

A PAINFUL SAGA OF “THE DOOMED STRANDED WANDERER” IN ARUN JOSHI’S *THE STRANGE CASE OF BILLY BISWAS*

ARUN KUMAR DAFRAIK

Assistant Professor of English, Government Degree College Nerwa, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

Arun Joshi’s protagonists are burdened with a spiritual hollowness, cynicism, severe pangs of materialism, loss of faith and identity crisis. They despairingly feel the brutality of fate turning their lives into nothingness without any purpose. A painful saga of many things including mechanization, dissatisfaction, changing moral values, spiritual emptiness in the era of modernity, Joshi in this beautiful piece of writing throws light on the obvious estrangement of its demoralised hero from the “upper crust of Indian society” with its yearning for materialism, spiritual hollowness and blind imitation of western culture in utter defiance of its traditional values and lies. Billy desperately searches for invaluable and unanswered questions which have their relevance in the context of his own life but always encounters unacceptable yet bitter truths of life. The shattered protagonist of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, after becoming aware of the mess his life has been, acutely experiences the traumatic strains in life and desperately longs for stability and grace amidst chaos. W. B. Yeats in his great poem “*The Second Coming*” befittingly explains the same idea: “The things fall apart, the centre cannot hold” (Quoted in *Jeffares* 199). The absence of any symmetry and order makes his life a sort of hellish experience. The novel explores Billy’s search for meaning in this materialistic and hollow world.

KEYWORDS: Hollowness, Materialism, Nothingness, Mess, Stability, Mechanization

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas emerges as a fictional piece of writing symbolizing the doomed existential quest for values in a mad and fully absurd world. The protagonist is mesmerized and hypnotised by the attractive and mysterious look of the lovely tribal girl Bilasia who changes the entire meaning of life for Billy and brings his unavoidable doom –the last labyrinth that life holds for man in the existential vision. The fall of a man of extraordinary obsessions has been shown with remarkably alive sketches.

Jasbir Jain while discussing Arun Joshi’s *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* pronounces that “Billy like Sindi, is in search of a human world of emotional fullness- a world of meaningful relatedness”(The *Journal of Indian Writing in English* 54). Joshi artistically shows Billy’s awareness of dark labyrinths of his personality due to which he feels alienated from the society. Billy’s strange expression on his face symbolises “a mixture of nearly all those emotions that one tends to associate with a great predicament” (BB43-44). “No other man” than him, “so desperately pursues the tenuous thread of existence to its bitter end” (BB8). An epitome of sophistication, and studied in U. S., Billy renouncing his family and the world eagerly searches for dark depths and bitter truths of life. Arun Joshi probes into Billy’s “dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish forever, hidden from the dazzling light of the sun.”(BB 8)

Billy’s life neither in America nor in Indian upper class societal set up provide him solace and soothe his lonely soul which longs to get it. The charm of anthropological books fails to entice him as the places mentioned in them have no

relevance and are worthless for him. He likes to learn with real zeal and enthusiasm about “the aboriginalness of the world” and it is around his interest in the primitive man that his entire life had been organized”. (BB14)

Billy’s confrontation with the exceptional nature of his personality at music session repeatedly exerts “a mesmeric pull on him” (BB18, 21) itching and forcing him to search for a conducive atmosphere (BB27). His itch for India is an itch for realization and accomplishment of the relevance of life that he pursues desperately. Opting Harlem Anthropology in place of Engineering which his parents wished him reflects his longing to live his precious life in his own exceptional and unique style and moreover, he considered America too civilized for him to live in.

Billy’s demeanour adds charm to his dashing personality. Romi’s remarks on Billy’s character bring to limelight the latter’s aristocracy and superb demeanour that ultimately add grace to his character. “He was one of those rare men who have poise without pose”. He talked in “soft cultivated voice without gestures” (BB11). He had dark, deep and almost “inhumanly sharp eyes” (BB43) which were “the dominating feature of his face” (BB12). Most of the people could not identify the strangeness of his sharp eyes and his exceptional power to see. They mistook him for “a light-hearted good sport” and failed to read the dark depths of his eyes. Romi confesses that “there were many things that I could not see which Billy saw and which step by step led him to the only end that await those who see too much”(BB40). The peculiar expression and narrowing of his eyes means that he tries to unravel some elusive secret of universe.” Tuula Lindgren and Romi perceive in the dark inscrutable, unsmiling eyes of Billy Biswas the glimpse of dreams with their destination and abode far away from the simple world of mortals. By achieving his mission Billy wants to immortalize and canonize himself in the eyes of the world.

