



ISSN Print: 2394-7500  
ISSN Online: 2394-5869  
Impact Factor: 5.2  
IJAR 2020; 6(10): 404-407  
[www.allresearchjournal.com](http://www.allresearchjournal.com)  
Received: 12-08-2020  
Accepted: 14-09-2020

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## The art of fictional technique in the novels of Arun Joshi

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### Abstract

Arun Joshi is regarded as one of the finest novelists of India. He basically lays stress on the problems of modern world. His fictions seek the importance of the individual in this complicated world. His art of fictional technique is very unique and strange which gives the trace and the taste of reality through his fictions. Arun Joshi's fictional technique is guided by several factors of his development as a writer. He has acquired it from the study of his favourite authors. He has borrowed it from the American and Continent writers and has fused it with the Indian concept of the story mixed not only with myth and folklore but also with the device of a story within a story coming down to us from the puranic traditions. To R. K Dhawan, O.P. Bhatnagar, V. Gopal Reddy and others Arun Joshi's works are signs of his mature genius, skilled narrative style and profound vision of life. Arun Joshi has paid great attention to the three important parts of the narrative such as plot, characterisation and the narrative point of view. He has taken recourse to the various devices in forgoing the technique of his fiction.

**Keywords:** Arun Joshi, fiction, art, technique, style, tradition, modernity, narration

### Introduction

Arun Joshi has evolved a style of his own that is flexible enough to communicate the varied experience of his characters with perfect ease. The quality of his novels lies in the authenticity of his scenes and it is evident from the accurate descriptions of life of Indian students in New York and Boston, the life of District collector, the corrupt practises and manipulations of Indian bureaucrats and the photographic documentation of the tribal region in central India and of the life of its people. The strength of his narration and the superb control of his style evoke the intrinsic flavour of each place he describes. The evocative power of his narrative style is evident in his depiction of the mystical experience of spiritual regeneration that Billy Biswas undergoes in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*.

His style is apparent. He depends entirely on the resources of his narrative style, which is apparently meandering but always under control and on his evocative language to recreate the journey of the human soul into the mysterious other world. It is this narrative skill that turns *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* from a factual record of real events into an artistic restatement of the human quest for cultural identity and spiritual commitment. Again because of this stylistic excellence he transmutes the tract material of *The Apprentice* into a fictional re-enactment of the anguished search of a guilt-stricken consciousness for salvation.

The plots of Arun Joshi's novels are related to the upper class and even when the subject matter is drawn from the life of the poor, it has been narrated from the viewpoint of the upper-class narrator. A significant fact about his fictional world is that in his novels he is concerned with the decaying upper crust of the Indian society. He satirises the glistening flimsiness of the Indian affluent society. *The Foreigner*, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* and *The Last Labyrinth* deal with the decaying crust of the Indian society. In *The Apprentice*, Ratan Rathor rises to this status while in *The City and the River* there is a clash between the two. Arun Joshi's characters belong to the upper-class society except for the mud people in *The City and the River*. They are complex figures and as such they are seldom at ease with themselves. They go on developing and suffering the different schism of modern life. The major characters in his novels seem to be lost in the crisis of their identity, search for meaning. His fascination for dealing with existential themes in which the characters get lost in the mazes of their existence is also in keeping with the favourite image of the maze in the

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post-modern literature. His novels are peopled with educated-uneducated, urban, rural and primitive figure. There are primitive, tribal characters which naturally require a different language and expression from that of educated, civilized upper-class.

### Discussion

The first-person narrative technique is Joshi's favourite. He employs it in his novels *The Foreigner*, *The Apprentice* and *The Last Labyrinth*. This omniscient narrative technique is adopted by the protagonist himself. In the *Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, the narrative technique is that of omniscient point of view of Billy's friend, Romesh Sahai, who knows about his strange case as an investigating officer of his past friend. In *The City and the River*, it is the omniscient author who narrates the tale in the third person. He has not adopted one point of view and he has adopted one consistent point of view in the novel.

Arun Joshi makes his novels readable as possible and chooses a particular functioning. It is this special care and the recognition of the need to establish human contact with his readers that make his novels so extremely readable and assert the readers undivided attention.

The academic world also crops up in some of Arun Joshi's novels such as *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* and *The City and the River*. Arun Joshi's interest in the academic world has been revealed by his several characters. In the *Foreigner* Sindi is on his visit to New-Delhi. Sindi leaves his academic career in the U.S. to come back to his forefather's land India. In the *Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, the protagonist Billy Biswas is appointed as a faculty member in the Department of Anthropology of Delhi University. His escape into the Saal forest of the Maikala hills is for his academic mission to study the tribal world along with his students. Leila Sabnis in *The Last Labyrinth* is an academician interested professionally in philosophy and as a pastime in foreign languages. In *The City and The River*, the academic world plays a dominant role. The Hermit of the Mountain, The Great Yogeshwara, the Professor and his disciple Master Bhoma are all associated with the academic world.

