

Chapter - VI

THE LAST LABYRINTH

Arun Joshi's Magnum opus is **The Last Labyrinth**, his fourth novel, which won him the prestigious 1983 Sahitya Akademi Award. Basically, the novel is based on love-story but it explores the search for the meaning of life by its main hero Som Bhaskar.

Tapan Kumar Gosh writes in his book **Arun Joshi's fiction – The Labyrinth of life -**

“Although written in English, **The Last Labyrinth** is unmistakably a book about an Indian by an Indian. The issues explored in this novel – life, love, God and death are basic human preoccupations.

The questions that Joshi's hero's confronts this time are metaphysical in their profundity – the mysteries of life, love, and death the greatest of all enigmas – the last labyrinth.”

Daruwalla found **The Last Labyrinth**

“...to be a novel of ideas of concepts of events delicately synchronized to a plan.”

Dr. Satish Kumar writes that

“...in **The Last Labyrinth** the material and spiritual dimensions have been correlated with commendable sureness and expression.”

Shankar Kumar writes in “The World of Business and personal Relationship in **The Foreigner** and **The Last Labyrinth**.” -

“The heroes of both **The Foreigner** and **The Last Labyrinth** suffer from the malady of the crisis of identity. But in **The Last Labyrinth** the crisis of identity is at the cosmic level besides the physical one.”

Mukteshwar Pandey writes in his book **Arun Joshi: The Existentialist Element in his Novel**. -

“The novel probes into the turbulent inner world of its protagonist Som Bhaskar, who represents the contemporary phase of the dilemma of modern man groping through the labyrinths of life, existence and reality.”

Devinder Mohan is of the opinion that Arun Joshi makes the narrator (Som) work out the historical reality within himself, so that he could define “the fictional voice by visualizing the natural impulse moving towards its own destruction.”

The above quoted reviews show different dimensions of the novel. The novel discusses the theme of alienation and dispossession as well as it shows the world of business and personal relationship. It also deals with detachment principles and the longing for the essentials of life in the mystical urge of the hero, Som Bhaskar. Above all **The Last Labyrinth** is a deep psychological exploration of a lost soul.

The character of Som Bhaskar invites psychoanalysis. Let us first examine his character on the bases of Freud’s psychological theory. Freud identified three different parts of the mind, based on the levels of awareness.

- 1) **Conscious mind**
- 2) **Sub conscious mind**
- 3) **Unconscious mind**

Conscious mind as stated earlier is what one is aware of at any particular moment, one's present perceptions, memories, thoughts, fantasies, feelings etc. working closely with the conscious mind is what Freud called the preconscious mind, which can also be called "available memory." It includes the thoughts and memories, which are not immediately available but with a little effort can be brought to the consciousness. His concept of unconscious was ground breaking in that he proposed that awareness existed in layers and that there were thoughts accruing below the surface. The concept of the unconscious is the foundation of psycho-analytic theory and practice. This concept holds that there are drives, desires, attitudes, and motivations, fantasies in one part of the mind of which we are not aware. They are important because without our realizing it, they are responsible for many of our conscious feelings, thoughts, attitudes, actions, and they influence our relationship with others.

The novel begins with the technique of flashback, where the hero Som Bhaskar, narrates various experiences of his life and characters which itself allows Freud's concept of unconscious. Som as a narrator begin the novel.

“Above all. I have a score to settle, I forget nothing, forgive no one.”

The opening sentence hints the revenge motive in Som Bhaskar. This rather unusual opening sentence, descriptive of Som’s inner turmoil, Tapan Kumar Ghosh writes in “The Intricate Labyrinth: The Last Labyrinth.” -

“It reminds one of the way in which Dostoevsky’s underground man introduces himself, “I am a sick man... I am a spiteful man. I am an unattractive man. I believe my liver is diseased.” It is reminiscent of the first words of Roquentin’s journal in Nausea. “Something has happened to me, I can’t doubt that any more. It came as an illness does.” This, then, is the position of Som Bhaskar, a modern anti-hero, afflicted and unbalanced groping for a remedy for his soul sickness. He views his predicament not so much with anger as with deep internal pain. His anguish springs not from the chaos of the world outside but from the chaos within himself. He spends nights of insomnia, with his wife sleeping by his side and gets into arguments “with the living and with the dead, with himself.””

The time he narrates is two in the morning, his wife is sleeping but he is awake and watches the sea and his reflection starts.

“Why is the sea so grey here? It is blue down in Goa and bluer still on the coast of Ceylon.”

The turbulent grey sea symbolizes the acute mental conflict suffered by the hero at the beginning.

Som, like other hero's of Arun Joshi's novels belongs to the upper strata of the society. He has respectable inheritance, education and accomplishment. At the age of fifteen he loses his mother and at the age of twenty-five his father. But at the age of twenty-five he is millionaire. He says –

“I was twenty-five and a millionaire.”

And it is also true that in spite of wealth, position he is never at peace with himself and spends sleepless nights, drinking and taking tranquilizers. He has become a chronic patient of insomnia, he says –

“This illness has turned many things topsy-turvy. One thing badly turvy is my sleep routine. Three to ten in the morning and four to

six in the afternoon. There is nothing that K has not tried. Sleeping pills, tranquillizers, warm baths. . . .”

