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**APPRECIATE THE RELEVANCE OF LIFE, OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MAYA, OF GOD AND
OF FAITH: READING ARUN JOSHI'S *THE LAST LABYRINTH* (1981)**

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ABSTRACT

The paper interprets how In *The Last Labyrinth* (1981), Joshi attempts to cross the threshold of the temple and tries to bring the Outsider to the end of his difficult journey. This novel was winner of the Sahitya Academy Award for the year 1982, attempts to explore and fathom the mystery of the poetry that lies within the temple and envelops the whole of Hinduism in general. Joshi has sought with success to penetrate and appreciate the relevance of life, of the significance of Maya, of God and of faith. With this novel Joshi once again moves into the world of the wealthy and the elite and depicts the ennui of Som, Bhaskar's life. Bhaskar, the protagonist, is a debonair million e industrialist lacking nothing that money could provide. And yet, driven by the urge to possess more and hoard a lot more, Bhaskar is driven and plagued by a restlessness that is not unfamiliar to the reader for we have glimpsed the same restlessness in Ratan Rathor. In order to satiate this compulsive all consuming greed and restlessness he devotes all his time to plotting out devious methods to come companies and industrial concerns to make them his own. It is this greed that leads him to Aftab Rai and the mysterious Anuradha. Aftab Rai as a businessman does not impress Bhaskar with his acumen for deals because it becomes clear that Rai is facing ruin.

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INTRODUCTION

Joshi devotes considerable space to discuss Rai's ancestry, which is bound to the historical traditions of India. But the musty smell of decadence is a factor that cannot be ignored for it envelops Rai everywhere in his palatial but eerily isolated Irlansion- Lal Haven. He forms a perfect foil to the exuberant Bhaskar who, induced to acquire Raj's tottering business, is spurred on by learning of Rai's own romantic liaisons, which include the mysterious Anuradha. While Rai intrigues Bhaskar, Anuradha excites Wm. In fact the couple attracts him and is able to sustain this interest throughout the novel.

Both Rai and Anuradha are described as "obsolete" (p 12) is exuding a smell of musty grandeur and ageless beauty. Joshi alternates between the cities of Bombay and Benares. While Bombay is hardly described,

Senates is shown as pulsating and throbbing with life. Senates is dirty and yet holy to the Hindus. There is life and the incessant call of death. Bhaskar's first visit is to a dargan, a grave of a holy saint, and he feels tricked for having been "Shifted so suddenly from the euphoric heights of the Intercontinental to those desolate mounds"(p 15). And yet it is in this desolate dargan that Bhaskar becomes aware of Anuradha's beauty. It is Aftab Rai's Lal Haven that points to the last labyrinth leading finally to the Himalayas The word is used to refer to a "Network of winding paths, roads, etc., through which it is difficult to find one's way without help" !

constructed so that people are able to lose their way and perhaps never be found According to Kai the last labyrinth contains death is death. This persistent preoccupation with death colours this book with a trepidation that mis the reader with dread For Bhaskar the death of his father due to acute melancholia has left a void in his life that could never be filled His mother died of cancer and in his view because of Krishna " My mother believed Krishna would cure her and flushed her capsules down the toilet. Krishna sat on top of her bureau and smiled and smiled and smiled until she was dead" (P.57) However it is in connection with the theme of death and of life that Joshi has used the image of the last labyrinth The concept of the labyrinth is seen in the streets of Benares and in Rai's Lal Haven. Another character is the deaf and dumb Gargi who leaves Bhaskar nonplussed and disturbed While "K" (Dr. Kashyap) has a major hand in the recouping of his wasted body, Gargi revives hisdejected spirits In her wisdom she is able to perceive Bhaskar as a man lusting after money and the body of the beautiful Anuradha. Gargi helps him resolve his inner torment by slow guidance.

