

**Thematic Concerns in the Novels of Arun Joshi at a Glance**

**Dr. C. Yoganjaneyulu,**

Dept. of English

Govt. College for Men(A)

Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh, India

[cyogach@gmail.com](mailto:cyogach@gmail.com)

**&**

**Dr. C. V. Viswanatha Rao**

Dept. of English

Govt. College for Men(A)

Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh, India

[cvvrao007@gmail.com](mailto:cvvrao007@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

*The Journey of Indian English fiction has undergone a metamorphosis from time to time. In fact, the first Generation Novelists R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao have chosen their themes merely reflecting the society as it is in a creative manner. In course of time, as a result of Post – Colonial impact, the modern novelists have taken a different view point in their creative work of art. Arun Joshi, a well known novelist has written five novels, which are replete with divergent thematic concerns which would mirror the inner churnings of human psyche in their day to day life. The proposed paper deals with five novels, which mainly focuses on the themes of Illusion, Alienation, Supremacy, Dilemma of Existence etc. Besides the paper evaluates the content of the story from every novel and scientifically presents the individuals' struggle to establish their existence in their own way.*

**Keywords:** Fiction, Metamorphosis, Post – Colonial, Modern novelists, Creative work, Replete, Divergent, Inner churnings, Alienation, Dilemma of existence etc.

**Introduction:**

The literary wealth of our country was enriched by Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao in 1930s. keeping up the standards set by them, there followed other eminent writers like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar and Kamala Markandeya. With the advent of writers like Bharathi Mukherjee and Arun Joshi, the themes of social cause and concern made room for some of the soul – searching existentialist themes: rootlessness, detachment, East - West confrontation and above all the very meaning of life and death, love and marriage. The present paper outshines the thematic concerns in the novels of Arun Joshi.

**Theme of Illusion:**

*The Foreigner* is the first novel of Arun Joshi. It is the story of Sindi Oberoi, a loner and a misfit anywhere and everywhere. His father was an Indian. But his mother was an English Woman. They died in a plane crash when he was four. An uncle brought him up. He studied in Kenya and London. One finds Sindi very different from other high school boys (*The Foreigner* 165). His foreignness lay within himself. One day he told his uncle that he “was contemplating suicide, since I (he) was tired of living” (165). And he was perfectly serious about his suicide. Sindi shifted to London, where he “got tired of the class room lecture” (165) and soon he “wanted to know the meaning of life” (165) for which he required experience other than studying. But, Sindi was apprehensive of involvement. He struggled a lot to remain uninvolved. But in due course, he realized the fact that one cannot choose one’s involvement.

Though, he pretended to be an indifferent lover, he did have a few short lived affairs with Judy and Christine, Anna and Kathy and a Chinese girl in San Francisco. These affairs left an impression on his mind that “All love-whether of things or persons or oneself was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion” (170). The result was to be detached from others.

But his involvement with June, without commitment resulted in the latter’s death. Sindi says “June’s death finally broke my attachment to myself” (195). In fact, it is not one death, but three deaths; Babu, June and their unborn child. People do make mistakes. But Sindi’s meaningless detachment resulted in the loss of three innocent lives.

Sindi, having nothing to do in America with a flip of the coin – comes to India, where he joins Khemka Industries as P.A. to Mr. Khemka, Babu’s father. After a high level drama, Mr. Khemka goes to jail to tax evasion. Muthu makes Sindi realize that, “detachment consisted in getting involved with the World” (226).

The novel ends on a happy note, when Sindi takes over Khemka Industries. All these twists and turns who hear from none other than Oberoi, “who existed only for dying” (62).

**Theme of Contrast between Civilized Life and Primitive Life:**

*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is about the life and death of an American returned Anthropologist, Billy Biswas. An eminent scholar like Sudhakar.R comments:

Most of his behaviour seems erratic. Only those who know him well know that Billy is not the impulsive man he seems. Rather every one of his thoughts, ideas and actions is well reasoned out long before they solidify into reality (*The Literary Endeavour* 1985).