He comes to realize at the very outset that he has “become a nuisance” and has been fooling around “like a clown performing before a looking glass.” His soul is at war with himself and he suffers from an inner crisis. He says in the beginning. –

“If I believed in God I could pray, may be run a rosary through my fingers. But that’s out. Sitting around, I get into arguments: with the living, with the dead, with myself.”

The opening chapter concludes with Som’s dilemma –

“Hunger of the body. Hunger of the spirit. You suffer from one or the other or both.”

Som, is a typical westernized man who is restlessly searching for his root and in this process he discovers only a haunting emptiness, and void. In the futile pursuit of realizing this ambition, he gets mentally shattered and physically exhausted with vague dreams and insomnia.

“I looked at myself in the mirror, lean, crow-footed, greying. I could not then, see the hunger but there was the boredom and fed-up ness endless depths of it . . . I woke up in the middle of the night, depressed the taste of tranquilizers in my mouth.”

Som Bhaskar psychoanalyses his own character in the context of his family background and upbringing. He inherits infliction and contradictions from his father and grandfather. From his father, he had the legacy of curiosity, skepticism and logical approach to life. His father was a brilliant chemist, a businessman and owner of a plastic industry. He was interested in the mystery of universe and had a philosophical bent of mind. His father was disturbed by the eternal questions of Science and Philosophy regarding the first cause. He earnestly wishes that Som, a student of Philosophy should try to know “the first cause.” His father watches through his telescope the vast emptiness of the space in search of a clue to the mystery of the universe but in vain. When his faith in Science and reason shattered, he turned to philosophy and metaphysics. But it does not solve his conflict and he was disappointed with the arrangements of the universe which resulted in melancholia and he died. This skepticism does not affect Som, as Som was busy in the worldly things.

Som's grandfather was "a man-about-town, gourmet, fond of women and drink." Som remembers, "anything to do with God embarrassed him." He used to disappear whenever his grandmother held *kirtans*. Being a man of the world, Som's grandfather believed in the satisfaction of impulse and senses. Many critics, therefore observe that Som, like Ratan Rathor of **The Apprentice** is a child of double inheritance – both contrary to each other. From his father he inherited hunger of spirit and from his grandfather hunger of the body. Both the hungers however do not provide him any remedy or solace and he utters –

“And where did I fit in? I was a womanizer all right, and a boozer but my womanizing and boozing had not settled anything. I had inherited the afflictions of both of them- for what were they if not afflictions, afflictions that had led me into unbearable entanglements ”

His mother, on the contrary is very religious by nature. She believes in the principles of faith and tolerance she became victim of cancer but did not go for medicine as she firmly believed that her Lord Krishna would cure her. She ultimately died of cancer. From her, Som inherits faith in religion and love for Krishna.

Mr. Mukteshwar Pandey writes –

“The two – science and religion – create a strain within his self and torture him. He suffers from an inherent sickness a Hamletian incertitude. Like Hamlet he is in fix whether to abide by the faith of his mother or to welcome the inquisitive scientific attitude of his father, whether to live in the world of illusion or that of reality, whether to apt for spirit or the material world.”

Thus, Som is caught in contradictory impulses. The opposite impulses of reason and intuition, doubt and faith, illusion and reality, resistance and submission create a vacuum in him. He is puzzled by “this going forward and backward and sideways of the mind.”

So on a conscious level he remembers the role of his family members in shaping his life. His wife Geeta, is well – bred, beautiful and trusting and remains loyal to him throughout her life. But Som “goofed it all up.” He is never satisfied with his possessions and is always after acquiring more and more shares. He runs after satisfying his undefined hungers and it is this that leads him through haunting world of life, love, God and death, the greatest of all mysteries and the last labyrinth.

Shankar Kumar writes in “The World of Business and personal Relationship in **The Foreigner** and **The Last Labyrinth**.” –

“The protagonist of the novel is tormented by a great roaring hollowness inside his soul. His life of affluence has simply added to the “boredom and the fed up ness.” There is within him “orchestras of discontent,” instead of heavenly harmony. At an early age, he becomes “a worn-out weary man incapable of spontaneous feelings.” He feels “like a hare chased by unseen hounds.” Som feels that inside him “there was nothing but an empty roaring, like the roar of the sea in a conch.”

Psychoanalysis explores the nature of the subject who it is who is experiencing, what our relationships of meaning and identity are to the psychic and cultural forces which ground so much of our being. On its bases, Som’s character can be analyzed truly.

Outwardly, Som leads happy life as he is a rich industrialist, young, educated, intelligent and has a trusting and educated wife. Apparently, he has almost everything in his life – money, health, name and social status that are essential for so called comfortable life. But inwardly all these

materialistic achievement do not bring peace of mind. From the existential philosophical point of view, Som suffers form “isolation.” Man has no place in the highly industrialized set-up of modern society and remains as an outsider, an alienated person from the beginning to the end of his life. He has lost the centre and moves from pillar to post in search of some centre of “belonging” but he fails to find root anywhere. And it is quite ironical that man, who is responsible for changing the very complexion of society on earth, has no place in it. He has fallen prey to a cosmic anguish. Living in an impersonal, mechanical, urbanized and industrialized social environment, he is constantly on the rack. He suffers form inner emptiness, isolation and feeling of insecurity and, thus, is bedeviled from within and without. The individual, however, does not withdraw to monastery or cave, but carries his personal despair or existential predicament wherever he goes. He is not free from society, but is engaged in it as a self-proclaimed “Outsider.”

