

**Alienation and Isolation in the Arun Joshi's Novel "The Strange Case of Billy Biswas"**

**A.Mahendran**

Assistant Professor, Department of English, KG College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu-India

Indian English literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. Arun Joshi's fictional world is most strange. *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is seemingly a sequel developed from the first novel *The Foreigner*. Sindi and Billy Biswas, the protagonists of *The Foreigner* and *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* respectively, seem to explore the hidden treasures of life; they search for their own bearings of life and death, sorrow and joy. Their major concern is their real and the inner world - the world of soul. Communication is also the beginning of the establishment of self-identity, if not the assertion of the identity. The analysis of the entire corpus of Arun Joshi's novels demonstrates that there is a pattern in his works. The innate urge to determine life's meaning in positive terms leads Joshi's protagonists to wage an incessant war against challenging situations. The author's capacity of critical judgment is reflected in his novels. It also presents the socio-economic and cultural background leading to the literary milieu of the period to which Joshi belongs.

**Keywords:** Isolation, Self-Identity, Sorrow, joy, death

In the novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), Arun Joshi portrays how the process of individualisation destroys a man of extraordinary sensibilities. The novel seems to advocate that life's meaning does not lie in the world outside but within. The quest for identity of Billy Biswas is deeper than that of Sindi Oberoi of *The Foreigner* (1968) Arun Joshi in this novel has tried to combine the Lawrentian quest for the essence of life with Upanishadic search for soul's spiritual reality. In reality, Billy learns from the seers, mystics and visionaries of all ages and it brings him closer to Mathew Arnold's *Scholar Gipsy*, as a result of which Billy takes the hard decision to live in the jungles of Central India deliberately renouncing the luxurious life that he could have afforded very well. Billy is completely faded up with the grossly materialistic Indian society, in defiance of its traditional values, ethics, culture and mores. It also endorses that Billy supports the anti-materialistic way of Hindu life.

Arun Joshi's first novel *The Foreigner* was first published in the year 1968. Arun Joshi has candidly accepted, with reference to *The Foreigner* that his recurrent theme is alienation which is closely related to the identity issues in many forms, sometime in the form of identity conflict, sometime in the form of self-quest, many times leading to estrangement from the self. In his first novel *The Foreigner* Arun Joshi brings out the crisis of the present age through the protagonist Sindi Oberoi. Sindi is an Indian by origin but born and brought up in Kenya, studied in London and took up his engineering in America. Sindi feels alienated wherever he goes. It is not because of the nationality or the geography but of the rootlessness that he feels within. He has become an orphan at a very early age and grows without a family and a country. "My foreignness lay within me"(Joshi.61), he confesses. This has increased his rootlessness and he feels his life an empty one till he meets a karmayogi in India. Muthu, the karmayogi, teaches him the essence of life; the reality that lies behind the Maya of this world. After the teachings of the karmayogi, Sindi realized that the life of a man will become meaningful and useful only when it is of some use to others. Like the karmayogi, he too has decided to surrender himself to the upliftment of the needy people around him.

The theme of alienation and loneliness is a recurring theme in modern Western fiction. Consequently modern novel is an existential fable on man's predicament. The experience of disinheritance and futility has not percolated in the wide fabric of Indian life, but it has pierced into the life of a significant segment of Indian society. Life in India is also no

longer tranquil and composite. Arun Joshi's novels dealt with theme of crisis of self, problems of identity and the quest for fulfillment. Joshi, in all his novels, has tried to explore "that mysterious underworld which is the human soul." (Joshi.7) His novels are essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and of himself. In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*(1971), Arun Joshi has carried his exploration of the consciousness of the hapless rootless people and has revealed to our gaze new gas-chambers of self-forged misery.

Billy Biswas is a young, rich and a well educated person. He has everything in his life; still Billy has some unusual obsessions which make him to get lost in the problems of identity. The son of a judge of Supreme Court of India, Billy belongs to a rich and respectable family. His grandfather was once the prime minister in Orissa and his father was a judge of India's Supreme Court. He sent Billy to America to study engineering but Billy has started pursuing anthropology without the knowledge of his father and he is already half way through his Ph.D. He has specialized himself as an anthropologist and studies the tribal attitudes and custom.

Joshi has shown his protagonist Billy to be completely fed up with the materialistic society. According to him the upper class society is completely shallow and superficial. He doesn't think that he is fitted to such kind of society. He feels himself alienated from the society. He is lost in his problems of identity. Even though Billy is living with his wife Meena, he has some sort of aloneness. It is only with Bilasia, the tribal girl he feels complete attachment.