Part I of this novel traces the love that grows between Anuradha and Bhaskar. Joshi uses this opportunity to make a reference to Anuradha's bizarre background Daughter of a woman who felt she was wife only to Krishna, Anuradha is a victim of unscrupulous and lustfulmen. "K" even refers to her attempts at suicide after an attack of small pox. These details help us look at scarred yet charming Anuradha with sympathy. A heart attack stalls Bhaskar's plans to promote his amorous purpose. Part II of the novel is the beginning of the long journey to salvation and a thorough resolution of Bhasku's inner turmoil. Gargi cures Bhaskar and brings him back &om the jaws of death. But Anuradha's sacrifice of her love for his life when Gargi demands it of her enrages Bhaskar.

Bhaskar predictably takes the path of easy vengeance to teach Anuradha a lesson With renewed vigour he decides to buy up all the shares of Rai's company to teach them both a lesson. The task however proves very difficultfor he soon discovers the existence of a block of shares formerly belonging to Anuradha but at the present moment of his revenge sold to an unknown party. Detectives are used to trace the missing shares and the track leads upto Lord Krishna Himself. Bewildered but determined Bhaskar traces the temple atop a hill and despite his illhealth climbs to the last labyrinth ostensibly for his precious shares but more to learn of the true meaning and significance of what lies in the last labyrinth.

He meets death at the foot of the hills in an old man. It is a peaceful and willed death, a dying effected to the rhythm and cadence of the mystic chants of the priests. It is death without agony and without the usual grotesque marring of the features. It is liberation and Mukti. By implication the last labyrinth contains freedom and not death.

Faith And Love And Above All

At the temple, the last labyrinth, Bhaskar sees faith and love and above all Gargi who listens to all his vituperations against Anuradha, gives him the shares and watches him leave with the fierce intention of taking Anuradha away. But Anuradha disappears. The hint of the supernatural surfaces when Anuradha disappears on Janmashtami day- the day of the birth of Krishna. Bhaskar returns to Bombay dogged by the threat contained in Rai's unsigned letter. At the close of the novel the damned man is changed He has realized his purpose in life and the true nature of love that has always eluded him. He pleads with the absent Anuradha- "Anuradha if there is a God and if you have met Him and if He is willing to listen, then Anuradha my soul tell Him, tell this God, to have mercy upon me. Tell him I am weary. Of so many fears; so much doubting Of two dark earth and these empty heavens Plead for me Anuradha. He will listen to you" (p.222-223).

His casual attempt at suicide is the mark of a man who has not realized the indomitable energy to survive and has not found the spirit that lurks within his heart. But the end of the novel is positive. Like Rather

before him, Bhaskar penetrates deeper to arrive at the perception of true love. He is able to realise that love means giving and giving of one's self like Anuradha. Just as the true meaning of love is realized so too God becomes someone more than an idol playing a stony flute. Joshi's reference to Janamashtami reinforces this sense of deep attachment to Krishna. Bhaskar is nonchalant but not his mother nor Anuradha. This mystic love of Krishna is developed at the greatest intensity when Anuradha expresses her devotion to Krishna but does not consider herself married on this earth. " I can imagine I am married to Ahab. I can imagine I am married to you. My mother used to imagine she was married to Krishna." (P.128).

This concept of Bridal mysticism is an integral part of Hinduism and Joshi does not name it. Many mystic saints had adored God and offered prayers expressing their deep longing in the language of bridal mysticism for this spiritual union of the human bride with the divine Bridegroom, Lord Sri Krishna. The devotee, male or female, should enter into mine mood to adore the Lord as "Bhuvana Sundari" to gain the fruits of devotion" (The Hindu, 23 Dec, 1983, p 16, col) Joshi skilfully weaves in this novel the concept of Bridal mysticism just as he artfully delineates the significance of dying in Benares especially for a Hindu. Therefore when Anuradha disappears we conclude that she has been united with Krishna in love and devotion on Janamashtami day: a glorious union, the significance of which dawns very slowly on Bhaskar. The element of mystery and suspense in the death of Anuradha keeps Joshi's readers speculating long after the novel comes to a close. To find peace and purpose in life Bhaskar roams about lustng after different women with varying degrees of passion. He Bounders about and is yet strangely buoyed by Anuradha's spirits infused in him Bhaskar learns the meaning of love as giving and sacrificing and .in the final union with the Supreme One. He also realizes that love could be worship as that felt by Rai for Anuradha. Joshi invests Rai with mystery and evil. Viewed as the villain with Tarakki, his chauffeur, as his agent, Rai comes alive with respect to his love for Anuradha. He venerates her as if she was a Goddess. In his desolate letter to Bhaskar, Rai says- " all is desolation- take hold I tell myself- take hold Aaab Kai, you can live without her but I cannot live without her" (p.222).

