



“Intellectual and Cultural Women in the Works of Arun Joshi”

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Arun Joshi is a novelist of outstanding stature in contemporary Indo-English fiction. On his place as a novelist M.K. Naik points out, “Of the novelists of the late sixties and seventies, the most prominent are Arun Joshi(1939) and Chaman Nahal”.(1) He is the most remarkable novelist of India dealing with the sub-jects-existentialism, alienation and east-west encounter. The fusion of these two qualities bestows his novels a peculiar generic values in modern Indian fiction written in English. Arun Joshi has focused not on social or political problems but on the deeper layers of man’s being. A whole multtude of men and women of highly cultured nature, belonging to the higher classes of Indian society as well as foreign society ,inhabit the pages of five novels of Arun Joshi, namely ‘The Foreigner’, ‘The Strange Case of Billy Biswas’. The Apprentice ‘The Last Labyrinth’ and ‘The City and The River’.

Most significance among women of native as well as foreign origin but belonging to the sophisticated classes are Tuula Lindgren psychiatrist in U.S.A, interested in the anthropological study of Indian tribes and Leela Sabnis, a voracious reader of various philosophers .These women represent different sections of Indian society and foreign society and are striking and memorable figures. A close observation of the wide range of his cultured characters show that Arun Joshi had an intimate knowledge of the higher sections of Indian and foreign society. Through these characters he gives a faithful picture of the affluent and cultured class .

There are four prominent women characters in ‘The Strange Case of Billy Biswas’ the novel dealing with the “.....exploring the predicament of one who consciously alienates himself from society, renouncing his past, his family and the everyday world”.2 Tuula Lindgren, the first and foremost, is a cultured westernized intellectual woman. Sittu, the second, is a cultured Hindu wife anchored in the Indian tradition. Meena Biswas, the third is sophisticated wife of Biswas. Bilasia, the fourth, belong to the aboriginal section of society. They contribute in their own way to the necessity of the tragic complications of destiny projected in the novel. But here we shall analyze two women characters named Tuula Lindgren and Situ.

Tuula, is highly influenced by Hindu philosophy unknowingly or willingly and represents her as the sub-centre of the plot. Her character has a strange blend of romanticism, traditionalism and modernity. She is the type of the new foreign woman who can analyze the rootlessness i.e, existentialism of modern era .She is the centre of Billy Biswas and afterwards of Romi Sahani U.S.A. She is the first person with whom Billy makes friends. It is Tuula Lindgren, who does not ignore Bimal Biswas’ love of “finding out about the aboriginalness of the world”.3 Austerity is the mottos of her life. She does not give much importance to the value of money as a foreigner does generally. She hails from a highly educated family which is thoroughly



westernized, although the details of it are not portrayed by Arun Joshi. But she belongs to upper layer of society of the western classes. Romi Sahai, the story teller, takes her name on the issue of the aboriginals of the world. Billy Biswas is unaware of this fact. Like a western cultured woman she is frank and not serious. It is she who phones to take to Billy but by chance Romi Sahani receives it. She studies at Columbia and schooling are hinted at in the following words, “Tuula Lindgren was Swedish and had come to the United States for advance training in psychiatric social work”.⁴ Her character is mysterious because nowhere she discloses her intention of life except psychiatric training. But she is well educated. It is her bad luck that she passes her youth without the male partner in the form of a lover or a husband. Although Billy tries to be one, but he fails in his attempt.

She is a lover of art and refined. She is young as well as intelligent. It is not her beauty. That attracts Billy Biswas and the D.M. of Jhansi but her intellectual quality. Unlike Billy Biswas and Romi Sahani, “the roommate”⁵ of Billy Biswas, she lives “in east village, very close to western edge of the Lower East side.”⁶ She is not slovenly. She likes sanitation where she lives comparing his apartment to Tuula’s Romi Sahai comments, “Neither her locality nor her apartment gave was of taste and slight artiness.”⁷ She is a tactful and beautiful woman of taste. The tale-teller tells the following words about her personality. “She herself was all taste and intelligence and a times very witty. She was a lovely person (blond hair the colour of the sea) she was thirty but looked younger”⁸