Soren Kierkegaard’s remark –

“The whole of existence frightens me . . . the most inexplicable thing of all my own existence, is applicable to the man of the present generation.”

Som also suffers from this psychological problem. He suffers strongly from a discontent, an indefinable hunger, that disturbs the peace of his life and keeps him restless. From the age of twenty-five he has been singing, night and day a song of nameless content: "I want. I want. I want. I want." Besides, this "orchestras of discontent," he is disturbed by a sense of emptiness, of a void both within and without him. –

"It is the voids of the world, more than its objects, that bother me.

The voids and the empty spaces, within and without."

It is these voids – voids in his soul as well as "voids of caves and voids of the sky, the terrible vacancies of loklok" – that constantly haunt him.

Abdul Saleem writes in his book - - **Arun Joshi's Fiction: Self in Exile**

"Som's achievements, ipso facto, have disappointed and disillusioned him. His drives for money and materialistic means have, on the contrary, further aggravated his sense of isolation and futility. Finally, it is revealed to him that "money was dirt, a whore so were houses, cars, carpets. Som is in turmoil. He feels sick and lost, fragmented and frustrated. But wherein the problem of anguish and anxiety lies remains a nagging question. He is engaged in a sisyphian task of locating the sickness of his mind and soul.

He is alienated and his alienation is not from chaos of the world outside but from the chaos within himself”

Mr. Tapan kumar Gosh writes in “The Intricate Labyrinth: The Last Labyrinth” –

“Corroded by this overwhelming sense of dissatisfaction, Som tries to appease his fierce, unfocussed hunger by possession: of an object, a business enterprise, a woman. But once secured, no business and none of the women remain important to him. He describes his problem to K, his friend and physician thus: “For many years now, I have had this awful feeling that I wanted something. But the sad thing was it didn’t make the slightest difference when I managed to get what I had wanted. My hunger was just as bad as ever.” He flits from one woman to another, from one business venture to a new one, but far from attaining a sense of fulfillment, he grows even more dissatisfied. In the melancholy isolation of his sleepless nights the inane but intense chant of discontent becomes even more strident. The fact that he has no clue to this sense of void is the symptom of his malaise: “If I stayed up all night choffing tranquillizers, not knowing why I was awake, and came close to tears because I did not know, it came pretty close to sorrow.””

Life thus becomes a complicated affair, “a labyrinth within the labyrinth,” like the lanes of Benaras, comparable to “meaningless flights of stairs” or “a fisherman’s net....”

In the novel, the use of similes and symbol demand special attention from the point of view of Som’s physical and psychological conditions. Som becomes a psychological case. He presents excellently those deep hidden conflicts of the mind which the probing of psychology disclose to us. The novel explores the recesses of Som’s mind. H. M. Prasad writes “Like Jungian or Pirandellian man he is full of inner disharmony and is a loose cluster of masks or fragments of identity.”

Psychologically, speaking Som has a split-personality as he is torn between two selves – the one is the scientific, analytical, materialistic and, almost, drawn, towards the ideologies of his father and grandfather, and the other personifies the endurance of his mother, trust of his wife Geeta and their joy in suffering with a view to cleaning the soul. His rational self attracts him to Darwin, whereas his primal self urges him to aspire for intuitive faith. Both are at daggers drawn.

Som wants to know everything in life “the secrets of the universe” and riddle of a woman. The difficulty with him is his rational and analytical mind that refuses to take anything for granted. For him anything that cannot be explained logically, does not exist for him. He develops fear of death after his mother’s death and this fear continually torments him.

Som needs someone who can resolve his contradictions and provide him an anchorage. He finds a person in Leela Sabnis, who is “a professor, descendant of a long time of professors. M.A. and Ph. D. from Michigan, something else from London” she knows more than four languages and understands the philosophy of Descartes, Freud, Jung, Spinoza and others. She coolly analyses the pathology of Som’s psychological upheaval. She tells him –

“You are much too high strung without reason. You are neurotic. A compulsive fornicator.” She tries to analyze the root of Som’s obsessive cry – “I want, I want, I want” as is noticeable in the conversation between them:

“I am not fond of you,” she told me one evening.

“That would be lying. But I am concerned, I am worried.

Tell me, what makes you tick?”

“The voids,” I said without enthusiasm.

“The voids? What voids?”

“I hear this song way up in the sky all the time.”

“What song?”

“I want; I want; I want.”

“I want, I want. I want. Just like that?”

“Yes.”

Som suffers from hallucinations as he hears strange voices of the dead and the song “I want, I want, I want.” Leela Sabnis considers these voices to be his delusions. She is a rational woman but Som is not satisfied with her reasoning and Som’s affair with Leela breaks after six months because Som needs, “Something, somebody, somewhere” in which the two worlds combined. He wants someone who can fulfill his two hungers of body and spirit. His wife Geeta is unable to satisfy these two qualities of body and spirit. Geeta has all the good qualities of an ideal wife as Som himself says –

“If discontent is my trademark, trust is Geeta’s”

Yet Som is not satisfied with his married life. He feels lonely and very strongly develops obsession for women.

