

CONCLUSION

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CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

The Routes

One of the most persuasive contemporary Indian novelists in Indo- Anglian Literature, Joshi is noted for his concern for fellow human beings, and for his profound insights in to human nature. His novels probe deep into the dark and innermost recesses of the human mind and illuminate the hidden corners of the physical and mental make-up of the characters. His characters, most of whom are contemporary Indians, indulge in a quest for the essence of life. In search of the quintessence of human living, the novelist focuses not simply on man but on his identity. As a novelist exposing the human predicament, Joshi visualizes the inner crisis of the modern man and finds out that the most besetting problem that man faces today is the problem of rootlessness. This problem is aggravated by technological advancements, the economic situations and the inhuman demands of the society. The problem is so pervasive that it threatens to eat into every sphere of human activity. As a result, man fails to discern the very purpose behind life, and the relevance of his existence in a hostile world.

Joshi, the novelist, follows the tradition of Kafka, Camus, Sartre and Saul Bellow. Differing in style from Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Kamala Markandaya and so on, Joshi joins his heroes in searching for their lost self. The individual gets trapped in the world of objects and thereby lose his subjectivity. Later, aware of what he has lost, he experiences a dehumanization mixed with despair and anxiety. The individual is also engaged in a rat-race and is estranged not only from his fellowmen but also from his inner self. He has nothing to fall back upon in the moments of crisis. He is shocked to find that he is no longer the master of his destiny and that there are forces which threaten to hinder his life and all its joys and hopes. The pervading sense of rootlessness is thus the most dominant feature of the human condition in the contemporary scene. No emotional problem is more alarming today, than the sense of rootlessness. The conditions in India, though not so frightening as in the Western world, have begun to take a dismal turn. Despite the differences in their approach, Joshi's heroes are all engaged in the search for the meaning of life. They follow several routes: the route from indifference to involvement, the route from sophistication to simplicity, the

route from crime to confession, the route from the labyrinth to the light, the route from fantasy to fact and the route from the struggle to the survival.

The Foreigner, Joshi's maiden novel, portrays some of the possible routes of the rootless especially the path from indifference to involvement. Cut-off from his cultural and emotional attachments, Sindi Oberoi of *The Foreigner* finds himself in the predicament of a foreigner wherever he goes. He drifts from one end of the globe to the other in search of peace and emotional stability. He cannot reach out to the world for fear of pain and he seeks refuge in the thought of detachment, which he misconstrues as inaction and withdrawal from life. But his detachment or indifference turns into a kind of delusion because he cannot free himself from self-engrossment. His selfish desires make him drift from crisis to crisis; sucking on its way the lives of two innocent persons he loves most, Babu and June. The tragedy shakes Oberoi out of his self-complacency and reorients his life. Through sincere self-examination he learns that true detachment does not mean inaction and withdrawal from life. On the other hand, it is proper action without desire for its fruit. He also

understands that involvement with the world around is the real attitude to life and living.

The response of the readers to *The Stranger* varies from person to person, group to group. The interested reader is silently surprised as he travels with Meursault through the transitional stages of his life. The reader's interest helps him to experience the pain of Meursault's indifference and detachment especially with regard to Marie. The reader's heart also beats as fast as Meursault's when he sees Marie dead in the end. The reader moves swiftly to the scene with the same pace and momentum to confront Meursault and comfort him in his dramatic sense of indifference. The disinterested reader, no doubt, sweeps along the ups and downs of Meursault's life and stands still, trying to winnow the right and the wrong in his actions. The impartiality in the reader supports Meursault to an extent, taking into consideration his rootless past but he is slightly confused at Meursault's remorseless action of leaving Marie just for the cause of detachment. The uninterested reader, on the other hand, responds in a negative manner, criticizing Meursault for his cruel and inhumane actions. The indifference in the reader makes him ignore Meursault's past and his resultant character and the consequent actions. The

principle of detachment is also outside the purview of the uninterested reader because he has no interest in Oberoi and therefore no feelings for his thought-content.