Billy’s friend Romi Sahi, an IAS and a District Collector, tells us the story in retrospective narration. Even as a boy of fourteen, Billy, like Sindi, had a premonition that he

actually belonged to the forests. In his Bhuvanesh war incident, at a small village in the forests, he remembers saying “something has gone wrong with my life, this is where I belong” (*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* 125).

Billy, after a stint at an uninterested teaching job and an unsuccessful marriage, “simply vanished into the sail forest of the Maikala Hills” (83). Not enough, he felt in those forests, “as though I (he) was not Bismal Biswas, graduate of Columbia, the only son of Supreme Court Judge, husband of Meena Biswas and father of handsome child; it was as though I were not all this but the first man on earth facing the earth’s first night” (120)

It is a fact that Billy, “certainly underwent a deep metamorphosis that was no doubt, responsible for all that I (he) did subsequently” (121). It was not in his hands to reject the invitation of the nature, which said ‘come, come, come’. The urge for his to merge with the tribal was so strong that, while explaining the geography and the life of the primitives to his students, he said “I felt as though I was a tribal myself..

I felt that I lived across the river in that hut by the hill and I had crossed the river to meet these strangers who were interested in my people. The feeling was so strong that I almost broke into the local dialect (129).

Since, Billy left no clues, the search for his whereabouts ended up and everyone thought that he must have been killed by a tiger in those hills. After ten years, one day he suddenly surfaced and told Romi what happened to him in the forest, Billy was living with Bilasia and had two sons. He was a sort of ‘king’ and ‘priest’ to the tribal. Soon his wife and father came to know of his existence through Situ, Romi’s wife. Romi told them Billy was not interested in returning to the main stream of life. Despite the objections, Mr. Biswas obtained permission to comb the forests.

Billy the tribal hero got killed by the police in an encounter. In the words of O.P. Mathur and G. Rai, the novel is “an interesting contrasts between the contemporary civilized life and the unsophisticated primitive life” (*Common wealth Quarterly* 132). To their sorrow, Mr. Biswas and Meena could take back only the urn containing Billy’s ashes to their civilized world, Delhi.

O.P. Saxena observes that:

Billy’s heightened awareness as to the nature of ultimate reality is misconstrued by the narrow defined vision of the technologically advanced society” (*Glimpses of indo English fiction* 71).

Bill’s case was “disposed of in the only manner that a humdrum society knows of disposing its rebels, its seers, its true lovers” (240). As he died, he left some “shattered hearts” behind. One death resulted in making two widows and three fatherless children.

**Theme of Alienation:**

*The Apprentice* is the story of Ratan Rathor, a high official of the Government of India. The novel runs in the form of dramatic monologue. Ratan makes a long confession to a college student, T.K. Ghosh observers that Ratan reveals “his hypocrisy, cowardice, corruption, debauchery and finally his great betrayal” (*The Labyrinth of Life* 91). As the novel progresses, we are reminded of Coleridge’s *The Rime of Ancient Mariner* and Albert Camu’s *The Fall*. In *The Fall* the protagonist narrator, Jean – Baptist Clamence also like Ratan, gives the reasons for his downfall.

Ratan’s father, a Gandhian revolutionary, abandons his practice and dies a martyr in the hands of the British. Ratan and his childhood friend Brigadier enjoy their college days. Ratan thought “if the sun shone it seemed to shine only for us” (18). If he had money he would have become a doctor. For many days, his job efforts in Delhi proved futile. Finally he comes to a conclusion that “there is nothing in the world as sad as the end of hope”(26). He stated feeling that there was something decidedly wrong with him. At the age of twenty-one he was a hypocrite and a liar; in short, a sham”. Times without number he was ‘examined, interviewed, interrogated and rejected’.

Later, he became a temporary clerk. The rest is history. In no time he became a ‘thick skin and washout’. From the superintendent, he learnt the art of making ‘DEALS’. His job, marriage, life and almost everything he did in his later life was part of a deal. He owned ‘a car, a flat, a concrete roof, a refrigerator’. But, to gain all these things, he had to ‘lick THEIR boots’. He accepted a bribe from Himmat Singh and passed defective war material, which resulted in causing the ‘Army several hundred lives’, One among them was his one and only close friend, Brigadier. Ratan was set free for want of proof.