Maya’s life in Anita Desai’s *Cry the Peacock* consists of a stifling experience of alienation in her relationship with her husband, and unfortunately same is the lot of Billy. Laying their hands on exposing the contemporary man’s traumas and tortuous experience Arun Joshi and Anita Desai, “the two literary giants” portrayed and painted their heroes as absolute outsiders and complete strangers. Their souls groan and grumble in cage-like houses. Existential predicament is the Zeit Quist of all the major characters in their novels. These are tormented, tortured, introverted and stranded wanderers. Faced with disgusting tunes of absurdity they ultimately annihilate themselves.

Billy’s passionate urge to undertake the exploration has been explained at length by Arun Joshi as an absolute inner compulsion, a superb force of primitive origin and a strong obsession. Portrayed as ‘a man of extraordinary obsessions Billy falters in his life due to the uncontrollable desire to espouse music, painting and abstract science. He remains thoroughly crazy even by Indian standards.

Attempting to advance on the wings of imagination and fantasy, Billy Biswas, the man belonging to a strange world and born of a different mettle brings himself closer to the indescribable doomsday. His strangely unparalleled passion and love for primitive life is indicative of his being a tiny part of primitivism that was longing to complete itself after reunion. Billy’s bizarre and unusual way of living, his day to day response to life, eating, dress –up and strange thinking and even his behaviour vote for one’s assertion that he was not born to live and play in this useless and inferior world of ‘wasted children of God’. Billy’s isolation from the materialistically soaking world surfaces and comes to the fore during the party celebration at New York when he beats the bongo drum before sitting silently, sans drinking and moving. Thus Joshi points at the cultural alienation of the fragmented and burdened protagonist.

Billy’s isolation and alienation suggests that he has other milestones, which were hitherto been invisible to him, to

achieve in his life. His futile preference to breathe the “singular air” and efforts to adjust himself socially and culturally fills his heart with a feeling of wasting his life by living in a civilization where people are busy, “making and spending..... money”. He scorns the world as it hankers after the money. Tuula and Bilasia act as “magnets” to which he’s attracted as they are least bothered about money. His dislike for the artificiality in the life of the wealthy people is clear from the letter he gives to Tuula. According to Billy materialism deadens the sparkle of life, spoils and mitigates the noble qualities and dehumanises the human being.

Billy Biswas consistently endeavours to unravel the hidden meaning of life. He like William Wordsworth, who was regarded as the “Noble and High Priest of Nature” in the Romantic era, desperately wishes to live in close communion with Nature. Billy’s similarity with Arnold’s “Scholar Gipsy” is hard to ignore as he always loves to listen to the silent whispers of the unseen and behold the spark from heaven to pursue his life in a meaningful way. Undoubtedly, Billy is having a split personality, split between “primitive” and “civilized” but Tuula’s “extraordinary intuition” makes her see beyond the ordinary as she understands the dilemma of Billy’s life. She says that Billy is “an exceptional person” and feels something inside him... a great force, urkraft, a primitive force. He is afraid of it and tries to suppress it... but it is very strong in him, much stronger than you or me. It can explode any time” (BB23). Hinting at the prospect of sudden exploding of this ‘urkraft’, a remarkable primitive power, Joshi makes us realize the strong connection between Billy and vastly unknown primitive world.

Taking into consideration the prevailing atmosphere of imminent doom and destruction, Arun Joshi’s novel has remarkable similarity with Hardy’s dark vision of the cosmos. Many critics feel that Billy’s call beckoning him to primitive world and wilderness is reminiscent of Lawrence atmosphere. Undoubtedly the perception of human beings undergo tremendous change in the wake of advanced technology and immense materialism, yet the protagonist of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* remains aloof and untouched, safe from the dangerous clutches of evil technological avalanche. Billy hears his first call from primitive world at the tender age of fourteen: “Yet almost from the very first day, almost from the moment we emerged from the railway station, something odd started within me.” He felt that a “slumbering part of me has suddenly come awake” (BB122). However he fails to understand the primitive call. He says, “I could not figure out what excited or troubled me unless it was a sudden interest in my own identity.”(BB123)

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas offers an example of Joshi’s great craft of capturing the most hidden and inaccessible covering of the mystery of life. The protagonist is suffering from schizophrenia and is an intellectual in the modern sense and the primitive. The serenity and equipoise of “this exceptional fragment of God” gets a severe jolt at the hands of malicious technology. The mesmerizing pull of his own natural self unsettles the protagonist and ultimately his civilized self is under extreme danger of losing its vital sheen.