The route from sophistication to simplicity is also shown in *The Foreigner* in which Oberoi finds America, “a place for well-fed automations rubbing about in automatic cars” (87). He notices the hypocrisy and fabrication of the modern society in America and he gets boggled and totally uncomfortable with his life in the mechanized world. It is a place where “strangers parted on the doorsteps, promising to meet again” (26). His busy, meaningless and sophisticated life makes him yearn for the primitive land. With the sudden death of June and Babu, Oberoi is forced to leave that fast society behind. He comes to India and embraces a peaceful life in Khemka’s group of industry. Though work-wise Oberoi does not find any difference between the two countries, he notices the mental peace in the lives of the factory workers. As he decides to be one among them to fight for their rights, he faces his own much sought-after being. Thus he enjoys living and working for the betterment of others.

Obviously he transforms his life into a successful existence. The interested reader fully understands Oberoi and

rejoices with him for forsaking the sophisticated norms in America and for accepting the simplicity of his land. If Oberoi is able to delve into his roots, the greatest dream of a foreigner is fulfilled. On the other hand, the disinterested reader is not so eager about Oberoi's return. In fact he is unconcerned about Oberoi's choice because he believes it is the person and not the place that matters in life. On the contrary, the uninterested reader accuses Oberoi for preferring the primitive to the sophisticated.

The path from crime to confession in the life of Oberoi is clearly depicted in the novel. Oberoi who wilfully whirled in worldly pleasures, including illegal sexual relationships with Anna and Kathy, was haunted by a call within. Though he got more involved in worldly pleasures after his encounter with June, his intensely passionate affair with her, breaks off all the principles he had held up, until then: "Sindi lives in a strange world of intense pleasure" (82). The relationship between June and Babu ends in a tragedy. An episode in which he contemplates on a relationship with a Catholic priest is also mentioned. Yet the novel concludes on the note that when Oberoi stands as a fortress for the factory workers, his self-realization paves the way for his glory.

The interested reader is pleased with Oberoi's route from sin to confession, and his decision to turn to the religious door. The disinterested reader is surprised at Oberoi's turning point and wonders whether he would succeed in living a life with the gates of his lurid life completely closed. The uninterested reader does not find any fancy in Oberoi shunning himself from the public gaze. He believes that Oberoi should maintain a balance between worldly pleasures and spiritual purification.

The Foreigner also traces the route from the labyrinth to the light. Oberoi's wild experiences of life drag him to the realization of truth. The novel describes his childhood that leads to his wanton desires in the later stages of his life. The darkness of his life is more darkened by the contemplation of suicide. His sadness is noticed by Sheila who says: "You are the saddest man I have ever known" (140). Nevertheless, the novel ends with a hope that it will not be long before Oberoi will find a loving wife in Babu's sister, Sheila. Clear indications are given of a growing mutual tenderness that promises a closer relationship.

The interested reader is startled at Oberoi's route through labyrinthine paths. But finally he is relieved when

Oberoi attains self-knowledge and the light of truth. The disinterested reader is not sure whether he should justify Oberoi or not, for he is not convinced about Oberoi's detachment or indifference. The uninterested reader, on the other hand, does not agree with the opinion that Oberoi has ever achieved anything in his life.

The route from fantasy to fact is also delineated in *The Foreigner*. Oberoi is a true hero of the fantasy world with his belief in the principle of indifference. June, Sheila and Babu remind him that his concept of detachment is only a fantasy. It is his fantasy that shatters the lives of June and Babu. Oberoi realizes the drastic effect of his fantasy and decides to face the facts of life. Only through Muthu's words, "Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved" Oberoi gets down to the world of reality in order to serve his fellow beings (188).

The response of the readers to the route from fantasy to reality is varied. The interested reader observes closely Oberoi's fanciful thoughts and deeds and perceives the beauty of the turning point in Oberoi's 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. He is also not ready to accept the fact that Oberoi is capable of living outside the world of fantasy and accepting the facts of life.

Joshi's second novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* traces the route from sophistication to simplicity and several other routes of the rootless character, Billy Biswas. Biswas's search for the primitive life is the result of his detachment from the sophisticated society. This is Joshi's vision of man's existence as Hari Mohan Prasad observes in his article, "The Crisis of Consciousness: *The Last Labyrinth*:"

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

Bhaskar's dilemma has crystallized the sociological, psychological and metaphysical dimensions of

human existence into Joshi's unique vision of modern man's predicament. (Dhawan 239)

Biswas, who does not find any enjoyment in his social circle, is greatly attracted towards the magic of the primitive. Like Oberoi, he is in search for a human world of emotional fullness - a world of meaningful relatedness. Aware of the deeper layers of his personality Biswas is totally alienated from the superficial reality of life. Sophisticated and educated in the U.S., he renounces his past, his family and the everyday world, and goes in search of his roots in a very hostile atmosphere. For not conforming to the norms of the urban civilization and for daring to step out of its stifling confines, he pays a heavy price. The readers are made to believe that the strange case of Billy Biswas has been disposed of in the only manner in which a humdrum society knows how to dispose of its rebels, its seers, and its lovers. Thus from sophisticated norms he finds solace in simplistic living.

