reader is also not ready to accept the fact that Oberoi is capable of living outside the world of fantasy, accepting the facts of life.

In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, Billy's transformation from the world of fantasy to reality is appreciated by the interested reader. The disinterested reader keeps track of the happenings in Billy Biswas's life on the rungs of the ladder of success. But he does not accept his journey to the primitive world because he (the disinterested reader) does not believe that, it is the only world of reality. The uninterested reader criticizes the novelist for the sudden twist in the character of Biswas from 'a creature of fantasy' to a falsely realistic being.

The interested reader of *The Apprentice* responds positively to the transition of Ratan Rathor from a world of fantasy to reality. Rathor struggles to do everything possible to build his own world of fantasy-ideas. But finally when he makes recompense for his sins, the interested reader is with him, nodding his head in approval. The disinterested reader keeps himself on a par with Rathor in all his endeavours but

does not agree with him finally when he decides to descend to the level of a shoe-shiner. The uninterested reader sternly opposes the ultimate change in Rathor because he considers the act of shoe-polishing as a fantastic idea far removed from reality.

The interested reader of *The Last Labyrinth* is tickled by Som Bhaskar's fancy for Anuradha. His passion had driven him so crazy that Bhaskar is pitied by the interested reader even when he knows very well that the alliance is unacceptable. The disinterested reader blames Bhaskar for the infatuation and is not willing to accept the fact that Anuradha can instil the idea of God in him. The uninterested reader does not believe in Anuradha's disappearance thus breaking the fantasy-shell. Reality dawns on Bhaskar but not on the uninterested reader.

In *The City and the River* God's power had fallen down on the people of the river at the time of their struggle for survival. God's intervention helped not only an individual's evolution but also the evolution of the community thereby indicating the evolution of the human race.

“To be respected. To be of use. Who has not wanted them? Yet how few manage it. Simple things like that. Things as basic to life as air and water. And so difficult to get.”

Arun Joshi