Despite these realizations of the true nature of love, Bhaskar feels alone. However, the emptiness, the voids that threatened him earlier do not return towards the end of the novel. The voids are replaced with a sense of deepening sorrow, which is the culmination of his awareness of the true nature of God, of love, of life, of duties and of detachment For Joshi the last labyrinth consists of love and life with the inevitable release of death. This juxtaposition of life and death, almost as if they were two sides of the same coin is what constitutes the last labyrinth. To regard one as wholly significant to the exclusion of the other is human folly. Bhaskar realises this and denies Rai's negative view of the last labyrinth as a symbol of death alone.

Bhaskar's situation is similar to that of Gautama, the Buddha whose experiences disillusion him totally with life and people around him. But Joshi stops short of fictionalizing the story of Siddhartha. For instance he gives neither the details about Bhaskar's way to a solution nor the description of Bhaskar's knowledge Instead he brings Bhaskar across the threshold in to the temple, the last labyrinth, educates him and allows him to return to a humdrum existence, completely altered and suffused with energy.

The Best Commentary On The Vedanta Philosophy

Obviously Bhaskar's way is not that of either Rathor or that of Sindi. Joshi does not depict the completion of Bhaskar's journey since the philosophy of detachment and the concept of right action are never finite. Joshi sets Bhaskar as he does Sindi on the track of right action In this novel he takes us to Benares, explores it in its essence through Bhaskar and allows the readers to draw their own conclusions his preoccupation with the other world is seen in all four novels. Joshi's significance as a writer is chiefly on account of his ability to state and depict sufficient action and philosophical discussion to simulate introspective thought He has displayed a sensibility that is basically Hindu effectively combined with an idiom refined by his urban and cosmopolitan background The vision contained in all his novels transcends the narrowness of any particular country. The vision is highly effective because it relates to mankind irrespective of caste colour or creed. It is this note of universality that renders all of Joshi's novels excellent material for cultural education no less than artistic appreciation From Joshi's work we are able to learn that the Vedanta as a religion must be

intensely practical. It should be carried out in every part of our lives. Perhaps, the accent in the novels of Joshi is on living out of the theory rather than intellectual gymnastics. The Vedanta therefore as a religion must not only be practical but it should be viable in every part of a man's life. The false division between and differentiation between religion and the life of the world and its men must vanish because as it is obvious Vedanta teaches oneness, of one life through out. Vivekananda says that the dynamism of the thoughts in the Vedanta has been the outcome "not of retirement into forests but have emanated from persons whom we expect to lead the busiest lives-&mom ruling monarchs" {Vivekananda: Practical Vedanta p.6). It is not possible to conceive any man busier than a monarch who mires over millions of people. Though the Bhagavad Gta is not mentioned by name either in the novels or by Joshi elsewhere, its presence is everywhere. It can be considered as the best commentary on the Vedanta philosophy and curiously enough the scene is laid on the battlefield where Krishna teaches this philosophy to Arjuna. The doctrine, which is emphasized, is that of intense activity coupled with eternal calmness. This according to Krishna is the secret of work, the final goal of Vedanta. Inactivity, as we understand it in the sense of passivity, certainly cannot be the goal. "Were it so, then the walls around us would be the most intelligent; they are inactive Clods of earth, stumps of trees, would be the greatest sages in the world;. they are inactive. Nor does inactivity become activity when it is combined with passion. Real activity, which is the goal of Vedanta, is combined with eternal calmness, the calmness, which cannot be ruffled, the balance of mind, which is never disturbed whatever happens. And we all know from our experience in life that that is the best attitude for work." (Vivekananda p 8). The calmer we are, the better for our work because all our energy is not spent on mere feeling but in doing good work. The man who gives way to anger, or hatred or any other passion cannot work;, he only breaks If himself to pieces and does nothing fruitful. That is why Rathor as the seeker of vengeance is laughed at by the Sheikh who exhorts him to emulate the ideals of his father who was calm, forgiving, well balanced and purposeful in his life.

