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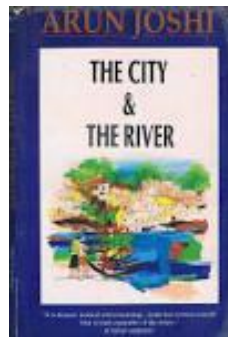
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Elements of Fantasy and Reality in Arun Joshi's Novels: *The City and the River and The Foreigner*

K. Santhi Malar, M.A., M.Phil.



Introduction

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K. Santhi Malar, M.A., M.Phil.

Elements of Fantasy and Reality in Arun Joshi's Novels: *The City and The River* and *The Foreigner*

Arun Joshi is one of the perceptive contemporary Indian English Novelists who have attempted to grapple with the predicament of modern man in their writings. Arun Joshi was born on 1939. Joshi has had a brilliant academic career. He obtained an engineering degree from the University of Kansas and a degree of Industrial Management from M.I.T., Cambridge, Massachusetts. For a brief period in 1957, he worked at a mental hospital in the United States. After returning to India in 1962, he joined DCM in a managerial capacity, on the recruitment and training side. After that he was an executive Director of the Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources.

Arun Joshi stands out as a highly significant novelist. He is quite different from his Indian or western counterparts, living or dead, since he has kept the novel form serious. Basically, he is a remarkable thought-provoking novelist with uncompromising propensity towards the moral and the numinous. His works read like the spiritual odyssey of twentieth-century man who has lost his spiritual moorings and is wandering aimlessly. The novelist has tried to project through experiences the crisis of the urbanized and highly industrialized modern civilization along with its dehumanizing impact on the individual who is ever eager to find out and reaffirm the value of meaningful relatedness in life.

His Influences

Arun Joshi belongs to the tradition of existentialist writers like Camus, Sartre, Kierkegaard, Saul Bellow and others. Joshi was obviously influenced not only by existentialist writers such as Camus, Sartre, in the main, but also by a number of other Western poets such as Thomas Hardy, T. S. Eliot and others. But Joshi has absorbed and assimilated all his influences, oriental as well as occidental, and fused them with indigenous traits, transmuting them into organic, well-orchestrated novels with the indelible imprint of his own individuality. His novels are structured in the immediate socio-cultural situations and are concerned with moral and spiritual problems of the contemporary Indian. Joshi responds to the challenges of his time and the problems resulting from the bi-cultural milieu of the century. Joshi reveals a wholeness of vision by going into the cultural and spiritual problems of his own countrymen.

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About His Novels

Lord Macaulay wanted the Westernization of Indians through the introduction of the English Language. Then in the 1930s and 1940s there emerged a new trend in the Indian-English novel exhibiting social and political realism. The authors took up contemporary social and political problems. Mulk Raj Anand is the first writer to give the Indian-English novel a definite tone and texture. Many authors have emerged in those periods, who also wrote about the social problems. In his novels he was immensely influenced by leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, poets like T. S. Eliot and philosophers like Camus, and Kierkegaard.

Joshi came into the limelight with the publication of his very first novel, *The Foreigner*, which appeared in 1968. This novel talks about Kenyan-Indians mostly autobiographical. This was followed by the publication in 1971 of his second novel, a more imaginative one, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. The book is about a mystical urge. Joshi's third novel, *The Apprentice* was published in 1974. It is different in tone from the earlier novels. Ratan Rathor, its hero, is Everyman - a contrast to other protagonists in so far as his intellectual level is much lower. Joshi's fourth novel, *The Last Labyrinth*, published in 1981, won Joshi the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award. Though basically a love story, it explores the hero's search for meaning of life.

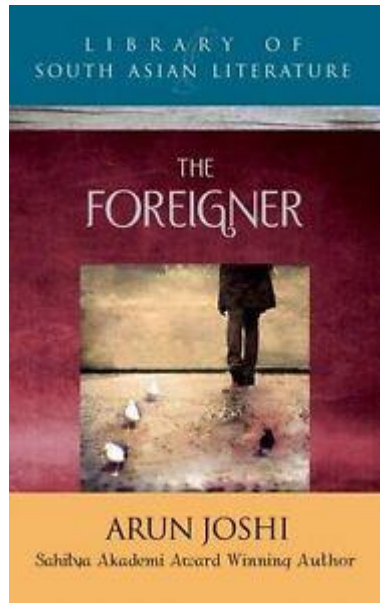
Along with novels, Joshi has also published a collection of Short stories entitled *The Survivor*. Though he has excelled in longer fiction and his novels have been more popular, it does not mean that his short stories are, by any means inferior. Arun Joshi's *The City and The River* (1990), the fifth and last novel strikes a unique note different from his earlier novels in many respects. Arun Joshi's first four novels are concerned with individual lives, but *The City and the River* is a departure from the existing themes of Arun Joshi as it is a commentary on the times and a political parable. Arun Joshi's novel mainly deals with the problem of the social economic and political situation obtaining in the 20th century and the development of Indian English Fiction.