Som's behaviour and his actions in the novel can be interpreted in the terms of a psychological theory. One of the famous psychologists states that basically there are four possible factors affecting human behaviour.

All these four factors are affected to man's desire. –

- 1) Man knows his desire and also the way how to satisfy it.
- 2) His desire is known to him but not the way how to satisfy it.
- 3) How to satisfy a desire is known but the desire itself remains obscure to the person.
- 4) The complete ignorance of desire as well as the way to satisfy it.

Above mentioned four psychic possibilities, which the person himself does not know lead him to a typical behaviour. Keeping in view the stated views Som's character can be analyzed as a man who knows his desire but does not know the proper way to satisfy it. So, he runs after different women who can give him an answer to all his weird questions. He wants someone who has the ability to settle the contradiction of his life. "His hunger is of body and spirit both. Hunger of body is cry for emotional authentication and hunger of spirit is an yearning for self-realization" – he searches for his roots and identification. He does not get the answer of his dilemma, desire by his wife or by the clever professor Leela Sabnis.

He has a desire to get happiness, peace and satisfaction in life even though he knows it is out of reach. It is this yearning for wealth, happiness and success that brings him to Benaras with only one aim of buying all the shares of Aftab Rai, a decaying King of Plastic Industries. He meets Anuradha for the first time in a Delhi hotel at a reception organized by Aftab Rai for the Plastic Manufactures Association. Here he falls in love with Anuradha. He depicts Anuradha as –

“A monument: tall handsome and ruined and notices that she was obsolete like her husband.”

Arun Joshi depicts the hero Som as being attracted by an antique looking woman, Anuradha, dressed in antiques and living in an antique haveli of the more antique environs of Benaras.

“She had the features of women one saw in Moghul miniatures. I was fascinated. “

She becomes the centre of his life and his desire to be with her brings him to Aftab’s Lal Haveli. Som’s craving for Anuradha and for that the strategies that he uses and his disillusionment in getting Anuradha reminds one the famous Freudian three concepts –

1) Id

2) Ego

3) Super ego

Which he invented in the year 1923 for explaining the structure of psyche and used them in providing a basic structure to the human personality based on his behaviour.

The id is the deepest and most primitive part of the human personality. It consists of man's instinctive tendencies or primitive drives towards sexual satisfaction or pleasure seeking activities and violence or destruction. It knows no reality, follows no rules and considers only the satisfaction of its needs and drives.

The ego develops out of the id and acts as an intermediary between three sets of forces i.e. instinctual demands of the realities of the external world and ethical moral demands of the Super ego.

The Super ego is the ethical moral aspect of the psyche. It is idealistic and does not care for realities. Perfection is its goal rather than pleasure seeking or destruction.

Som's craving for Anuradha is but his Id, which wants Sexual satisfaction or pleasure seeking activities and if his Id is not satisfied, he wants destruction.

Som has a beautiful wife. She is all a wife could be – trusting, beautiful and well mannered. Som very well knows that his is a happy marriage and he cannot imagine a life without Geeta and yet he fornicates.

He says –

“It is a happy marriage from what anyone including myself can make out. I couldn't imagine life without Geeta. But, then – and here is the big question – why these little fornications?”

When he meets Anuradha, his Id demands her. After meeting her, he cannot think of anything other than her and he neglects his business, his family and his health in an effort to win her. He makes frequent trips to Benaras with the sole motive of acquiring her for himself. He finds her

attractive and sees in her a personality very different from anyone he had ever known.

Mr. Abdul Saleem writes in his book **Arun Joshi's fiction Self in Exile** –

“We find that Som Bhaskar desperately tries to have Anuradha. His longing for her is obviously uncontrollably strong, his need and ineluctable desire for her at times he is very deceptive, it has many a time overtone of genuine love and authentic human relationship. But as we know it is motivated and ignited by a narcissistic desire, a desire to possess. This desire for possession, carefully analyzed and understood in fact, deprives the other of his/her individual identity and a sense of personal integrity. Som wants to possess Anuradha totally every inch of her physically, psychologically and even spiritually. He resembles Gerald Crich of D. H. Lawrence's **Women in Love.**”

Som is surprised to find that Anuradha lives with Aftab without marriage.

She says –

“I have never been married . . . It is better not to be anybody's wife . . . You can't marry everyone you love.”

Som's Id excites him and he forgets all the norms in his craving for Anuradha. He says –

“All I wanted was her. I wanted her body and soul every bit of her.

I wasn't willing to share a hair of her body with anyone.”

At first, he wanted to have shares of Aftab but after meeting Anuradha his desire changes. He is attracted to the world of Anuradha. In the company of them, he meets Gargi and his world becomes Anuradha, Aftab, Gargi, Lal Haveli. For Som Lal Haveli “is the micro-cosmic labyrinth of life and reality.” He has doubts and uncertainties about Haveli but he is totally sure about his desire for Anuradha.