As required by the police, he wanted to make confession to save his friend’s life. He even wrote one but never posted it. It was still lying at his house. He realized that he “had been sold over, double – crossed, by none other than the secretary himself (135). Now, as a penance, he says “each morning, before I go to work, I come here. I sit on the steps of the temple and while they pray I wipe the shoes of the congregation (148).

V. Gopal Reddy comments that Ratan’s sense of individuality is in conflict with his life of hypocrisy. The latter being defeated, Ratan, “out of acute sense of alienation and a quest to understand the meaning of life, undergoes the severest apprenticeship in the world (*Kakatiya Journal of English, Studies* 89) namely wiping of the shoes.

**Theme of Dilemma of Existence:**

*The last Labyrinth* appeared in 1981. In Hari Mohan Prasad’s words, the novel:

Explores the dilemma of existence with greater intensity and against a wider backdrop of experience and relationships...(it) is a congruent articulation of the contemporary

phase of the dilemma of modern man who is essentially turbulent, grouping, through the Labyrinths of life, existence and reality" (*The crisis of consciousness*, 20).

Som Bhaskar the protagonist of the novel is a ruthless business magnet of Plastic Industry. One finds it difficult to sympathise with a protagonist, who enters like a villain and says, "I have a score to settle I forget nothing, forgive no one" (*The last Labyrinth* 9)

Like his other counterparts 'Sindi and Billy', Som also studied abroad. He is married to a sensible woman, Geeta. He has two daughters. Som had learnt to corner companies'. He meets Anuradha, while trying to grab Aftab's Company.

In that 'summer of Anuradha', he heard the cry "I want, I want, I want (11) which was audible only to his ear. We are reminded of Billy's call 'come, come, come'. The result is the same, though. What Som wanted disappeared. Billy followed the call and he himself disappeared. Som looks at Anuradha's pink palm, "not quiet understanding what was happening to him (14). Again we remember Billy's reaction, when he sees Bilasia. Billy also says that something unusual was happening to him'.

Som starts shutting between Bombay and Banaras, between Geeta and Anuradha. Aftab and Anuradha live in the Labyrinthine Lal Haveli. The trio visit Durgahs and Temples. They all believe in the deaf-mute God woman Gargi. Som realizes that "it was to see her and not to negotiate for the shares, that I (he ) had really come to Benaras (41). Som gets a heart attack, a serious one. Even their family doctor Dr. Kashyap gives up hope. Anuradha requests Gargi to save him. Miraculously Som Survives. But Anuradha disappears mysteriously in the labyrinth of the Lal Havelli.

For a scholar of spiritual bent of mind reading of *The Last Labyrinth* may be a rewarding experience may be , but for an average reader it is difficult to keep track of the events in the Labyrinths of Lal Havelli and the strange behaviour of its inhabitants.

### Theme of Supremacy

*The city and the River* is the last of Arun Joshi's novels. It is a political allegory. T.K. Ghosh observes that:

Although in many respects it strikes a different note from his earlier novels, *The city and The River* is in fact a continuation of and an improvement upon Joshi's major thematic concerns (Ghosh 72)

'The city' in the novel could be any big city. The River is Time and Time 'alone is immortal'. *The city and the River* is about "a matter of allegiance related to God or to man (*The City and the River* 262)

Since times immemorial, the rulers all over the world were always cruel and cunning. They tormented the masses. The cities were wealthy, the rulers were rich. But the subjects, majority of them were (made) poor. Whenever the poor working classes tried to question the supremacy of the rulers, they were crushed down mercilessly by the kings and the military. This 'city' is no exception.

The Seven Hills are the seat of Grand Masters Government; the tall structures are made of 'Steel and glass'. Next, in order are the pink-rosey brick buildings for the upper middle classes. The narrow mud-huts are meant for boatmen, who are also known as the 'nameless-ones'. It all started when "one night the Grand Master dreamt that he had become a king (14). The Astrologer says that the 'prophecy' also mentioned the 'coming of a King', the king plans to freeze the growing population of boatmen by making a law. The Astrologer came out with the 'Triple way'.