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is a fascinating novel to an interested reader, who experiences Biswas's thrill of living an exciting high-level life. The interested reader also shares Biswas's bitterness and understands that he is suffocated by

the sophistication of the society and believes that it is high time he accepted the simplicity of a primitive life. The disinterested reader raises several questions of significance for he does not agree with the idea that going to the forest is the only way to lead a simple life. Being impartial he wonders how Biswas could be relaxed and peaceful when denied of all the familiar luxuries of life. Meanwhile, the uninterested reader is shocked because he considers Biswas descending to the level of a primitive, and is unable to accept such an action from the son of a High Court judge, who has a doctorate to his credit and the honour of a civilized life. An uninterested reader also blames Biswas for his instant and unmeditative decision of moving into a jungle.

The route from indifference to involvement is also portrayed in the novel. America was, for Biswas, too civilized a place. The first glimpse of Biswas's indifference towards everything phoney, materialistic and superfluous begins in America. He craves for a simplistic way of living, and realizes the ultimate truth that he can be happy only in the wilderness. And, that is the revelation of his identity too. His life is thus a journey from the world of indifference to the world of involvement. Only when he accepts the primitive

world he finds himself at home. Romi's surprise at Biswas's experience is seen in his observation: "I realized that for the first time I was face to face with Billy's world. Here was the jungle that had wrought in him such a magical change" (159). The interested reader of the novel justifies Biswas for detaching himself from the sophisticated world and for embracing the solace of the primitive. The disinterested reader is unable to decide whether Biswas has taken the right step, whereas, the uninterested reader resentfully waits at the gateway, criticizing him for his indifference to the successful world and his involvement with the primitive.

The spiritual decay of the westernized Indian society, and the route from crime to confession is also the case of Biswas. His problem is the authentic problem of a perceptive young man who had lost his spiritual anchorage. The novel clearly explains the triviality of modern man's pursuit for money, his love of romance and other fleeting pleasures of life. Biswas, a misfit in civilized America, becomes conscious of his "itching to be back" in India (27). His 'itching' is symptomatic of his craving for deeper things in life. He longs to move away from worldly pleasures to the religious door. After undergoing the regenerative process himself, Biswas puts

on a new role, that of a healer and a priest who cures dying children and helps the primitive people with their worldly problems.

The interested reader admires Biswas for his escape to the simplicity of the primitive world, for he believes that the retreat is ideal, though unbelievable. Moreover the interested reader is curious about the confessional part of the novel. The disinterested reader is not impressed by the primitive world, but he is tempted to suggest to Biswas that it is possible to find out better means of living than just simply plunging into the primitive way of life. On the contrary, the uninterested reader opposes the simplistic kind of living because he knows that it is not the only way of attaining self-realization.

The route from the labyrinth to the light is also portrayed in the novel. Biswas is entangled in a labyrinth from which he hopes to move towards light. It is shocking to notice how Biswas, a student of New York University, belonging to the anglicized ruling class of India, his father being a Supreme Court Judge, deserts his family and friends to live in the light of lawless love, in accordance with nature's natural course. The interested reader is delighted at

Biswas for coming out of his labyrinth of life and entering the world of light. As far as the disinterested reader is concerned, Biswas's route to primitiveness is incredible. Nevertheless he supports him for his search for self-realization. To the uninterested reader, Biswas's desire for happiness in the primitive world is an unacceptable route. He wonders how Biswas would ever find the light of life.