Devoid of any purpose especially in India, his distorted soul searches for heavenly bliss which is necessary to better his life and change the course of his absurd life. He remains upset by his hallucinations. He says: “I had been terribly afraid of myself, some part of me. I thought terrible things might happen unless I did not do something drastic. The only thing I could think of was to get married. It was like taking insurance on my normalcy” (BB184). The inability of his wife Meena to empathize with her husband and read his complex mind is brought into light by Joshi. Billy’s own aspirations and longings remain insatiated as Meena can’t readjust herself according to his needs and nature. The artificiality of the modern society represented and symbolised by Meena utterly fails to lure and ensnare the hero in its grip.

The unavoidable trumpet of destructive primitive life and Billy's insatiable desire for primitive world beckons him time and again thereby unsettling his mind. The mesmeric pull of "these unique and unnatural voices" of the primitive world is so strong and formidable that even Meena fails to chain up his personality. She herself acknowledges this to Romi: "Perhaps I just don't understand him as a wife should" (BB76). Billy's "inhumanly sharp eyes" are indicative of his splitting and tortuous personality and betrayed "emotions that one tends to associate with a great predicament" (BB44). "He turns introvert and lackadaisical. Gone was the staggering intelligence, the spectroscopic interests, the sense of humour... the Billy Biswas I had known was finished, snuffed out like a candle left in the rain"(BB70). The stark materialism and superficiality of the dehumanizing society execute a dent in Billy's sensibilities and chokes and tears him to pieces clawing him apart. He feels himself "pinned down there like a butterfly." His feelings, that his hold on life is getting weaker and weaker with each passing day, infuses a wave consisting of strong blend of pessimism and desperation in his heart.

Billy's distorted personality is absolutely untamed and uncontrollable. Meena's lack of understanding leads him into the soothing arms of Rima Kaul. Even the birth of their son could not make him turn to the family. Meena then realizes the fact that "things are falling apart" and that 'Billy is getting stranger and stranger with every passing day" (BB74). But neither Rima's body nor her sentiments could help to realize his identity and bring an inner joy and satisfaction. He is ashamed when he realizes that his relationship with Rima is only another name for adultery which he positively abhors. He reflects: "It gradually dawned on me that a tremendous corrupting force was working on me. It was as though my soul was taking revenge on me for having denied it for so long that other thing that it had been clamouring for." (BB189)

After watching the tribal dance, the young Billy is transported to the seventh heaven of happiness feels: "Something has gone wrong with my life. This is where I belong. This is what I have always dreamt of" (BB125). Thus, Joshi, step by step, explores the inner layers of Billy's divided personality. He makes it clear that that the protagonist is in search of some vital meaning in life.

One of the most strangest and unimaginable fact about Billy's life is that if such "a man of exceptional talent" gets entrapped by the extraneous factors or far off strange unknown voices then how can we expect an ordinary man to resist these unavoidable pulls and strong nets of enticement. But Billy never belongs to this natural world. He perhaps has sensed that his roots are anchored to some other world where the clutches of materialism and man- made barriers would never come close to touch his soul and take him away from his desired, supremely placid and lovely world.

Billy realizes that his responsibility towards his soul is more than towards the family. He confesses that "I had greater responsibilities towards my soul" (BB186). The brief but shameful affair with Rima offers him the first glimpse of his "degeneration" yet he fails to get away from this filth and turns into a hypocrite". In case of Billy the seduction of Rima intensifies his urge for self-realization and self – actualization. He realizes: "It was like warning signal. It was as though a master mind has arranged the whole things to give me preview of what awaited me if I continued to defy its calls"(BB189). Billy, thus, has two clear options: "I could either follow this call, this vision, whatever the cost or be condemned to total decay" (BB190). He later tells Romi: "Deep down us are afraid that the price of making such choices is terrible not realizing that the prices of not making them are even more terrible" (BB191). He decides to go for the first option to follow the call from the primitive life.