Abdul Saleem writes –

“But a careful analysis reveals that his yearning for Anuradha is not motivated by sheer carnal and physical desire for her in fact, goes beyond merely biological, and instinctual gratification. His desire for Anuradha betrays his symbolic quest for an enduring relationship that negates ulterior or narcissistic motives and leads to harmonious amalgamation of the selves, for an irrefutable oneness and togetherness. His longing nevertheless is intensified

and his great expectations are shattered although he possesses her physically. His intrinsic cravings remain ignited as ever....”

Som’s Ego in his obsession for Anuradha comes to his rescue and tries to create balance. Under the influence of Ego Som decides to forget Anuradha and with his wife Geeta goes to Europe, America and Japan but he fails to forget Anuradha. He comes back still more discontented. So he goes to Gargi to seek help for his “restlessness.” Gargi writes a note to him –

“God will send someone to help you...someone who has known suffering,” means Anuradha. Som asks – “But what if there is no God?” Gargi’s answer does not satisfy him. She tells Som that God will cure him. But she cannot diagnose the disease of Som. Gargi says – “Go with her (Anuradha). Don’t quarrel. She is your Shakti.” Since then, he feels that Anuradha is “indispensable” to him. He returns to that haveli over and over. Yet each meeting, far from cooling his passions, serves only to fuel them. He describes it thus –

“I lived on the nourishment of the shades thrown by her naked body under the chromatic shower.”

In order to possess her for good, he takes her to the mountains and clings to her –

“I threw myself, my entire desperate weight, the turbulence of my forty years, on her.”

Anuradha becomes an obsession, a passion for Som. He cannot think of anything other than her and he neglects his business, his family and his health in an effort to win her. On psychological level his ego tries to control his Id as he returns to Bombay to pick up the threads of his ordinary everyday life of commerce and business deal. At these moments, he is tormented by doubts and uncertainties about the reality of the haveli that always tantalizes him with its mystery. He remains in a state of ‘waking dream’, half sleep, half-awake. His business goes to seed, his health declines and his mind is ravaged by despair. Gargi cannot sooth him. And at last he forces Anuradha to go with him to Bombay. Anuradha agrees to go with him because she loves him. At this crucial moment of their affair, Som suffers from a massive heart-attack. He is shocked to hear that Anuradha has gone back to Benaras. Som requests her to come back to him but she turns down Som’s telephonic request to see him. Geeta informs him that Anuradha has written to her everything about their relation and has begged her forgiveness and that she will not

see him again, he feels ditched, angry and frustrated. His despair and frustration turn into an insane desire for revenge.

It is at this juncture his Id him violent and revengeful. This particular behaviour of Som confirms Freud's concept makes of Id, which states that Id is driven by the pleasure principle, which strives for immediate gratification of all desires, wants and needs. If these needs are not satisfied immediately, the result is a state of anxiety and tension. In other words the Id wants whatever feels good at the time with no consideration for the reality of situation. The Id does not care about reality, about the needs of anyone else, only its own satisfaction. Som's Id makes him revengeful and in utter frustration he orders Mr. Thapar, his manager, to start buying the shares of Aftab's company once again. He ignores the advice of his physician K not to hound Anuradha because she has suffered too much.

Mr. Tapan Kumar Ghosh writes in his book **Arun Joshi's Fiction: The Labyrinth of life –**

“The loss of Anuradha unhinges Som's mind and generates in him an unnatural fear “coming down the lift I was afraid the electricity would fail and I would be left hanging between two floors . . .of

late, I doubted everything and everybody.” He is afraid of everything: of elevator, bridges, motor cars, Sea breeze electric switches and canned food. He says “I was afraid I knew, because Anuradha had left me.””

His Id gets satisfaction when he buys all the Shares of Aftab but this revenge on Anuradha does not help him to get her or to win her. He visits the mountains and this journey brings him near to his soul, and he comes out from the world of reason into the clarity of faith. His meeting with Gargi at the shrine is very important; as it is here, he comes to know about the reality regarding Anuradha. When he introduces K to Gargi by saying –

““This is Dr. Kashyap. He saved my life.’...Mr. K frankly admits that he has not saved Som. Som was as good as dead when Anuradha came to see him in the hospital. The night before they started on their journey to the hill to retrieve the missing shares, Anuradha telephoned K. she told him that from Som’s sick bed she had gone straight to Gargi and requested her to save Som. When Gargi told her that she could not perform a miracle, Anuradha persisted begged, wept and threatened. She said that she could not live without Som and would commit suicide if anything happened

to him. With great intensity in his voice, K asks Gargi: “I am a medical doctor. I do not believe in things in which Anuradha believes. But I know for a fact that Som had no chance whatsoever and I want to know: did you save him? Anuradha says you did. And in return for what you did, she says, you made her promise that she should give up Som. Forever. That to her, Som would be dead, either way. Is this true? Please tell me.”

But all his attempts to seek explanation meet with an enigmatic smile from Gargi. Som is shocked. He is unable to understand whether Anuradha has, in fact saved his life. Here his super ego comes to his rescue and he tries to justify the act of Anuradha. His Super ego considers it as Anuradha’s sacrifice. She loves him deeply but she does not reveal it to him. She just gives her love and her self to him without expecting anything in return. In order to give life to Som, she alienates herself from Som and the society. She pays a heavy price to save him, she gives promise to Gargi that she would give up him (Som) if she cares him from his illness.