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas also shows the path from fantasy to facts. Biswas, a young man, full of vigour and enthusiasm, lives in a world of fantasy. His fantasy-world exists in the primitive wilderness. He finds happiness in the arms of Bilasia, a primitive beauty. Later on when confronted with Romi, he immerses himself in the primitive world and is treated like a 'seer.' He begins to fantasize that he has some supernatural powers. Finally, he is forced to believe the sad fact of reality through his death. His transformation from the world of fantasy to reality is appreciated by the interested reader. The disinterested reader keeps track of the happenings in 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 Apprentice portrays Rathor's route from crime to confession. The novel, a confessional monologue, shows contemporary man drifting about in a confused society without a purpose. Belonging to an impoverished middle-class family, the protagonist hopes to find a route in this world. His rootlessness is intensified by his awareness that he is the child of a double inheritance. While his father was patriotic and courageous, his mother was endowed with worldly wisdom. Torn apart by these two conflicting philosophies of life, Rathor is petrified and frozen. The torture of living in a muddle confuses him all the more and he fails to differentiate between right and wrong. He tries to restore his mental peace by undergoing the most difficult act in the world - wiping the shoes of the devotees outside the temple, every morning on his way to the office. And that is the path he selected for repentance, the route from crime to confession.

The readers' response to the routes with regard to the theme of crime and confession is varied and, of course, significant. The interested reader of *The Apprentice* sympathizes with Rathor for his self-punishment and confession. The

pathetic plight of Rathor is convincing to the interested reader and when Rathor turns to self-purification, the interested reader is overwhelmed with joy and tends to give him a pat on his back. It is Rathor's capacity to laugh at the past that wins the interested-reader's heart. On the other hand, the disinterested reader does not justify Rathor for his past actions. He criticizes him for bribing his countrymen and cheating his own country, more so, because he is the son of a patriot. All the same, he supports him for the firm steps he has taken for the purification of his soul. The uninterested reader blames Rathor for the shameless past and declares harshly that he does not deserve any sympathy. The uninterested reader even goes further ahead to suggest that Rathor could have been more wise and shrewd, and tried to find out the truth behind the deal.

The Apprentice delineates other routes too, for example, the route from indifference to involvement. Rathor gets involved in all corrupt activities and then detaches himself from everything around him. As he had committed the crime of taking bribes for clearing military equipments, he is troubled to the core. Later he comprehends that the major hands in this deed were not his, but those of the officers at

the higher level. This apprehension coaxes him to keep himself detached from the society around “One day they refused my tea. It was a considerable snub as such things go, but to my surprise, I discovered that it made no difference to me” (40). He is alone and robbed of all familiar ties and is faced with the emptiness and darkness of his guilt-tormented soul. Rathor went through terrible days and nights with, “no occurrence, no conversation, no visit of either friend or foe, no sleep, in spite of the sleeping pills that our good doctor gave me, no relief, no respite from the hands that pulled me steadily down towards those caverns where, I felt certain, the Brigadier had gone” (125). That’s how, finally he turned to absolute involvement in spiritual purgation by sitting at the entrance of a temple to wipe the shoes of the congregation.

Rathor is appreciated by the interested reader for being detached from the meaningless world of business concerns, and for waiting at the sacred steps of the temple as a penance. Though the disinterested reader is able to digest the height of Rathor’s confession and repentance to an extent, his response is a discreet silence. The uninterested reader, on the other hand, opposes this mentality and reacts harshly.

The route from sophisticated norms to simplistic living is also found in the life of Rathor. Familiar with a high-level living, Rathor gets opportunities to dive deep into the snazzy snares of the modern society. He eventually perceives the hollowness of life and through a sincere confession turns to the primitive idea of doing humble jobs for the sake of self-purification. Notwithstanding his cowardice and his mother's contempt for idealism, Rathor hopes to climb the ladder of success. He musters courage to accept a bribe, the aftermath of which finally urges him to accept a primitive way of life.

The interested reader of *The Apprentice* gladly watches Rathor on the steps of the temple polishing shoes, free of all the troubles and tribulations of life. The disinterested reader partially agrees with the action and partially wonders whether such a repentant step is possible for a man of Rathor's background. The uninterested reader is not convinced that a person like Rathor can stoop to shine shoes at the doorstep of a temple. But he swallows the statements as they are.

The Apprentice shows how Ratan Rathor yields completely to the corrupt labyrinth of the modern society and thrives in it temporarily. His dual parentage is perhaps a cause for his degeneration. When he understands that the bribe he receives

for clearing the war materials leads to the Brigadier's death, he becomes a cynic. However, his confession helps him attain light.

The route of Ratan Rathor is welcomed by the interested reader who understands and appreciates his willingness to leave behind all his evil desires. The disinterested reader wonders how Rathor could have taken such a deviation from a point of utter self-degradation to a point of light. The uninterested reader is shocked at Rathor's bold step but is cynical about its possibility.