The Vedanta preaches the ideal, and the ideal is always beyond and ahead of the practical. According to philosophers there are two tendencies in human nature: one is to elevate life to the ideal and the other is to harmonise the ideal with life. It is this harmonizing of the ideal with the life man lives that Joshi seems to advocate in his novels. Each man thinks that he can do only a certain type of work as is seen in the case of Sindi Oberoi and Ratan Rathor as also the other protagonists of Joshi's novels. Selfishness and self-enjoyment motivate most of the work done. When man is confronted with a certain ideal, as Sindi and Rathor were, the first step towards which is to give up selfishness. Most men will consider it as impractical. But when the ideal preached could be reconciled with self-interest then man will consider the ideal as suitable. Thus Sindi makes a fuss of his non-attachment and Rathor about his honour and his sense of injured innocence. According to Vivekananda "What I think is practical, is to me the only practicality in the world. If I am a shopkeeper, I think shopkeeping the only practical pursuit in the world. If I am a thief, I think stealing is the best means of being practical; others are not practical" (Vivekananda: p 10) It is important to understand that the Vedanta is intensely practical and does not preach an impossible ideal. In one word, this ideal is that man is divine and that the human soul is pure and omniscient, that it never dies and that it is very important for man to have faith in himself first. This is the second aspect of Joshi's presentation of his protagonist's Self. A man who does not believe in himself is an atheist "Not believing in the glory of our own soul is what the Vedanta calls atheism" {Vivekananda: p 11.).

Thus Rathor towards the end of the novel begins to find the courage to believe that he too, if he makes the effort, can be like his father, a man of honour, and of use to people. The ideal is practical and is inside of him, is his self. In the same way, the Vedanta recognizes no sin, merely errors, the greatest error being that of weakness. Every time Rathor or Sindi and even Billy feel that they cannot cope and are weak without any power to rectify the existing situation to a semblance of order, they become bound by the conditions of life, and grow further away from realisms the purity of their self.

The realization of the true self cannot be achieved by mere renouncement of the world. It has to be combined with activity in all possible conditions of life. Perhaps the oneness of Vedanta is best seen in the way Joshi shows that there are no two jives for man nor two worlds nor two different kinds of life for man. The

actual has to be reconciled to the ideal; the present life should be made to coincide with the eternal life. Therefore Sindi realises that he had misunderstood the philosophy of detachment He learns that he can maintain a semblance of order in his life if he is active without being passionately involved in the outcome of his action. Since Oneness is what rnvdfested in the Vedanta Sindi as also Rathor learns that is looking down with contempt on others does not serve the purpose of the realization of one's self. The difference between weakness and strength is one of degree just as the difference between heaven and hellish one of degree just as the difference between life and death is one of degree, and not of kind, because oneness is the secret of everything Work can never be accomplished by condemnation of anything or anybody for everybody's goal is the same.

The Remedy To The Strength

The remedy is to talk about the strength that is already within one. For this purpose, like Ramaswamy, every man needs a guru who will tell him that it is important to manifest his self in the highest degree. It is thus important to stress that are very low degrees of self-manifestation The ideal of faith in ourselves can help man to accomplish anything Thus Sindi finds a sense of belonging after his baptism into the doctrine of true activity. The idea is to show the energy and power of men like Sindi. The whole idea of this kind of ethics is to teach man that it is through the self that the whole world is known. "Take off the Self and the whole universe vanishes In and through the self-all knowledge comes. Therefore, it is the best known of all. It is yourself, that which you call I" (Vivekananda: p 27)

The God of the Vedanta is thus a known God, a practical God who is in all ofmankind " Feel like Christ and you will be a Christ; feel like Buddha and you will be a Buddha. It is feeling that is the life, the strength, the vitality, without which no amount of intellectual activity can reach God Intellect is like limbs without the power of locomotion It is only when feeling enters and gives them motion that they move and work on others" (Vivekananda: p 31).