The problem of individual identity has a complexity in its different manifestations. Psychologists and philosophers have all discussed the predicament of modern life and man found in both traits of deep-rooted anxiety, alienation and absurdity. The international connections have rendered man rootless and alienated. One of the forms of rootlessness is self-alienation which in turn is related to the loss of identity and its quest to get out of its crisis. Billy's case has been strange from his very childhood. When he was only fourteen he went to Bhubaneswar and visited Konark Billy and his mother spent a few weeks in Bhubaneswar. It was there where Billy started to feel that something strange has been happening to him.

The marital relationship between Billy and Meena is doomed to fail for the reason that the individual's freedom is infringed upon by the spouse. Meena occupies a world that is not risk taking. It is a world which insists on social positions and respectability to be maintained at all costs. He finds his wife to be less involved with his life. He realizes that Meena has very little to offer him any succour in his search for meaning.

Joshi's novels are essentially reflective of the eternal existential situation of the beleaguered contemporary man, which he has depicted with stupendous artistic elegance. His fiction stands out for the simple reason that he lays remarkable emphasis on the existential situation and the pragmatic solution he puts forward. Billy is made of a different-temper. The heroic individual is convinced that the constructions of society cannot sustain his search for the meaning of Existence. The society refuses to understand the individual. The individual has the force of his convictions telling him that his being different is a way of setting for the society, a model for the future whether it is acceptable or not. Thus the hero emerges as a prophet figure who goes beyond his time and place on the strength of his convictions. Billy records his contempt for civilization whose motive is making and spending of money. In this dispensation, he is to feel that he is "swiftly losing grip on life" (Joshi.98) Deep in the forests, life for Billy is more authentic without the affectation of order, sophistication and decorum. The tribal are people who live a life where there is no schism between the precepts and the practice of life. The forest which is the antithesis of civilization, by appearing to have its own order, an essence and a purpose, becomes for Billy his destination where he will make his tryst with destiny.

Joshi's second novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* deals with the theme of anxiety and alienation. The protagonist Billy comes from a upper class society and enjoys everything in life. Still Billy's unusual obsessions bring him the problem of identity. He feels himself alienated in the world which is westernized. Whenever he goes or thinks about the primitive village or something of that kind, he feels himself to be the person belonged to that place. That's why when he met Bilasia, the primitive girl and her surroundings, Billy has completely identified himself with them and started living a new life in that village. He feels happy being there, wearing just a loin cloth and wandering around the Maikalaa Hills. He doesn't want to return to his hometown or to the westernized life. He is a misfit in the modern milieu of technological jungle and seeks an escape from it. Billy finally loses his life in the hill itself as a primitive man.

The narration of the novel is from the point of view of Romesh Sahai, Billy's friend. He also serves as a foil to the character of Billy: while Romesh represents the conventional and the mundane; Billy symbolises the ideal the restless human spirit strives to realise, knowingly or unknowingly. The biggest irony lies in the title which marks out Billy Biswas as a strange case because of his quest for the truth. Billy's case is a strange case because of the fact that his personality was split between modernity and primitivism. This opinion of Billy makes him understand that he was not meant and made for this world and that is why this society was misfit for him. In reality, the first section of the novel is a background to understand the psychologically tortured Billy Biswas that how he was in constant conflict and in his quest of identity. The life he was supposed to live was miles away from the life of tribal in reality. The elite culture-laden society did fit to the quest of identity for Billy and he returns to India. But, to his utter surprise, he finds Delhi not different from the American society and feels Delhi's high hybrid society to be spiritually deserted and emotionally alienated. Billy hates the worldly pleasures but Meena is fond of the money, market and the materialism, supposedly the identity of the elite society. Arun Joshi successfully represents here that his protagonist was not an abnormal person. Rather he was very much a part of the human society and had the wish and desire to give a new identity and meaning to life by establishing a family. But, at the same time he portrays that Billy is destined by his very nature for some other person and places. It brings the character of Billy closer to the character of destiny.

The whole novel is devoted to the search of self identity. The novel has given the true picture of the post-Independent India. At the same time, it deals with western mode of living. The post-Independent India has moved to a higher level of development, but this progress is not achieved. As a cost of urbanization and westernization, India has lost a lot of things and, most importantly, it has lost its roots, history, culture and ethics. The protagonist was not against civilisation or the development, but he was against the wickedness, cosmetics cover and the money centrism. The development brought about human rationality in good but there is no use of rationality if it fails to give happiness and peace to the human soul and mind. The life of Billy from childhood was filled with the inquisitiveness of the world reality.

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