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Elements of Fantasy in Arun Joshi's Novels *The City and the River* and *The Foreigner*



We will now look at fantasy in Arun Joshi's Novels. *The city and the River* and *The Foreigner*. The word 'fantasy' is derived from the Greek word '*Phantasia*'. It is a flight of fancy or imagination, something visualized which is entirely imaginary, unconnected with genuine events. Fantasy has the longest heritage of all of the forms of genre, in fiction. Indeed, fantasy could be said to be the progenitor from which the other forms came from. Fantasy's habit of taking real-life situations and characters and introducing them into a world where unexpected things happen have resonated with readers since the earliest days. He has used fantasy to reveal society, human life and the meaninglessness of life.

The City and the River novel opens with a Prologue which relates the last day of the Nameless-One with the Great Yogeswara his teacher. The narrative framework of the novel is mythical and its narration pattern reveals that it is a story told by an old wise teacher, a Guru, to his keen disciple - about the destruction of an old city. The City has seven hills and people live on them according to their social status and profession which determine the geographical locations given to them on those hills. The Middle class people live on a lower ground in pink brick buildings. The poor people including the boatmen live an area along the river bank which

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is lowest in height. The councilors of The Grand Master include the Minister of Trade, The Education Adviser, the Master of Rallies, the Astrologer, the Commissioner of Police, the Commander of the Army and general starch who assist the Grand Master from time to time.

Arun Joshi has used fantasy as a dream through the character, The Grand Master. The present Grand Master one day dreams that he becomes a king, sitting on the top of the hill surrounded by the waters of a river and by a circle of naked men closely cornering him to the extent of choking him by their close proximity. By this dream, The Grand Master entertains hopes of becoming the King and resorts to unethical ways to realize his dreams. Another Fantasy has been used through the character, Master Bhoma's disappearance, which is held up to be a mystery because this man simply disappears between his house and the first lock-up. This incident generates lots of fuss. The truth was that Master Bhoma had simply walked away when the jeep carrying him struck against a pole. The parable is one coined by Master Bhoma and after his disappearance it is retold by Shani to people gathered at the lottery stalls where the listeners get one rose free of cost. *The Foreigner* follows the elements of fantasy which reveals the contrasting worlds of America and India, the rich and the poor, vividly and realistically.

Elements of Romance

The elements of romance and fantasy enter the novel when it depicts the inner and personal life of the protagonists Sindi. Sindi is very realistic, practical and clear-headed when it comes to his assessment that is mechanical and unattractive. It is only when it comes to his own affairs that Sindi appears irrational, unrealistic and impulsive. Though he considers June's affair with Babu a dream, prides himself on his having lost the capacity to dream, one clearly finds that Sindi's own life remains shrouded in a dream. His parentage, his bringing up, his schooling, his asthmatic fits, his sense of alienation, his pretense of detachment, his affairs with women one after another, his wavering about marriage and his haunting obsession of guilt for the tragedy of Babu and June - all of these have a touch of romance and fantasy about them. Wide-ranging of fantasy Arun Joshi reveals the corruption of the society and the impact of Hindu religious tradition here.

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Next we shall look at the corruption of the society through the concept of realism. Realism in arts may be generally defined as an attempt to represent subject matter truthfully without artificiality and avoiding artistic conventions, implausible, exotic and supernatural elements. In its most specific sense, realism as an artistic movement began in France in the 1880s, after the 1848 Revolution. Realists rejected Romanticism, which had dominated French literature and art since the late 18th century. Realism revolted against the exotic subject matter and exaggerated emotionalism in the drama of the Romantic Movement. Instead it sought to portray real and typical contemporary people and situations that arise in ordinary life, and often reflected the changes wrought by the industrial and commercial Revolutions.

Arun Joshi has written an anguished man's quest for survival and search for viable alternative amidst materialism, corruption, cynicism, alienation and dwindling spiritual faith. *The City and The River* symbolizes Indian corruption through characters which are the Grand Master, Astrologer, The police commissioner and Courtiers. And the Indian middle class people situation has been shown through the characters like The Boatmen, Bhumiputra and professor. Arun Joshi's novel *The City and The River* portrayals are reminiscent of the emergency in India, as the aftermath in both cases proved ruinous to the rulers. It rightly claims a privileged place among the political novels of our literature, as it powerfully comments on the political scenario of the past, the present and the future. Joshi enlarges his canvas, turns his focus from the private to the public, and deals with the socio-political and existentialist crisis of the entire "City" which is every city. Joshi takes up his favourite existentialist issues, but sees them through the spectacles of politics and thereby elevates the novel of political-allegorical satire. The Indian Political scenario of the emergency is in many respects paralleled in the novel. The novel contains characters who are archetypes rather than recognizable human beings with individual characteristics. It is remarkable to see that the novelist succeeds in providing a message for us without the psychologically realized characters. The question is not of individual success or

failure, but of collective efforts for the common good. Through this we can get to see how Arun Joshi is deeply influenced by Indian politics, the Indian mindset, and the Indian life.