In *The Foreigner* the narrative point of view is that of "the protagonist narrator's point of view" (Raizada 14). Protagonist, Sindi Oberoi he himself is the narrator. It is a sort of autobiography as the narrator protagonist begins the novel as an 'I' character. Herein Arun Joshi deals with the hero's physical contact with society and his psychological developments which enables him to solve his problems. The narrative of the novel oscillates between the past and the present and vice versa. Its narrative technique is oblique, in a flash back and not straight forward. There is the combination of British, American and Indian English. There are also straight forward third person reporting and also alternations between first person narrative along with free, indirect narration. The narrator sometimes narrates the story in the mood of introspection and sometimes he takes recourse to telling the story in retrospect of again changing over to reporting the story in extra-version.

The fictional technique of *The Foreigner* is influenced by T.S Eliot's poetic technique used in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". Sindi conveys his sense of futility by using phrases from T. S. Eliot as "irredeemable time", "the eternal joker snickered within me", "stood in graveyard cars" (159).

In the present novel there is a colourless cosmopolitan quality as Sindi he himself is an embodiment of cosmopolitanism. He is an uprooted young man living in the latter half of the twentieth century and who has become detached from everything except himself. The narration keeps up our interest constantly.

Arun Joshi uses metaphors, symbols and images for variations of mood and intensity of emotion. Sindi, is drawn analogues to a tree without roots. He is an aimlessly walks upside down exploring his inverted universe and the playing of cards are the symbols of man's deplorable position in the universe. orphan for whom the only reality of his parents is a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs.

The action in the novel has a definite movement despite the fact that Arun Joshi has used the techniques of flashback and perceiving the things through the eye of the hero, Sindi Oberoi. After his coming back to India, Sindi looks back at his life and events in Boston and London. Thus, the present grows out from the past, and the past directs the present. Further, the qualities the novelist attributes to his characters determine the action and the action in turn progressively changes the characters and thus the story is carried forward to the end. Thus, it has a well beginning, a well middle and a well end.

The language used in the novel is well suited to it. Narrative imparting seriousness to the novel. Most of the images in it are related to death and are from technology. Sindi describes June Blyth to Sheila just as he describes an automobile "Tall and slim, with blonde hair and large blue eyes" (57).

*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is a sort of biography of the protagonist, Billy Biswas. The narrative point of view of it is that of the witness-narrator. In it the narrative follows both flash-back and flash-ahead technique. It is told from the point of view of Billy's friend, Romesh Sahai (Romi) who is an omniscient narrator. He is an officer of IAS cadre posted at Jhansi. The Saal forest of the Maikala hills falls within his administrative jurisdiction. He was Billy's roommate in America. He was the very intimate friend of Billy and yet could not know the secretive and the mysteriousness in his friend's mind.

In his use of narrative technique Arun Joshi owes to Joseph Conrad, R.K. Dhawan writes that "Arun Joshi's fiction conforms to Conrad's conception of the novel. Joshi recognises a reality beyond a mere phenomenal world, a reality which the artists could imagine and capture by giving a consistent form to the shapeless facts of human existence" (17-18). Conrad's narrative technique in *Lord Jim* has great influence upon the witness-narrator's point of view in the present novel. Like Marlow in *Lord Jim*, "Romi performs the task as an involved friend and as a detached narrator. Both become more and more involved as the novel progresses. Both follow a tale to the end. And they have another feature in common" (29). In the similar vein here in the present novel Romi narrates the story. It resembles *The Heart of Darkness*. Like Kurtz, Billy forsakes the civilized human society and adopts himself to the primitive and has a native mistress.

Arun Joshi's third novel *The Apprentice* is a real masterpiece and a most compelling work of art. In its fictional technique adopted by Arun Joshi is surely one of the primarily motivations of uniqueness. It is cast in the form of dramatic monologue to that of Albert Camus' *The Fall*. It follows the novel narrative technique, which, however, has been a very favourite device which poets use

in dramatic monologue. Ratan Rathor, the protagonist narrates everything in his career. It is very original novel in its structure, so that V.V.N. Rajendra Prasad classifies it as “a fictional experiment” (122). Ratan narrates the facts of his life to a listener, who is a National Cadet and a student. Here what is relevant is that of the imaginary dialogue between both of them, the novel only records the voice of the protagonist.