Real longing for the knowledge of Brahman cannot grow as .long the mind chugs to sense objects. But the truth is that sense-desires do not leave a person even though he wants to leave them after he is convinced of their futility. He has to struggle hard to get rid of them This creates inner conflict. But the seeker of the self s not instructed to give up his worldly activities at this stage but to continue them while trying to make himself free &om attachment by maintaining evenness of mind in success and failure, in honour and dishonour, in happiness and woe. This is the practice of Emma-yoga. Lord Krishna says to Arjuna, "Being steadfast in yoga, O Dhananjaya, perform your actions, without attachment and with even-mindedness in success and in failure. This evenness of mind is called yoga" (Swami Satprakasananda: p 257). Literally, yogameans union. Generally, the word is used for the union of the individual self with the supreme self, the realisation of God, the Supreme Power. Karma-yoga means karma as a method of God-realisation. Thus yoga in the widest sense signifies spiritual discipline. There are two types of Karma-yogis or doers of action A Karmayogi of the devotional type does his work as an offering to God He claims nothing for himself and rem amsunperturbed by the vicissitudes of fortune in life. As he forsakes claim on his work and its results they do not act on him. Through the practice of devotion (Bhaktlu) he attains his salvation in due course. TheKarma-yogi of introspective type aims at the realisation of the self as Brahman (the Absolute) He holds his thoughts on the real nature of the self while he works. He recognizesthat all actions belong to the body, the organs and the mind and that the self, a calm witness of all physical and mental movements, is ever unchangeable and is at rest. He works but is ever calm and self-poised "A person regards himself as the doer simply because he identifies the self with the psychophysical complex The body the organs and the mind- as well as external objects- are transformations of the gun asof Prakriti" (Swami Satprakashananda: p 261).

Embracing The Nature

Prakriti (Nature) is comprised of the three gunas- sauva, rojas, and tamas is primordial nature from which the whole universe is evolved The self is beyond all the changes that take place in the realm of Prakriti. It is the very presence of the self that enables Prakriti to transform and change. There is no awareness anywhere but in the self "While the three gun asare like the three strands of a rope they are not the attributes

of Prakriti but its constituents. Sauna is the principle of poise conducive to purity, knowledge, and joy. Rajas is the principle of motility leading to activity, desire restlessness, or disquietude Tamas is the principle of inertia resulting in inaction, dullness, delusion" (Swami Satprakashananda: p 261) Activity therefore is of the body and the self is beyond and distinct from them all. Only a man of self-knowledge can maintain the attitude of a spectator and the seeker of self-knowledge has to cultivate it.

As we see the philosophy of Vedanta does not destroy the world but explains it. It does not destroy the person but explains him as well as his individuality, by showing him the real individual self He learns that the same spirit which is inside the sun and the moon, the fire and the earth, is in him so that he is able to see the Lord in everything, the reality of everything And thus he realises the Brahman, the light that shines everywhere within the eyes of the enlightened man as well as in the stars and the sun. This in effect means that to realise the self and attain knowledge of the self one must not deny the universe but see the self in everything Neither good nor bad neither life nor death only the infinite Brahman exists According to Vedanta that man who has arrived at this perception of knowledge becomes &ee--&ee of the evil he sees, free of the dangers that confront him, free of the death that faces all. He becomes free because he is able to enjoy his search for his true self and thus is able to seek the truth in his existence. A man becomes free when he does not hope for anything &om anyone. He is free when he realises that all the help that has to come to him is &om within him Only he has the strength to work for all that he wants. Joshi exemplifies this in the characters of Sindi, Rathor, Billy and Som Joshi seems to echo the Vedanta when he shows that Infinity is the true self of man, it will never vanish and it will abide forever. But recognising that we are limited by our Karma, Joshi shows how a Rathor or a Sindi or a Som or even a Billy limit themselves and are dragged around by their limited views. Freedom is for all who realise that they are everything and yet nothing unless united with the Supreme self. When man is able to achieve this realisation the whole vision becomes changed and instead of an eternal prison and a confusing labyrinth the world becomes a place where the discovery of one's oneness with the Divinity takes place.