The novel *The Foreigner* also suggests the Indian materialistic society through characters like Mr. Kemka and the hopelessness of people is exposed finally through Sindi Oberoi. Through the concept of realism, Arun Joshi exposes the futility of human life. Sindi becomes a typical existential hero, the haunted anguished creature of Sartre who is absolutely alone and free, creating for him a personal way of life out of the void of nothingness all around him. Through the character and ordeals of Sindi, Arun Joshi demonstrates that non-attachment can be acquired in stages only. The juncture which Sindi reaches is an important intermediary stage of the individual's attachment to the world, combined with his non-attachment to himself. The transitory pleasures of life fail to satisfy him for they do not help him in finding the purpose of his life.

It is a rational decision based on deliberate reflections, but a random choice made by tossing up a coin. Equally strange and impulsive is his acceptance of a job in Mr. Kemka's establishment. Still more fantastic is his decision to return to Mr. Kemka's firm and run it in his own arbitrary manner. One is unable to understand whether he takes up his responsibility because of the persuasion of Muthu, an ordinary employee in the firm because of his secret love for Shiela. The novel begins as a crime story and ends as a mystery. Through this we can understand how Arun Joshi is deeply influenced by the social milieu, and meaninglessness of human life, with the concept of realism.

Narrative Technique

We shall now look at Narrative Techniques in Joshi's novels. One must make a study of Joshi's command over the unique narrative divide used to narrate what happens to people and what they do. Narrative technique is the method of telling a story effectively. Narration is the process of relating a sequence of events. History narrates events as they really happened in the life of a nation. Narrative involves subjective expression. It should have some proof to

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effectively express a particular idea. Narration is the most important technique in the process of creating a novel.

In Joshi's novels his narrative leads the reader to various spheres of time and space. Arun Joshi brings his technical skill into play to capture the back and forth movements of the protagonist's mind in the world. In both the novels *The City and The River* and *The Foreigner* Joshi deals with the theme of fanaticism and the reality of human psyche. Arun Joshi's fictional world is a revelation of a world where man is confronted by the self and the question of his existence. His search is directed at the inscrutable region of human psyche and he enters into that mysterious region of uncertainty and inscrutability.

The City and the River by using this theme and execution, proves that Joshi has been deeply influenced by the Hindu existential vision and the novel continues the spiritual quest of his earlier novels through a measure of rhythms of myths, legends and archetypes. Arun Joshi depicts realistically the horror and terror unleashed on society when a handful of individuals like the Grand Master become ambitious and selfish. Right from the start of the novel the reference to myths and archetypes is quite suggestive. The sound of the dance is the dance *tandava* of Lord Shiva to bring *pralaya* (Flood) in this world when it becomes sinful and corrupt. At the end of the novel we feel like we are completing a quest and it is a universal human quest for affirmation through the negation of self.

The Foreigner, written in the first person narrative mode, initiates us into an elitist world dominated by drinks, dance, clubs, by jazz and rock's roll, by sex and psychoanalysis, by economic, political and military crisis, by discussions relating to mysticism and skepticism, socialism, and capitalism. And though this world is darkened occasionally by the shadows of want and hunger and distress, still it remains a world of glamour and sophistication. *The Foreigner* story is told in a style of flashback narrative style ordering of past events. Further the novelist mixes together the past and the present, the world of imagination as well as reality to maximize the suspense. The point of view in the novel is autobiographical, because the narrator-protagonist begins the novel as a first person narrator. Such type of narration is necessary

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because the novelist deals at length with the hero's psychical contact with society and his psychological developments which enable him to solve his problems.

The title of the novel *The Foreigner* itself gains a symbolic importance in the larger context of human existence. It portrays the protagonist's sense of metaphysical anguish at the meaninglessness of his life. The unreality and transitoriness associated with the word 'foreigner' permeates the whole structure of the novel. From this view, the foreigner has a remarkable degree of maturity suited to its theme. We perceive the influence of many Western thinkers that go into the shaping of Joshi's thematic and technical structure and narrative skill; the same have been made of use in a very cautious manner that shapes the novel into an organic novel.

Conclusion

In the two novels *The City and The River* and *The Foreigner* Arun Joshi Deals With the inner recesses of human psyche, where one finds instinct and impulse at work; man seeks a process of reality which may lead him to the realization of the truth of his life. Joshi the artist is not content merely to restate experience in a cold scientific manner. He feels a need to discover the reality of life, which is hidden in the actuality of his own life.

Thus, Arun Joshi occupies a very high rank among the prominent Indian English Novelists. He experiments with the medium of literature for studying man's predicament, particularly in the light of motive responsible for his actions and the reactions of his psyche. Joshi's novels, *The City and The River* and *The Foreigner* make an efficient attempt towards creating a better understanding of the world of one's self.

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