In the very beginning her character leaves a good effect on Billy while he was going to San Francisco and she was on her way to Topeka to work in a mental hospital. During the conversational, the fact comes to the surface that Tuula Lindgren “was strongly interested in India specially in her tribal people.”⁹ It is clear that Billy Biswas, who is too much enamored of the aboriginal life of India, finds a girl friend of the same motif and purpose and interest in U.S.A. It is she also touch the central theme of the novel who times in the following lines about the primitive life “Dance, drink andlove.”¹⁰ Further Billy tells Romi regarding his interest. “She had quite an interest in the occult. You know things like hypnotism- suggestion and so on.”¹¹

As a cultured and intellectual lady, she is matchless in the work. She is not shallow western women surrounded in their narrow domestic walls and praising their countries blindly. She likes and love other countries and people of the world. She listens very attentively when Billy and she “talked of the gone kings and of works of Verrier Elwin”. She is also influenced by the “talk of religion and yoga and Gandhi.”¹² and Gandhi’s non- violence.” It may be concluded that under the spiritual influence of Gandhiji, she had adopted austerity and gives no value of money in her individual life.

Tuula Lindgren is a psychiatrist, psychologist and philosopher. Like a true psychiatrist, she teaches Billy Biswas “ about the theories of Freud and Carl Jung and the work of Karl Menninger.”¹³ Like an expert psychiatrist Tuula Lindgren analysis Billy Biswas as existentialist learning and interest in tribal life. She aptly



comments regarding his feelings, “A great force , urkraft ,a.....a primitive force. He is afraid of it and tries to suppress itBut it is very strong in him, much stronger than in you or me. It can explore anytime.”¹⁴ And her guess comes true when Biswas disappears among tribal people during the expedition leaving the duty of teacher in Delhi university. Like a philosopher she wants to unravel the knot of his problem. In one of the letter he interrogates her and writes thus_ “ It seems, my dear Tuula, that we are swiftly losing what is unknown as one’s grip on life. Why else this contact blurring of reality? Who am I ? Who are my parents? My wife? My child? At times I took at them, sitting at the dinner table, and for a passing moment I cannot decide who they are or what accident of creation has brought us together”(15)

Regarding her psychiatric nature R.K. Dhawan rightly remarks “Billy’s was a split personality- split between primitive and civilized. Tuula Lindgren who is getting advanced training in psychiatric social work at Columbia gives it an expression when she ruminates”.¹⁶ Billy Biswas feels something inside him, but he is not sure. Something he is afraid of it and tries to suppress it.”¹⁷

R.K. Dhawan say that she hesitates to choose “between the primitive and the civilized”¹⁸ world instead of her failures, R.K. Dhawan praises her role of a psychiatrist. If Billy Biswas’ problem is unsolved, it is his own fault because she leaves no stone unturned for her boy friend, and says, “In American Billy’s Swiss girl friend used to help him come out of the strange hallucinations. Being a psychiatrist, she also advises Billy not give a free hand to them as they were “very dangerous for Billy.”¹⁹

Another features of her character is her frankness. She tells things in a candid way without blinking eyes. The protagonist likes this attribute and says, “If she decided to talk of something, she talked without batting an eye. This was a thing I learned from her.”²⁰ Epigrammatic quality and aphorism is found in her speech. It is devoid of exhibition or all sort of self-consciousness. In spite of being a Swedish woman, she is not a fashionable lady. Nor is she a spendthrift. She believes in simple living and high thinking. She does not like to live a luxurious life as a western women does. Billy Biswas comments in this connection, “She believed that to survive man needs minimum goods which must either be given to him by society or he must receive by exchange to procure them. This minimum, however, is very, low much lower than people imagine, and , except in times of great calamity, like war. “²¹ The novelist points out, “The novelist points out, “But the search for truth, she believed, was a lonely business, you were fortunate if you had companion if you were understood.”²²

Meena Chatterjee is the second in the second intellectual and cultured woman of Bengal in ‘The Strange Case of Billy Biswas’ she plays an important role in Billy Biswas’ life as a wife. But her role as a wife is not good. Billy Biswas is not satisfied with her. Even she is not satisfied with him. Both are poles apart. And the two different poles cannot meet. Billy Biswas thinks his problem of alienation can be solved by marrying her but she is unable to understand him and his real problem in the plot-construction.