Rathor also goes through the path of reality away from fantasy. He had conquered everything in life- a good career, a beautiful and educated wife and covetable reputation. He lived a life of fanciful ideas, also involving crime. Later when he realizes the consequences of his crime, and understands the truth that his higher officers were the real culprits, he faces a harsh reality. The realization, that he was living in a world of fantasy, leads him to the life of penance at the entrance of the temple.

The interested reader of *The Apprentice* responds positively to the transformation of Rathor from a world of imagination to facts. Rathor builds up his own world of

fanciful ideas. But finally when he makes recompense for his sin, 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 go down to the level of a shoeshiner. The uninterested reader sternly opposes the ultimate change in Rathor because he considers the act of shoe-polishing as a strange idea, far removed from reality.

The Last Labyrinth gives a picturesque description of Som Bhaskar's route from the labyrinth of love to the light of love. Driven by several kinds of undefined hunger, in spite of a wife of accepted standards and two children, Bhaskar goes in search of his 'wants.' The strident song of his life is "I want, I want, I want" (11). Attracted by Anuradha, he indulges in extra-marital sexual pleasures with her, and yet his desires have no end. Towards the end of the novel he is desperate and decides to serve in the temple every evening, and thus attain the light of love.

The reader's response to the routes from the labyrinth to the light is varied. The interested reader of *The Last Labyrinth* is influenced by Bhaskar's transformation from the labyrinth of unlawful love to the light of love. Though

Bhaskar satisfies his sexual desires with Anuradha, he finally attains the gift of realization. The disinterested reader supports Bhaskar in his ambition for progress, but at the same time, opposes his infatuation for Anuradha. The uninterested reader thoroughly protests against his involvement with her and firmly believes that it is his behaviour that causes the tragedy of his life. Moreover, the uninterested reader is not sure of the fact that Bhaskar has attained the light of love.

The Last Labyrinth also throws light on Bhaskar's path from indifference to involvement. Bhaskar is presented as a successful man, who at the peak of his attainments becomes totally dejected and indifferent, and estranges himself from the outside world. His meeting with Anuradha turns his life into a marathon search for grabbing material pleasures. As Joshi notes, Bhaskar is against his will drawn helplessly into "the labyrinth of [this] mysterious world" (69). His insane pursuit of Anuradha is a torture, like his bizarre journey to the hills in search of the missing shares of Aftab's company. The constant reasoning that goes on in his head suggests another labyrinth: "This, then, was a labyrinth, too, this going forward and backward and sideways of the mind" (53). He experiences a sort of total indifference with regard to his wife

and son as he gets involved in Anuradha's labyrinth of love. Later on, her indifference to him, leads to his involvement in a religious pursuit.

The interested reader of *The Last Labyrinth* understands the cause of Bhaskar's detachment and is willing to sympathize with his estrangement from his wife, family and business in order to pursue the ravishing beauty, Anuradha. At the same time, the interested reader is aware that Anuradha is a difficult hurdle in the hurdle race of life that is, the evolution of life. The disinterested reader supports him for his natural inclination, but at the same time, criticizes his unnatural involvement with her. The uninterested reader is unkind and stands totally against the unscrupulous actions of being indifferent to one's wife for a sheer infatuation.

The Last Labyrinth portrays the route from sophisticated norms to the simplistic. Bhaskar's path from the modern society to the light of a primitive mountain God is incredible because he had all that a modern man wishes for- an educated and a trustworthy wife, an expanding business empire, and a peaceful living. But Bhaskar was not satisfied. He suffered from a loss of identity in the society he lived in. Surprisingly, he seeks consolation in the company of

Anuradha, a primitive beauty. Consequently, he rebuffs his responsibilities towards his family and business and concentrates on Anuradha. He does not care for any religious sermons and even becomes resentful of Anuradha's mention of the 'God in the Mountain.' Being a worshipper of the modern world, he denounces what he calls the primitive concepts. Towards the end of the novel, when Anuradha forsakes him he is ready to search for the sedating splendour of the God in the mountain. This act of turning to God is taken as an act of repentance, a primitive concept of atonement for sin. "Deep inside my heart, I knew that I was a leper and that I needed a cure" (126). At last, the light of 'Moksha' dawns upon Bhaskar as though the universe has come out of the void. He begins to undergo a path of renunciation because of guilt.