In The Last Labyrinth Joshi shows how some realizes that all gods are here on this earth, and they are prototypes of man. When some becomes free he realizes that he has been projecting his little doubles and that he is the original of the gods; he is real, he is divine and that there was no need for him to be afraid of what lay in the last labyrinth. To the eyes of Som in the beaming the last labyrinth held all the tremendous horrors of death but in the end of the novel torment gives way to a gentle realization of bliss and a feeling of contentment When man attains a semblance to what he considers freedom he will realize that life is the universal life, that the heavens and all those' places are here. When man becomes free he does not turn his back on society and rush off to die in the forest or the cave but looks at the world with a new meaning The same world exists but man has become new. The same phenomena will remain but they become infused with a new meaning it is only then that man is able to understand the world for what it is. He realizes that the eternal voice within him was the music of the self which has its origins in the earth, the laws of which is contained everywhere In one word the Vedanta is to know man as he really is and to worship the divinity in him.

Karma Is A Word Often Used Without Its Special Significance

Karma is a word often used without its special significance The Sanskrit term Karma is often used synonymously with work but the two terms cannot be used interchangeably. Karma is distinguished from instinctive action, which is unintentional. Karma is strictly volitional action it is based on the recognition of man's power of judgment and his capacity to choose his course of action. Not only does man choose and experience sense-objects he also evaluates them. He can distinguish between high and low, true and false as also good and bad, right and wrong with the senses he perceives the objects and with his mind he judges them.

Every individual is responsible for his prosperity and adversity, for his elevation and degradation, for his enjoyment and suffering. Other factors are subsidiary. The laws of Karma rule out fatalism, accidentalism and naturalism in human affairs. Karma is ever associated with the process of self-determination No

volitional action is possible without self-awareness. The doctrine of fatalism thus receives when the responsibility is laid at the door of man's effort towards self-realisation. Thus Swami Vivekananda lays the whole responsibility on man when he says, "We, we, and none else are responsible for what we suffer. We are the effects, and we are the causes. We are free therefore If I am unhappy, it has been of my own making, and that very thing shows that I can be happy if I will. If I am impure, that is also of my own making, and that very thing shows that I can be pure if I will. The human will stands beyond all circumstance Before it- the strong, gigantic, infinite will and freedom in man- all the powers, even of nature, must bow down, succumb and become its servants This is the result of the law of Karma" (Swami Satprakashananda: p 134).

Freedom of action is a special privilege of human life. Man is thus accountable for his own deeds inasmuch as he has the freedom of choosing his course of action. The penalty or the privilege resulting from choosing his course of action is moral responsibility. He has to use this privilege with care because as he sows so he reaps. This in effect is the law of Karma and the universal law of cause and effect in relation to human life. In this way man is able to mould his life. "Every thought that we think every deed that we do, after a certain time becomes fine, goes into seed form so to speak and lives in the fine body in a potential form and after a time it emerges again and bears its results These results condition the life of man. Thus he moulds his own life. Man is not bound by any other laws excepting those which he makes for himself Our thoughts, our words, and deeds, are the threads of the net which we throw round ourselves, for good or for evil. once we set in motion a certain power, we have to take the full consequences of it. This is the law of karma" (Swami Satprakashananda: p 134)

When we realise & come to a reading and understanding of Joshi's work that all his protagonists follow this course of self-determination we also learn especially in The Last Labyrinth, that the sovereignty of God and man's freedom of action go together. Whatever power man has is derived from Him. None can work independently of Him. Yet each person has the freedom to use the power in his own way. Anuradha and Aravati Rai are illustrative examples of the ways in which one can use personal freedom The more Som Bhaskar realises Anuradha's mesmeric beauty, the more he wants to be powerful enough to possess her. But he is not able to because he has not curbed his ego and thus the flow of his own power is momentarily curbed Keeping to the laws of Karma Joshi shows how man is the architect of his own life, getting what he deserves, reaping as he sows, his happiness and misery proceeding from his right or wrong ways of living life.