In order to cure his obsession for the primitive and to settle down in life “Billy decides to get married”²³ to Meena Chatterjee, “a young girl of 22 or 23 sophisticated and most beautiful girl of his own Bengali community.”²⁴ She is born and brought up around Delhi as a pretty girl in a westernized sort of way – the most remarkable thing about her was that she was never short of word. She speaks “entirely in English in that unique, rather fit, accent that is to be found among young ladies taught in convent.”²⁵ But marriage does not solve his problem. Joy Abraham rightly comments on Meena Chatterjee’s role in his respect, “If Meena had possessed a rare degree of empathy or even a sufficient. Idea of suffering, things might have been different. But her upbringing, her ambitions, twenty years of contact with a phony society—all have ensured that she does not have it.”²⁶ He married only to avert hallucination as some terrible thing might happen unless he does something drastic. In a close-knit Indian family the only thing is to get married. It is like taking out an “normalcy”. Despite being a married man, feeling insecure again, he tries to channelize his passions through the course of romance with Rima Kaul which even borders on seduction.

Romesh Sahai and Tuula Lindgren and even Meena Biswas are unable to understand his problem of alienation or primitive love. And the problem is the cause of their relation becoming more bitter as D. Prembati points out, “The collapse of his marriage with Meena was again due to this phantom or hallucination.”²⁷ And Billy Biswas destroys his family while Meena Biswas destroy is incapable to control and solve his problem.

“Although she is “quite unusually pretty in a westernized sort of way, she is not able at all to give peace and satisfaction that Billy badly needs”²⁸ Dr. M. Pandey says, about her capacity of understanding Billy’s problems. On the other hand, what he comes to receive from Meena Biswas and depression. He is given to understand Meena Biswas, truly speaking, cannot respond to him.

A product of “phony society” as she is, she fails to quench his thirst, to satisfy his soul. The ditch between them becomes wider and wider. There is a gap of communication between the two. Like an old Indian woman she suspects that Billy Biswas has love affair and for clarification she wants Romesh Sahai’s help as Six months have passed since he did not touch her even once. Billy Biswas affirms, “Communication between us was reduced to zero”²⁹. Dr .M. Panday aptly analyses their relationship thus, “Billy is east Meena is west both east and cannot meet together”³⁰

Gargi, the another character is a worshipper of the idol of Krishna. There is always an idol of Krishana lying in her cottage. Idol worshipping has been a tradition in India. She has staunch belief in God in each and every atom of the universe. She is a selfless lady. Dr . M.Pandey rightly comments regarding Indian saintly life and Gargi and the western life, “Som’s grandfather, his father, Leela Sabnis and Dr. K. stand for the western world which is the world of reason and science where in there is no doubt, no uncertainty. On the other hand, the image of Banaras, After, Geeta, Gargi, the mother of Som and the Sufi Pir represents the Indian world of the mystery of life, love, god and Death—all a Labyrinth.”³¹ Hari Mohan Passed too,



very aptly remarks about Arun Joshi's sketching the character of Gargi. At one place Dr .M .Pandey expresses his view on Gargi: "The Lal Haveli is a symbol of life itself. Its Last Ladyrith symbolizes death. Som's mother, his wife Geeta ,and Gargi symplolises endurance, trust and religious faith . Gargi is a mysterious character who turns the purposelessness into mystery of life."32

Through the character of Gargi, Arun has presented, " The oriented spiritual world of faith."33 It proves that Arun Joshi has been highly influenced by the east in adapting the character of Gargi in the Last Labyrinth. About Arun Joshi's formation influences, Dr. M.Pandey says , "He has been considerably influenced by.....Mahatma Gandhi and Bhagwad-Gita."34 Gargi is the symbol of mystery, religion, endurance, religious faith, transcendental philosophy, motherhood, sainthood, worshipper and what not. Like a superhuman and divine woman she is like the ocean one could never reach the bottom of her and having nothing she has all.

References

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