The interested reader is conscious of Bhaskar's change and considers him a credible character. On the other hand, the disinterested reader approves of his change of interest from the glamorous world but disapproves of his infatuation for Anuradha. The uninterested reader protests against the relationship as a shameful one. He also disbelieves Bhaskar's final action.

The Last Labyrinth depicts the route from crime to confession. Bhaskar's obsession with Anuradha is one of illegal love, a love that does not liberate him and sublimate his desires. The novelist portrays the relationship as criminal because he goes through a disorientation of self.

His intense passion for Anuradha makes him shuttle between Bombay and Benaras. Even when he ignores the temptation, a dream about her drags him back to the labyrinth of her carnal love. Finally his relationship with Gargi takes him to the door of religion thus effecting the transition from crime to confession.

The interested reader of *The Last Labyrinth* is awestruck by the passionate life of Bhaskar as he traverses along the rare realms of love and satiety. The disinterested reader observes the movements of Bhaskar with interest but the thought of his crime and the total outcome of his passion are shocking to him. The uninterested reader points his finger at Bhaskar's thoughtless actions and is pleased with the fate meted out to him.

The Last Labyrinth also depicts Bhaskar's world of fantasy revolving round Anuradha. Another aspect of his fantasy-world is Aftab's shares. Beguiled by these powers of

fantasy, he forgets his wife, son and dear ones. It is Anuradha's disappearance that opens his eyes to the world of reality, and he decides to search for God, who, according to her, lives in the mountains.

The interested reader of *The Last Labyrinth* is tickled by Bhaskar's fancy for Anuradha. Bhaskar's passion had driven him so crazy that he is pitied by the interested reader. 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.

The City and the River traces the route from fantasy to fact from the point of view of public and political issues. There is a juxtaposition of fantasy and fact in the novel, presented through various episodes. The tale repeated by the Great Yogeshwara to educate his disciple, the Nameless-one, who spent thirty years under his master, is itself a fantasy. Another example is the dream of the Grand Master. The whole episode of tyranny and cruelty is aroused by a fantasy-dream where the Grand Master sees himself as the king of the city, but surrounded by boatmen ready to attack him. The

Grand Master lives in a world of fantasy and therefore he does not bother to familiarize himself with the people. He is filled with contempt for the boatmen and is disgusted at their rootlessness. The products of his 'fantasy' are 'the Era of Ultimate Greatness' and 'The Triple Ways.' The Grand Master becomes totally devastated as he watches the city pulled down to nothingness. The story ends with the conviction that God is the real leader of the universe.

The interested reader of *The City and the River* is overjoyed at the thought of good winning over 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 gloats at it. The disinterested reader is carried away by the different phases of fantasy but is not willing to believe in any incredible aspect of life. The uninterested reader does not agree with the supernatural interference that finally terminates in a tragedy.

The route from indifference to involvement is also seen in *The City and the River*. It contains a severe indictment of the corruption and malpractices of political leaders, businessmen, police and army chiefs. Joshi suggests that politics, detached

from religion and truth, may bring only destruction and death: Both the palace Astrologer, who is the mentor of the Grand Master and the ruler of the city, and the Hermit of the mountain, who identifies himself with the river and the river populace, are disciples of the Great Yogeshwara. But the different choices they make turn them into adversaries. The prophesy, regarding the advent of a king that sets the wheel of action in motion, is interpreted differently by the two, each according to his nature. The precarious balance between the city and the river is disturbed by the different choices made by the Grand Master and the boatmen. The whole story contains the life and activity of the people who work out their daily chores on the river banks. They insist on offering their allegiance to the river alone, which is for them, 'a symbol of the divine mother, of God Himself' (22). When the river is disturbed to the maximum, the supernatural power that has been quite detached all this while, starts to act - thus showing its great involvement by involving itself at the right time.

The interested reader of *The City and the River* is enthralled by the omnipotent for acting at the opportune moment and showing the people that he still rules the world.

The disinterested reader accuses the Grand Master for being so callous, for he finds no reason to protest against the action of nature. The uninterested reader opposes the omnipotent's indifference and the final episode in which nature annihilates an entire city.

The route from the sophisticated political scenario to the primitive idea of nature's dominance is portrayed in *The City and the River*. The story of the novel is spread along the bank of the river and is governed by the Grand Master, 'the sons and grandsons of Grand Masters' (13). The Grand Master's monopoly spreads over every nook and corner but those who have a self-image oppose his rule. The result is immediate jailing or corporal punishment. Simultaneous with all this, Joshi presents nature as a force beyond all human powers. As the primitive concept would have it, it rains for seven days and seven nights, demolishing all that belonged to the Grand Master. Thus the novel focuses on nature's dominance over man.