Som now realizes that both Geeta and Anuradha came together in order to save him both physically and spiritually. Next day he goes to Gargi to get Anuradha's shares and tells her that he wanted the shares to settle an account with Anuradha who jilted him after his illness. He says –

“I cannot give up Anuradha; you know that. In the absence of evidence, I intend to challenge the whole thing. I want to take not only these shares but also Anuradha. It scares me but I have no choice.”

Gargi advises him and tries to evade him from taking revenge on anyone. But Som is determined that he would not give up Anuradha. He says –

“As for Anuradha . . . as for her I can't give her up on these . . . flimsy grounds. I can't live without her. You should know that.”

His Id once again becomes active and he decides to go to Benaras to claim Anuradha from Aftab. Aftab begs him to leave them alone. He says—

“I wish you had left us alone. Anuradha and I need each other . . . I told you, you are different. You don't understand us. You work by logic. By your brain....”

At last, Aftab allows him to meet Anuradha and Anuradha meets him. His Id is about to be satisfied. As a narrator he writes –

“I sat alone smoking, feeling very tense. Anuradha was certainly taking her time. I looked around restlessly. That room had never been fully lighted. There were objects in it that I might never have seen just as I could not imagine all the strange happenings, happy, sad and cruel, that must have occurred within its four walls. Finally, I heard steps, someone running across the courtyard. Anuradha came in through the porch wiping her face with her Sari. I rushed towards her, took her hands in mine. I wanted to say something but my voice choked. She tried to free her hands but I wouldn’t let her go.

“I love you,” I said at last

“You must go away now,” “There was an unfamiliar urgency in her voice.” “You must come with me,” I said “come with you? You talk like a child. But you must go away. Return to the hotel. Go back by the morning flight.”

“Come with me to the hotel. Stay with me the night. Tomorrow we shall return to Bombay.”

“You don’t understand. You don’t know these people. Things could happen to you in this haveli and no one would ever know.”

“I shall return Aftab his shares.”

“That is not the point. It is not a question of the Shares....”

“Don’t argue. Go away now,” She said pushing me towards the door. Maybe she was right. May be she needed time to handle Aftab Rai.”

Som does not realize that Anuradha was pushing him out of her life forever. Next morning when he goes to the haveli, he received the shocking news. Aftab informs him about the disappearance of Anuradha from the haveli. Their conversation is worth nothing. He writes –

“Aftab met me in the Blue Room. He looked haggard. He wore the same clothes in which I had left him the previous night. He had not shaved and it did not look as though he had slept.”

“You have come to see Anuradha?”

He said with a half smile.

I nodded.

“Well, she has disappeared.”

Disappeared where?

“If I knew she would not be considered disappeared. She went to the temple last night for Janmashtami and she hasn’t come back.”

He reports to police, which makes thorough search of Aftab’s house but cannot find her. His dilemma remains unresolved. With Anuradha’s disappearance Som starts feeling more isolated and lonely and a sense of inadequacy, restlessness and aimlessness develops in him.

In utter desperation, he makes an appeal to Anuradha –

“Anuradha listen. Listen to me wherever you are. Is there a God where you are? Have you met him? Does He have face? Does He speak? Does He hear? Does He understand the language that we speak? 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 this, dark earth and these empty heavens. Plead for me, Anuradha”

This intense outcry of Som suggests that Anuradha is “the core of his existence, the crystallization of the meaning of his life.” Frustrated within

himself, he finds this world alien having no value, no meaning, or truth. In desperation, he starts pitying himself like a person who is completely vanquished by life. His only wish now is “a peaceful death,” for he is mercilessly torn apart by his doubts. Som’s own “strange mad thoughts” seem to devour him. He is also carrying with him the terrible curse of Aftab.

“How I hate you . . . curse you...you escaped to the hotel that night... but how long...your time will come...while you live. You will rot...when dead. You shall not find peace...from one graveyard to another you will wonder...a million years.”

At last he realizes that all human beings, whether be it Anuradha, Gargi or Geeta, everyone possessed one thing in common-hatred. Life has become almost nightmare for Som and he has lost his peace of mind and is incapable of paying adequate attention to the world and its demands and duties. His business is also reduced to a “big mess.”

He writes –

“I marvel at the strange mad thoughts that at times carom around my skull. Are they the harbingers, the pilot – escort, of

melancholia? Of insanity? Faith? You never know what is the pilot-escort of what.”

Under utter depression at last he decides to kill himself with his grandfather’s gun which he carried with him like a curse wherever he went, but he is stopped by his wife Geeta, who shakes him “gently as though rousing a man from sleep.” The novelist here ends the novel with a note of optimism that the trust and patience of Geeta will restore peace in Som’s life.

Tapan Kumar Ghosh evaluates the end of the novel thus –

“The novel ends where it began. Som Bhaskar stays awake, listening to the roaring hollowness in the crevices of his soul and putting down in his minute book the “thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season.” His loneliness and spiritual agony remain acute. The circular plot suggests the circular nature of Som’s journey. There is no progression in his character. Unlike the others protagonists of Joshi, he does not grow. His dilemma remains unresolved – as he finds no escape route out of the intricate labyrinth in which he is lost. One wonders if the failure of Som Bhaskar is a deliberate

attempt on the part of Joshi to reproduce the reality of life where a readymade solution to such a complex problem is seldom found.