Billy Biswas’ bizarre dream of achieving the impossible and planting his foot on “the Moon” and wish to conquer unimaginable and vastly promising “Heaven” and blissful existence for him get severely jolted by the cruel eyes of materialism and hollow societal bondages marring his identity. Consistently fighting with his wife over trivial matters and absurd, petty things creates a sort of deep chasm in their relationship and dries the bonding gel due to the lack of emotional understanding. The protagonist is threatened by the signs of impending doom and destruction. The unsophisticated Billy doesn’t work in unison with the parameters set by the civilized world and longs to be a part of enchanting and alluring primitivism, the persistent divinely inspired voice beyond the human world. Feeling pity at his own degradation and a “devastating apathy” to his own life forces he leaves the worthless world which is unfit to live in, particularly with reference to him. The articulate and strident calls of the primitive world exhort Billy to join, explore and merge with it and transport himself to a world which he always crazily longed and desired for:

Come, come to our primitive world that sooner or later overcomes the works of man. Come, we have waited for you. It is with us that you begin and with us that you will end...too longer have you wandered the purlieu of our forbidden city. (BB120-21)

Both Billy Biswas and Sindi Oberoi remain aloof, alienated and act as strangers in society. They wander through the mazes of existence to complete the half in the next birth as in Browning’s poems. The novelist depicts Billy’s nature like an “Indian saint” who has little interest in external attractions; he concerns himself with self-realization. Billy is thus “a refugee from civilization” (BB140). The tenacity and determination with which he pursues his quest in “an incoherent and meaningless world” is really astounding. The “bounty of primitive riches” and “pleasures of life” beckon Billy to have a taste of it finally leaving his wife and sweet child for the sake of temptingly dangerous and attractive ‘saal’ forest of Maikala Hills. This was the result of many unanswered questions, visions, fantasies and dreams which have made his life a place equal to ‘Hell’ where he felt frustrated: “Layers upon layers were peeled off me until nothing but my primitive self was left trembling in the moonlight” (BB121). With deliberate snapping of relationships and civilized trappings, he anticipates extracting meaning out of the corrupted and unsophisticated world.

Billy, who always envisioned himself belonging to the primitive world, as a cloud belongs entirely to the sky, snaps all connections with the civilized world of rogues where only hypocrites and hopeless scoundrels reign supreme.

Fulfilment of Billy’s dream, a dream which demands life – blood of a whole life, is indicative of a superb journey of the hero from darkness to light, desperation to extreme optimism and peace of mind. In the bright and soothing folds of primitive life Billy bathes himself fully in order to soothe, redeem and satisfy his burdened, dispirited and “dead self.” In D. H. Lawrence’s *The Woman Who Rode Away* a woman’s degradation and falling of life around her has been painted with deft touches. A chain of unstoppable primeval eroticism ensnares and allures the Professor of Anthropology. With God’s divine blessings Billy tries to gather the split selves of his personality to consummate the union of two bodies. He discovers in her “that bit of himself that he searched for all his life and without which his life was nothing more than the poor reflection of a million others” (BB142). The recurrence of the image of “strange woman” in Billy’s wonderful dreams mesmerizes the protagonist to the point of becoming an extreme lunatic. Billy once writes to Tuula: “A strange woman keeps crossing my dreams causing in me a fearful disturbance, the full meaning of which I have yet to understand.” (BB97)

What Rima and Meens fail to accomplish the magical Bilasia does it instantly and succeeds in enlightening and enlivening Billy’s slumbering and dead soul. Billy is in search of a place where, “nobody ...is interested in the prices of

food grains or new seeds or roads or election and stuff like that” (BB111) “where friends can die for each other” (BB120) where exists “not Bilasia..... But his future, indeed very purpose of his life”. It is after meeting Bilasia, “an untamed beauty that comes to flower only in our primitive people” (BB143) that Billy discovers his life force.