But the Head Boatman makes it clear that their allegiance is only to the river, The Professor, Master Bhoma also known as Bhumiputra, Shailaja's brother and editor Vasu, are the ones who stand by the boatmen. Hence, they are arrested, tortured and sent to the Gold Mines as slaves.

Bhumiputra and Shailaja's brother try to educate the boatmen. They reveal the 'nakedness' of the King. We understand what type of justice prevails in 'the City'. When the Commissioner explains to the professor:

There are two systems of justice in this world, citizens are either presumed to be innocent and we have to prove their guilt or the citizens are assumed potential criminals and they have to prove their innocence... this city follows the second system (83)

The Grand Master's son deployed all the three armed forces and personally co-ordinated the attack on the Grand Father's Rose garden, where Bhumiputra was hiding. When they bombarded with canon shells, there was large-scale destruction and a huge loss of human life that included, Grandfather, Bumiputra, Shailaja, Dharma, Mother and the Grand son Shani

At the end, the Astrologer understands the city's horoscope in a proper manner. "The river, I see, from a teacher rise" (217). By then it is too late to save any one. The river overflows and engulfs everything and everyone. O.P. Mathur is of the opinion that:

The final disappearance of the city under the primordial waters of the river can be said to stand for the merger of the weak, fleeting, flawed creation into the powerful... spectrum of a microcosm of the universe (Mathur1995)



‘On the ruins of that city’ a new city rises, which is ruled by another ‘Grand Master’. There is another professor, another Bhumi Putra’. The great Yogeswara being an optimist, sends the Nameless – One “to prevent this endless repetition, this periodic disintegration (*The City and the River* 262). He asks him to purify the city of ‘egoism, selfishness, stupidity’.

Ultimately the Great Yogeswara arrives at the conclusion that, “we are only instruments of the Great God” (264) and it is His will and His force that we follow and experience. Because, he is the one, who is the Master of the Universities” (264).

### Conclusion:

It is quite obvious from the above analysis about the themes of Arun Joshi, the novelist has had world knowledge and experience of modern society. Virtually, much importance is given to a particular concern in the present write ups to enlighten the readers to get acquaintance with the inherent attitudes of human beings. It is because of writer’s shrewdness in creating the characters alive to the day today situations.

In *The Foreigner*, the concern of illusion is very much heightened as the humanity is in the grip of assumptions and imaginations to satisfy their mental attitudes. In *Billy Biswas*, the contract is made between the civilized life and the primitive life since the society is in a way abetting the young men and women to exhibit their inner potentialities according to their whims and fancies. The theme of alienation in *The Apprentice* clearly shows an individual’s existential predicament in journey of his dynamic life. In *The Last Labyrinth*, the theme of conflict in human existence reflects the constant struggle of humanity in deciding their ways and means in leading a happy life. In the last novel the city and the river, the dominance of supremacy is dealt with allegorically about the political strategies in governing the moods and temperaments of the people. However, the ultimate resignation to God’s dispensation that nothing is possible according to human will by realising that the human beings are the instrument in the hands of Great Master and it is His will which would prevail in the universe eternally.

### Works cited:

1. Arun Joshi : *The Foreigner* Orient Paper back edition , Delhi 1968
2. ~ ~ : *The strange case of Billy Biswas* Orient Paper Back 1971
3. ~ ~ : *The Last Labyrinth* , Orient Paper Back Delhi, 1981
4. ~ ~ : *The City and The River*, Orient Paper Back Delhi, 1994
5. JamkhandiSudhakar R :Arun Joshi : *An emerging voice in Indian English Literature : The LitereayEndevour* 6.1-4p 1985
6. O.P. Mathur and G. Rai, *Common wealth Quarterly* Ed. Vikram Raj Vol 5:17 ( 1980)

7. G.P. Saxena, *Glimpses of Indo English Fiction* ( New Delhi Jainson's publications, 1985)
8. P.K. Ghosh, *ArunJoshis fiction : The Labyrinth of Life* ( Prestige Publication 1996)
9. V. Gopal Reddy, 'From Alienation to Community: A note on the novels of Arun Joshi', *Kakatiya Journal of English Studies*, Vol VII
10. Hari Mohan Prasad, *The crisis of consciousness – a thematic analysis of the Last Labyrinth*, A scholar critic publication 1984.