Conclusion

In this vein Joshi shows how the law of Karma promotes individual and social well-being Are repeated success and failure, exaltation and humiliation in public career, after sweet and bitter experiences in 'social and domestic life, the protagonists become convinced of the inviolability of the moral law that righteous deeds invariably lead them to well-being and happiness. Therefore Rathor and Sindi as well as Som and Billy to a certain extent realise how important it is to do good, to be of use and entertain thoughts that were ennobling and pure. What emerges which is of immense importance, is the quality of fearlessness that Joshi wishes his readers to take note of in the moral fibre of his protagonists Fear of the battle of life or failure in it, bitter experience of unforeseen calamities, sufferings caused by bereavement, humiliation or chronic disease - any one or more of these can generate disgust with life or dislike of society. But man must learn and teach himself not to become victim of all his insecurities and bad feelings Instead he should channel all his energies to realise his self and understand and assimilate the Supreme Self Hence right understanding is essential to right living, a fact we see for ourselves in the novels we have studied Som Bhaskar makes money but he achieves no peace of mind because he lacked right understanding. This is why his vision of life, of Anuradha, is distorted When he becomes a victim of his anger and greed he is not able to reconcile his loss and his judgment becomes vitiated It is when he learns of what lay in the last labyrinth, that he realises the stability of practicing virtues This insight enables him to see life as a whole Like the other protagonists before him he typifies in himself the search and the insecurity, the fulfillment and the bliss The four novels thus studied image in them the journey towards the realisation of the Self and the glorying in the supreme

Self The vision of Joshi starts with the foreigner who finds himself in the last labyrinth where truth is what prevails and death is merely an extension of life. Without taking recourse to obvious references, Joshi is able to penetrate the non-duality of existence His world seems banal but truly uplifting in experience Joshi has shown a humanity, which is stricken by greed, lust for power and anger, surrounded by political friction and economic unrest and moral confusion The challenge of evil, which undermines human society, is a palpable experience in the four novels The saga of answering that challenge begins with non-attachment, progresses to the true meaning of detachment, then to renunciation pauses at penance and finally to a glimpse of salvation Salvation is not easy to arrive at. The labyrinth of the mind has to be uncoiled and an understanding and faith has to be arrived at to dust away the cobwebs of confusion, which lie in crass materialism and greed The world is not denied at any point of this journey of discovery. Instead Joshi takes care to present all his protagonists as finally becomes Karma-yogis. The influence of the Western way of life is only discernible in The Foreigner because it is set in the U.S A. but the attitudinal-postures of Sindi remind the reader of Meurleult, Camus' Outsidel, The resemblances end with the postures affected because the freedom attained by Meurleult is in keeping with the dualistic nature of the religion of the West. While Sindi achieves a release in life through detachment and the practice of duty towards other men, Meurleult wishes for death to achieve the freedom of the self.

The Vedantic conception of immortality refers to an immortality that is attained on this earth in this very body through the knowledge of the immortal nature of the self. A man realises that he has always been free and when he realises his Heedom, it is a realisation born out of the knowledge he attains in this very life A free soul is not bound by the injunctions of the scriptures or by the conventions of society but he will not do anything that will harm others because long before his attaining the knowledge of Brahman he had suppressed all selfishness. Meurleult's freedom is attained only after his death because he is very much conscious of his physical body. When he is asked why he killed the two men towards whom he had no animosity. he blames his loss of mental equilibrium on the harshness of the sunlight on the beach. Joshi's protagonists are physical but not condemned to that aspect alone. There is a way and therein lies their Beedom.

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