The predicament of Billy’s life can be compared with the plight of Krishnan of *The Dark Dancer* who ditches his wife for an attractive English woman. Always feeling pressurized by the family members and his surroundings, this intelligent lad and an exceptional scholar is forced to accept a govt. job giving him no intellectual satisfaction. Keeping in view his response and attitude towards his indifferent, dark and cynical bent of mind and lack of interest in life and people around him, there is no dearth of doubt that this novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* has a lot of similarity with B. Rajan’s *The Dark Dancer*.

Billy’s mind is preoccupied with the feelings of insecurity at the thought of leaving and forsaking his beautiful, primitive tribal woman Bilasia symbolizing life force. He says: “I was terrified as a child is terrified in the dark (BB123). The sense of dilemma at the prospect of bright and sweet primitive life on the one hand and detestation and scorn for the civilized world on the other makes his character chaotic and strangely unique. Billy’s fearful personality and insecurity make him a bizarre character with uncanny logic. He wonders “whether civilization is anything more than the making and spending of money?”(BB97). At this point Arun Joshi’s beautiful piece of fiction can undoubtedly be compared with William Wordsworth’s famous sonnet “*The World is too Much with Us*” signifying people’s voluptuous greed for money ultimately opening the doors of doom and destruction of soul for them;

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
 Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers,
 Little we see in nature that is ours;
 We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon.

(Wordsworth 536)

Billy finds in the primitive world the happiness and joy which is lacking in the materialistic life of phoney society. Billy’s extraordinary love for the primitive people compels Romi to comment: “I marvelled at the intense beauty of human relationship that was born out of so much love” (BB141). Arun Joshi here reveals the uncorrupted love that Billy feels for the aboriginals which is in every sense venerable and potent. To Billy expedition into primitiveness is like a communion with the wilderness. In the second day of the expedition, Billy Biswas disappears ... simply vanished into the ‘saal’ forest of the Maikala Hills (BB83). And there he undergoes a sudden transformation into an aboriginal. It was as though “I was the first man on earth facing the earth’s first night.” (BB120)

After marrying Bilasia, Billy’s fascination for primitiveness becomes the realization of his quest. Bilasia is his ‘missing self. He is the ‘Mahaprasad’ (i.e. an intimate friend) of Dhunia, the headman of the village. The tribals believe that Billy is the incarnation of their mythical king and possesses divine gifts as did Chandtola, the white-faced cliff of the village which starts glowing because of his presence in the village; he can bring a dead child back to life; the tiger runs away on sighting him. The primitive people consider him a God. Billy is passionately concerned with himself alone, with his own nature and the realization of his life force. He never tries to establish any link with the civilized world but once he tries to contact that world – when he cures Romi’s wife of her migraine- it leads to his tragic doom. He really adopts a

primitive culture. The jungle has wrought in him such magical change. To Dhunia and the tribals "he is like rain on parched land, like balm on a wound" (BB236). Arun Joshi portrays Billy as the long awaited 'Messiah' of the tribals. Dhunia is aware of the fact that Kala Pahar "the black rock" and "master of us all" has called Billy to consummate his search for meaning in life. The search cannot be completed in the imperfect, futile and phony world of the civilized people. Billy is obstinate in his pursuit of enduring values, for material prosperity fails to deflect him from his search for the vital fragments of life. He is involved in the exploration of his inner being. Joshi attempts to find out viable alternatives for the modern man trapped in the vicious circle of materialism. Romi remarks:

As I grow old I realize that the most futile cry of man is his impossible wish to be understood. The attempt to understand is probably even more futile. If in spite of this I propose to relate Billy's story, it is not so much because I claim to have understood him as it is on account of a deep and unrelieved sense of wonder. (BB7)

Joshi makes us aware of an alternative mode of living which is a total contrast to the materialistic society devoid of any sense, purpose, direction and values.