Indeed, **The Last Labyrinth** is only the enactment of Som Bhaskar's peculiar dilemma and as such it does not provide any resolution. To try to read the ending of the book as ushering in of faith will be serious misreading, an over simplification. The hiatus between the two worlds – world of science and rationalism and that of mystery, faith and transcendentalism, represented by Bombay and Benaras respectively, and worked out in terms of parallelisms and contrasts of character – remains unbridged till the end.

The Last Labyrinth is a deep psychological exploration of a lost soul. Som Bhaskar is woefully aware of the baffling human predicament of being lost between two worlds, of being unable to accept, or quite reject, the one that shakes his disposition with its inexplicable but tantalizing mystery. . .”

Freud stated that the Ego deals with the demand of reality, the Id and the super ego as best as it can. But when the anxiety becomes overwhelming, the ego must defend itself. It does so by unconsciously blocking the

impulses or distorting them into a more acceptable less threatening form. These techniques are called the Ego defense mechanisms. It includes sublimation, reaction formation denial, projection, displacement, repression, intellectualization, rationalization, etc. In the case of Som he resorts to Intellectualization and rationalization. Intellectualization is a “fight into reason” where the person avoids uncomfortable emotions by focusing on facts and logic. The situation is treated as an interesting problem that engages the person on a rational basis, while the emotional aspect are completely ignored as being irrelevant.

In the novel we find that Som is influenced by Cartesian rationalism and Darwin’s theory of the survival of the fittest. He is skeptical of Indian Spiritual thoughts and religious beliefs. His rationalism and logical approach do not help the dilemma he faces. He wants to know everything in life “the secrets of the universe” and riddle of a woman. The difficulty with him is his rational and analytical mind that refuses to take anything for granted. Anything that cannot be known or logically conceived does not exist for him. Arun Joshi excellently presents Som’s Ego defense through his rationalistic tendency of mind. For example when he gets the news that Anuradha left him to save him, he broods. He is left staring at the dark sea and broods –

“Was there a mystery into which everything fitted? Reality was so like an iceberg. You never saw the whole of it.”

This particular thinking of Som reminds the reader the famous example of an iceberg which has become a useful metaphor to understand the unconscious mind, its relationship to the conscious mind and how the two parts of our mind can better work together. As an iceberg floats in the water, the huge mass of it remains below the surface. Only a small percentage of the whole iceberg is visible above the surface. In this way, the iceberg is like the mind. The conscious mind is what we notice above the surface while the unconscious mind, the largest and most powerful part remains unseen below the surface. Som uses the same metaphor to represent that – The Whole REALITY does not apprehend like the ICEBERG.

As reality lies within the mind – unconscious mind, which an individual himself cannot understand or comprehend.

Mr. Mukteshwar Pandey writes his book **Arun Joshi: The Existentialist Element in his novels –**

“The novelist seems to suggest that the labyrinths of life can be resolved through unwavering faith, trust and intuition rather than science, logic, brain and rationalism. Life’s riddle can only be solved by an unwavering “trust in the world’s mechanisms.”

But Som is not the type of person who would readily trust: “But I needed the trust – who doesn’t? I needed it all the more because I did not trust myself, or my men, or my fate, or the careless travel on the social wheel....” He possesses an analytical mind, an altogether non-believing mind and is made of a sterner stuff as he himself says in the very beginning of the novel: “Above all, I have a score to settle. I forget nothing, forgive no one.”

He is always guided by reason and logic, and remains almost always at war with himself. His skepticism and rationalism only aggravate his problems and all his life he suffers from a “discontent”, “a restlessness”, a Hamlet – like incertitude, an inherent sickness “with its sick hurry, its divided aims....”

He is a lonely existentialist who has come to realize “that core of loneliness around which all of us are built.” He finally loses himself in the labyrinths of life and dies like Abhimanyu lost in the ‘Chakravyuha’ of **The Mahabharata**. All his mystical cravings remain unfulfilled and he is doomed to remain alienated: “I am dislocated. My mind is out of focus.”

Mr. Abdul Saleem also opines the same. He writes –

“In the novel Som’s dilemma remains unresolved. Som possesses an analytical mind, an altogether a non-believing mind. He is always guided by reason and logic and remains almost always at war with himself. He says about his problems: “If I believed in God I could pray, may be run a rosary through my fingers. But that is out. Sitting around, I get into arguments: with living and with the dead, with myself....””

His skepticism and rationalism aggravate his problems and all his life he suffers from discontent, restlessness and alienation.

The Last Labyrinth describes Som's dilemma and it does not provide any resolution. The difference between two worlds – the world of science and rationalism and that of mystery, faith and transcendentalism remain separated till the end. Som's failure lays in his intellectual arrogance, his excessive reliance on reason and his conviction that science and logic can solve the problems of life. Som's way of life is different than that of his mother and his wife. Their way of life is faith. It is different from that of Anuradha which is suffering. His way of life is stubborn, rationalism expediency and disbelief that results in anxiety and ineluctable pressure of alienation and dispossession. Som devoid of such suffering is lost in introspective solitude. His solitude instead of yielding fruitful results in return of reconciliation with his own self and society, leads him to the horrors of isolation and loneliness. Sanjay Narasimhaiah rightly observes: "A Study of Som's character shows that introspection itself is not enough unless there is strength of mind to fiercely alter one's thinking and being. It can be an indulgence too, for when one expects him to suffer and learn he gives himself to defiance."