The interested reader applauds the interference of nature in order to make everyone believe in the omnipotent. The disinterested reader is not willing to accept the power of nature pervading over human beings. At the same time, he

confirms that the Grand Master's monopoly is unacceptable. The uninterested reader refuses to confirm to the idea of nature overpowering man. He also dares to criticize Joshi for concluding the novel upholding the primitive concept of nature's domination over man.

The *City and the River* exposes the route from crime to confession too. The novel portrays the loss of faith in the omnipotent, the tyranny spelled out by the rule of the Grand Master, and the description of the 'Crowning Ceremony' the Grand Master has indulged in. In the name of sacrifice and public interest, the Astrologer tries to beguile the people of the city. The novel also focuses on exposing the importance of astrology in the lives of Indians, their credulity and their blind belief in it. The novelist's message is that "the world belongs to God . . . let him be the king of what is His" (70). Thus the move from crime to confession is explicit.

The interested reader of *The City and the River* is glad to witness the city being saved from crime. He considers the rain of seven days and seven nights as a purification of the city. The disinterested reader rejoices at the transition but is not able to digest the Grand Master's monopoly. The uninterested reader finds the final episode a superficial act.

He attaches no special significance to nature's absolution of the crime.

The route from the labyrinth to the light is traced in the novel *The City and the River*. The city is dipped in darkness because of the Grand Master's rule. The innocent boatmen and the ordinary people of the city are troubled and tormented and all man-made forces and powers fail. The citizens are filled with "fear and foreboding" (23). But God acts through rain and the river for the purification of the whole city. The evil intentions of the Grand Master and all his people are wiped off through plenty of water.

The interested reader is thrilled at the pathetic plight of the Grand Master and his people who are entangled in labyrinthine paths. The disinterested reader justifies the death of the Grand Master but does not agree with the ruin of the entire city because of what the Grand Master and his people have done. The uninterested reader challenges nature for acting so suddenly and destroying the whole city.

Chapter Seven, "The Route from the Struggle to the Survival," is an analysis of Joshi's short stories, published as a collection under the title *The Survivor*. The story "The Gherao" depicts the struggle between a college principal and

the students who 'gherao' him and thus defeat him. The story highlights the declining sense of values among the post-colonial youth of India, and the degrading status of the student-teacher relationship in the modern society. "The Frontier Mail is Gone" recounts the story of a young girl, who is deprived of the comforts of life, crushed by the rich and the big men of the upper class. "Eve-Teasers," a tale of modern India, deals with the evil of eve-teasing. Both Ram and Shyam are examples of the corrupt youth, whom the weaker sex is scared of. "The Boy with a Flute" is a successful short story presenting the life of Mr. Sethu, a businessman, "wealthy beyond calculations" (50). In his struggle to reach the peak of success he forgot the small prayer his mother had taught him in his childhood. But later on, the same prayer helped him to survive an accident that might have led to his death.

In "A Trip for Mr. Lele," Mr. Lele loses his high-level career because of his love for his daughter. Staying at his daughter's bedside when she is sick, Mr. Lele becomes an example of a 'survivor' in the competitive world. His sacrifice helps him survive different kinds of struggles in his life. "The Survivor" depicts an individual's desperate attempt to

survive “that fantastic racket that passes for the modern Indian Society” (96). The story echoes the inner cry of Kewal, “the survivor of the greatest disaster of them all: “The Modern Indian Woman” (95-96). Another short story, “The Homecoming,” one of the memorable stories of Joshi, deals with the theme of an unsuccessful arrival. It narrates the failure of an individual, a survivor of war, to establish meaningful contacts with others, a failure that results in a painful experience of loneliness.

“The Intruder in the Discotheque” is a piece of fantasy that deals with the hopeless longing of Shembhu to survive the struggles of his old age. “The Servant” is portrayed as a cut-off piece of corrupt society. It is the story of a servant who gathers courage to rape his mistress. This story emphasizes the struggle of women to survive such attacks. Another impressive short-story, “The Only American from Our Village,” is about Dr. Khanna who was given a good education despite of the poverty in his family. His father expected to survive the struggles of his life when his son would attain a secured financial position in the future. But Dr. Khanna forgot altogether his father’s difficulties and enjoyed his life as the only American from his village. In “Kanyakumari” the

protagonist failed to see the sunrise at Kanyakumari, and this led him to a great disappointment. He is the representative of the country's young ones who are lost in faith, yet waiting for the sun to rise so as to assist them survive their struggles. As stated in chapter six, G. S. Amir is right when he says: ". . . as an affirmation of India's wisdom and the value of the fable as a mode of comprehension, it 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.