All efforts to capture Billy end in vain, only his ashes reach the modern civilized world. Billy's search for meaning in life remains unfulfilled as his crucial encounter with the police ends his tragic drama of life. In spite of the repeated warnings of Billy to Romi not to disclose his whereabouts to anybody, Romi and Situ break their promise by telling his father about the secret of Billy's life. He cautions Romi in this fashion: "If they ever get hold of me, they will not leave me alone. And you know what havoc it will play with my life here" (BB151). However things go beyond Romi's control and his pestering wife compels him to disclose the secret. Billy's influential father, a onetime ambassador and retired Supreme Court Judge sets the whole government machinery moving to trace Billy with an idea "to drag him up to Delhi by force." (BB207)

Unfortunately and very sadly the young and dynamic IPS officer Mr Rele who was appointed to execute the plan to capture Billy acts in a purely mechanical way devoid of any sensibility, sensitivity and understanding of human psyche. The behaviour of sophisticated society smelling of its "middle-class mediocrity" attempts to bracket men like Billy with "irresponsible fools" and "common criminals". (BB231)

Billy's story turns into a stereotype of childish escapade which was all their ordinary minds capable of" (BB206) and the search for such an unnatural man who was searching his roots somewhere in the exclusive world of tribals "turns into a man hunt"(BB232). The tragedy, which was looming large on the protagonist since his "heart's awakened longing" for love and passionate cry to "plant his foot" on the different world, finally occurs as Billy is shot dead by a havildar. Even gliding on the wings of his final journey of death which befall on him unexpectedly, he leaves his footprints behind, as H. W. Longfellow in his famous poem "Psalm of Life" also exhorts us to follow, and slaps his verdict on the inhumane and insensitive world - the world which knows no other ways of disposing its rebels, its seers, its true lovers, by uttering "you bastards" (BB233). The last words reveal his fierce hatred against this cruel society.

Billy who dared "to step out of its stifling confines" ultimately has to pay a very heavy price for it. His end was "as certain as the end of solitary boats beating against the maelstrom." Billy's escape to lead a meaningful life in the peaceful sanctuary of the primitive world can be aptly compared to Patrick White's *Voss*; as both the novels deal with the issue related to human experience, question of identity and search for meaning in life. Being possessed with strong inner,

unavoidable and forceful compulsion, the protagonists of both novels endeavour to search for their real self, and both meet a tragic end. Both the novels are about the journey of the protagonists into the interior regions of the soul.

For Billy, Bilasia acts as an embodiment of true meaning in life he is searching for. Arun Joshi makes use of mythology and folk-lore to bring out Billy's character and his search for meaning in life. For him Bilasia is; 'Prakriti' and he is 'Purush' and the cosmic whole can be experienced in their union" (*Prasad* 60). Joshi's world of 'Maya' (illusion) is represented by the 'Prakriti' or Shakti' in the form of June in *The Foreigner*, Bilasia in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, Anuradha in *The Last Labyrinth*, who in the end attain a level of liberation with which they are comfortable. Arun Joshi's estranged tragic heroes attain self-awareness, self-liberation and self-realization through involvement with a woman. Like Saul Bellow's Henderson, Billy finds the real meaning of life in the primitive girl Bilasia. Joshi has portrayed Billy in the image of 'Rama' of *the Ramayana* and a sort of man-god, an avatar to the tribals. The betrayal of Billy by Situ reminds us of Biblical characters of Samson and Deliah where Samson is betrayed by a woman. Joshi's passion for myths is evident in portraying Billy's experience as a 'rishi' and his search for meaning in life.

Arun Joshi's beautiful piece of writing has similarities with D. H. Lawrence's *The Woman Who Rode Away* and Graham Greene's *A Burnt out Case*. Querry, the protagonist of the latter novel, a famous and well reputed architect of Europe, doesn't find any charm in his materialistic life and starts his voyage to the remote Congo to live with the lepers in search of peace and happiness. Like Billy, his search for meaning in life remains unfulfilled due to his untimely death caused by the intervention of the dangerous goons of the civilized world. Similarly, the hero of Samuel Beckett's novel *Murphy* absconds from the civilized world. Of all the protagonists Billy alone is able to overcome the predicament of modern man successfully and convincingly. Establishing compatibility with the primitive world is one of the best ways to get rid of all the problems of life. Billy's search for meaning in life is evident from the following dialogue between Billy and Romi:

I don't want to sound too pompous; an old chap. becoming a primitive was only a first step, a means, to end. Of course, I realized it only after I ran away. I realized then that I was seeking something else. I am still seeking something else.

'What is that?'

He seemed to be thinking.

'God?' I (Romi) prompted.

'There, there, old chap, that is too big a word.'