The narrative of *The Apprentice* has a wide span. It covers the period from the Quit-India Movement to the Chinese debacle in NEFA in 1962. During this span of about two decades Ratan grows from a boy to kingpin in the corrupt official hierarchy clearing war purchases. According to Prasad Hari Mohan:

The novel enacts three stages in the human divine comedy of Ratan. The pre-Independence period is the dawn, the period of idealism, the phase of innocence, the post-Independence India is the broad-daylight of experience, the inferno of corruption, the last part the area of expiation, is the door to the purgatory (60).

The novel is a self-analysis by Ratan of his own crisis and consciousness. In it the confessional note is the central concern. Thakur Guruprasad remarks that “the narrator in this novel is an insistent confessionalist; confession is a factor in his redemption” (162). Ratan’s confessional mode is also an affirmation of his real quest of identity which had been a sort of abominable crisis which tempts him on to act as dishonourably as he could with his other accomplices in the official hierarchy. Ratan’s confession makes it evident that the novel as a sarcastic hymn to corruption is also a satire. Through the narration Ratan exposes duplicity in the India.

The narrative strategy in Arun Joshi’s *The Last Labyrinth* is the protagonist- narrator’s point of view. Som Bhaskar, the protagonist tells the story of his life in a flash-back to Dr. Kashyap or Dr. K. who is not only a silent listener but also interacts with him as he narrates some part such as Som’s surviving from the heart attack because of the miracle performed by Anuradha and Gargi. The novel’s narrative refers to a vast sweep of the problems of life of Bombay and those of life and death, materialism and spiritualism. The philosophical problems dealt with touch upon the labyrinths of life and death.

The title *The Last Labyrinth* can be operative at many levels. At the symbolical level, the Lal-Haveli stands for the maze of life and the last labyrinth of the title is death itself which is even more mysterious than existence itself. The title is very significant as it stands for the great mystery that hangs about the book’s deep structure, and itself is a matter of great inquiry. Som Bhaskar is the battleground between the two hungers, hunger of body and spirit. Anuradha is the force that makes Som a captive in the Lal-Haveli. She represents a constellation of stars, Som stands for the moon, for a creeper, from which medicinal juice is extracted, and the moon is believed to be the giver of the medicinal juice. Som is, again, the Sun, that gives light and enlightens others. Their relationship therefore is one of the moons, the stars and the Sun. The hidden meaning of the novel can be worked out by studying the novel in terms of these symbols. Another symbolical meaning of the labyrinth is associated with sex. The attraction of Som and Anuradha leads to their being sexual partners.

Arun Joshi’s *The City and the River* differs from his previous novels in regard with the point of view of fiction.

In his *The Foreigner*, *The Apprentice* and *The Last Labyrinth* the plots develop through the confessional mode of narrative in which the protagonist himself relates the story of his life. *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is in the witness narrator’s point of view. His last novel *The City and The River* differs from all the preceding novels not only in its theme but also in its structure. The very title words of the novel are joined by ‘and’ which indicate the clash of two different opposing symbols. It is a political strife in which Arun Joshi imparts to the tale a universal and eternal significance and raises the novel to the level of great literature which has an all-time appeal. In its Arun Joshi has used various myths, legends and archetypes to suggest the value of an authentic life, faith and right action the barest necessity of modern man. The political scenario of the city is used as backdrop of the novel which helps in presenting a contemporary problem with the metaphysical overview of creation and disintegration, sristi and pralaya dealt in Indian myths. The canvas of the novel is very vast and encompasses within its range time, God, man and nature.

The fictional modes incorporated in it cuts across many forms of prose fiction, such as fable or parable, fantasy, science fiction and political novel. The clash in it is between the two ways of life: those represented by brick people and mud people who speaks of the political reverberations of them. But the narrative pattern of the novel affords it many other layers as well.

### Conclusion

Arun Joshi takes his characters into no-man’s land, the past as well as the future. The significant thing in it is that the characters in it have a sort of anonymity about them. The characters are mostly known by their positions and very few of them love their first names. Even the city and the river are anonymous. The city in which the action of the novel takes place is “a nowhere city” and the river is the symbol of the continuity of life, is also nameless. The ageless Yogeshwara has a disciple known as Nameless-One. The Grand Master, the Astrologer, the Police Commissioner, the Minister of Trade, the Professor and the boatmen have no personal tags attached to them. Even those who are known by their personal tags have rather connotative names typical to the humorous characters. Bhumiputra, a symbol of rebellion, means the son of soil. The General of the Army is called General Starch for his stiff attitude. Nevertheless, the characters represent not only types but also individuals. The Grand Master is a character to represent the collusion of the businessmen with politicians for their sharing profits. Being a fantasy novel, it has some hazy characterization, Anup Beniwal affirms that “the characters do not develop spontaneously and lack psychological depth” (Dhawan 276). This is to say that most of the characters in it are flat ones and lack in the rotundity of the great fictional characters.

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