Joshi's novels and short stories are thus bold attempts to discover the roots of life. As Tapan Kumar Ghosh points out in the article, "The Indian English Fictional Milieu and Arun Joshi:"

Joshi may be regarded as an avant-garde novelist in the sense that for the first time in the history of Indian novel in English he has powerfully exploited and given sustained treatment to a very potent theme of his time, namely a maladjusted

individual pitted against an insane, lopsided society which is unhinged from its cultural as well as spiritual moorings, and his uncompromising search for identity. (Ghosh 30)

Arun Joshi's novels devise ways and means to eliminate the discrepancy between the individual's pursuits and his fulfilment. His heroes are lonely misfits in the world in which they live and face the rootlessness of life. In the article, " 'Isolation' in Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner* and *The Last Labyrinth*," S. S. Rengaghari states: "The Joshian heroes face a conflict that is common to the entire world of sceptics. They cannot feel at home in their own tradition. . . .They find themselves isolated even in a crowd" (Bhatnagar 117). Though they are not religious or saintly, they learn the lessons taught by life's problems. While experiencing love and hatred, doubts and dilemmas, they face the challenges of their rootless life by outstripping the narrow confines of their distraught selves. A reader of Arun Joshi's novels is tempted to believe what Erich Fromm proclaims in *The Sane Society*: "In the nineteenth century the problem was that God is dead; in the twentieth century the problem is that man is dead" (122).

According to Arun Joshi, the success of an individual life depends upon its transformation or evolution of consciousness. An individual's lifetime offers unlimited opportunities for conscious growth and the individual is expected to make use of the opportunities. Though every individual has an urge to grow, actual growth takes place only rarely because growth involves effort, and an individual is generally reluctant to exercise the required effort for growth. An individual, who attains growth by taking effort, enjoys the advantages of growth. But the enjoyment is not an end in itself. He is obliged to render to his fellowmen, the growth he has attained. Not all persons are willing to take up such a responsibility.

There are some human beings who evolve consciously, accepting the responsibility of assisting humanity to evolve. This becomes difficult because there is resistance everywhere. Such resistance is natural. Evolving becomes strenuous with entropy because entropy retards growth. To fight against resistance and entropy, the human spirit requires effort – the conscious effort to serve and thus grow, the effort to grow and thus serve. The route towards evolution thus becomes a hurdle race, and to reach one's destination, hurdles should be overcome.

Joshi's characters do not show the mark of the spiritually advanced persons, though they are spiritually inclined. The mark of the spiritually advanced is the awareness of their sense of responsibility. To evolve means to be aware of responsibility and to be determined about one's power of choice. If the purpose of life is to be God's agent and to spread goodness, Joshi's heroes are God's agents with a difference. They are not God's agents if being an agent means sowing love in the human hearts where it does not exist, watering human minds with love, nurturing human lives with God's love, and thus helping one's own evolution of the human race. Joshi's heroes live life to the full with all the pleasures a permissive society can offer. Yet they give up at one particular stage of their lives to live a life of penance. They do not prepare themselves for such a life from the beginning, but, as already mentioned, they drink life to the lees only to be satiated at the end. Their routes naturally differ from the routes of the spiritually advanced. The main reason for this is their rootlessness. Rootless in one way or the other, Joshi's characters suffer the consequences of their rootlessness and thereby search for routes to make their lives worthy.

As the strength and weakness of the routes of the rootless characters are analyzed, there is a message of hope and happiness. Their routes lead to the ultimate reality of God. Be it Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism with differences in customs, ways and beliefs, their routes lead to one end- the route to the Almighty.

“Life is zero. . . . You can take nothing away from a zero . . . Of late, however, I have begun to see a flow in the arguement . . . You can take things out of a zero! You can make it negative . . . Life might will be a zero, for all I know, but it seems to me it need not be negative. And it becomes negative when you take out of it your sense of shame, your honour.”

Arun Joshi