'Something like that?' (*BB189*)

On the one hand, Billy's revolt is blatantly against the rules and the modes of a society which does not value and acknowledge the full potentialities of the individuals and mercilessly suppresses all minorities. Billy's portrayal as an anarchist symbolizes his hatred and sharp rebellion against his societal set up.

Billy has been portrayed as a rebel while others are depicted as helpless compromisers. In order to engage himself with the exploration of the essence of human living, he renounces the outer world of attractions and temptations. His renunciation is reminiscent of Sidhartha's renunciation of his child and wife along with the luxuries of the materialistic

world in search of the ultimate truth about human existence. The pernicious impact of rapid industrialization digresses man from the very purpose of his life. Billy has to pay a heavy price for his search for meaning. Efforts to bring Billy back to civilization by capturing him by police force only lead to the final tragedy. He pays with his life for not conforming to the norms of the civilization-for daring "to step out of its stifling confines" (BB240). The efforts to capture Billy lead to final catastrophe; only his pious ashes reach the civilized world-the world which failed to recognize the true worth and feelings of this simple man who ultimately succumbed to its fury and recurrent threats.

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas as a novel is a marvellous fragment of quest literature in which Arun Joshi has beautifully presented the hero's journey through the world in order to explore the essence of human being. And eventually the novel leads to the self realization and self- discovery of the protagonist. The sordid imperfections of the world surrounding him stifle his emotions. In one of his letters to Tuula, he writes, "we are swiftly losing what is known one's grip on life" (BB40). Thus it deals with the metaphysical questions like: "Who was i? Where did I come from? Where was I going? (BB122)

Billy's quest for something higher and nobler remains incomplete due to his untimely death. There is a beautiful portrayal of chaotic state of man in the modern world, the world which is engulfed in the detrimental and abominable claws of technology and materialism. The contradictions and aimlessness in Billy's character owes its origin to the nostalgic predilection for the native culture to which he is exposed. The soul-destroying, meaningless, mechanical, monotonous, moronic existence is an insult to human nature. The modern man has emerged from the ashes of smothering, suffocating, debilitating, decadent and civilized world.

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas announces that mechanized industrialization injects into man terrific speed and throws him to "sick, hurry and divided aims" by instilling in him enervating sense of competitiveness. It is Joshi's artistic courage and boldness to trace out the fundamental crux of the social crises in pervading darkness of human affliction. Thus Billy provides solutions to the human predicament in the contemporary society by suggesting an alternative for a simple and meaningful existence. In a bid to seek communion with the primitive world, Billy opts out of the modern world of hypocrisy and deceit to enjoy a life of noble savageness like Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Billy forsakes civilized human society, adapts himself to the primitive, and even has a native mistress. It is not strange because people who get frustrated by the pompous, artificial and overcrowded life of the civilized world prefer to move out of it for being "far from the maddening crowd." Arun Joshi's final verdict is that one can realize the essence of life by liberating the self from the mercenary civilization and by paying due heed to the authentic calls of the inner being. Sushil Kumar Sharma points out that when Billy discovers that the prevailing social order is difficult to redesign, he opts out for the tribal world which operates in a simpler and clearer manner. Hence Billy can be called an Indian Huck Finn, or Henderson whom material prosperity cannot detract from the pursuit of abiding values. (Sharma 163)

Billy Biswas is a Gandhian as far as his understanding of the present civilization goes; a Wordsworthian as he finds true happiness in tribal life of simplicity and grace (Bhatnagar 143). He is a thorough simpleton in his search for divine values. According to Billy man's greed for materialistic values will take him closer to his deathbed and destroy him completely. Like Thomas Moore's *Utopia*, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* successfully portrays the old, invaluable and purely idealistic trends of life. That is why the hero is called "The Primitive Pilgrim." (Prasad 46)

Paying due importance and recognition to our inner voices is a must- because these amazing awakening calls

recurrently and repeatedly try to destabilize our life, yet offer us an opportunity to excel and raise ourselves to a higher and more satisfying profession hitherto unimagined and materialized only in dreams. Once a person truly understands and realizes the immense worth and remarkable value of such divinely inspired and magnificent calls, his scattered vision and wayward dreams get real meaning ultimately excelling and achieving unimaginable things in life.

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