The psycho analysis of Som's character is incomplete without the interpretation of his dreams because the novelist explores the working of

Som's inner mind as to what he feels about life, love and death through series of dreams which haunt him again and again.

For Freud dreams are important source of the study of the unconscious. In our dream, all our hidden desires are fulfilled. But because we are immobilized while asleep and therefore do not act, our controls are loosened and we can express desires or find solution to any problem or conflicts which are unacceptable in waking life. Freud believed that the dream to be composed of two parts.

1) The manifest

2) The latent content

The manifest content can be thought of as what a person would remember as soon as they wake and what they would consciously describe to someone else when recalling the dream. On the other hand, the latent content holds the true meaning of the dream. The forbidden thoughts and the unconscious desires. These appear in the manifest content but will be disguised and unrecognizable.

It works in the following four ways

- 1) Condensation – Here two or more latent thoughts are combined to make up one manifest dream image.
- 2) Displacement – does not direct the emotion or desire toward the intended person or object.
- 3) Symbolism – where complex or vague concepts are converted into a dream image.
- 4) Secondary Revision – this is where the dream loses the appearance of absurdity and incoherence.

Dream work covers up the contradiction and attempts to reorganize the dream into a pattern.

In this novel Arun Joshi makes the use of dreams not only to project the mind of Som Bhaskar but also to set it against the logical and rational restraints of moral and social structure. As Som feels alienated because he wants scientific evidence for everything and his frustration, his inner working of mind is presented through dreams. His dreams can be considered as latent content. As his unconscious desires appear but they are in a disguised form. His relation with Aftab, Anuradha, Gargi which disturb him constantly appear in his dreams. The first and the last part of

the novel contain two dreams and the middle contains one dream. When he writes I dream – means what follows in all of his dreams described in details. The dreams are intended for some symbolic meaning related to the thematic aspects of the novel.

Rekha Rani writes in *The Language of the Dreams in The Last Labyrinth*:

“Strange murky shapes, appearing in Som’s dreams stand for abstract ideas concepts of life, love, death which are not clear to him. The use of adjectives such as “murky” and “tangled web” makes them appear confused and mysterious. “Fire” and “Sun” imply hope for brightness, light in his dark misty life and also with the help of their light he is trying to understand confused reality behind those, shapes. Shoeless Anuradha passing through the burning desert is representative of her strength to survive in this world full of sorrows and suffering. The dream consisting of wedding ceremony brings to the surface Som’s desire to possess Anuradha.

Tall, deserted houses stand for hollow, empty materialism. The emptiness of outer surrounding is symbolic of the inner emptiness of modern human beings. The phrase “black gashes for windows”

indicate the collapse of moral values based on religion which has been the true spirit of human culture. The reference to Azizun's song reflects the loneliness of life around which all of us are built."

Som's dreams of flying in the sky is a symbol of his deep desire of rising high in life. The beginning of the dream reflects his confused mental state. Constantly haunted by this dream, he finds himself baffled, and is not clear about his direction to move about. The content of the dream gives us the idea of his going towards the highest point of rise in life indicated by the mountain; snow-covered peak is symbolic of brightness, peace and calm on the top. The media he adopts to reach the mountain peak is "the plane" – a symbol of materialism. His sitting in the front while in the plane symbolizes his yearning for his place on the top, ahead of all. Cloud, mist, fog and rain stand not only for obstructions in his journey but also demand struggle, survival instincts on his parts in the presence of suffering in order to arrive at the goal. When he reaches the mountain, its height, its huge size frighten him and he with his plane crashes down in the mountain. All this symbolizes his confrontation with the God. Though he is afraid of the great Entity, yet he is ready to confront Him in order to see the proof of his existence.

The dreams are presented mainly through visual images. The ideas of life, of struggle, of light, darkness, the inevitability of death are visualized in the images of metaphors – “Suns”, “skies”, “desert”, “labyrinth”, “Blue Room”, “shroud”, etc. auditory image is used in the dream through the singing of Azizun. He can’t see Azizun in the dream but can hear her voice.

The dreams containing the images of Anuradha, Gargi and Aftab are either the fulfillment of a wish to possess Anuradha or are the realization of an apprehension realized through the dream consisting of death theme. Sometimes the dream reverses the desired solutions, the appearance of the haveli in his dream, signifies his wish to go to it and meet Anuradha, a wish against which he is fighting inwardly.

The dream in which the images of his mother and Krishna occur signify merely the reminiscences of his past. In his dream he sweeps away the wooden Krishna from the table as he used to do in his mother’s prayer room. The instance of Gargi’s taking; the place of his mother can be taken as his seeing the image of his mother in Gargi, the symbol of that affection and care which he used to get from his mother. That is why he is

more at ease with Gargi than anyone else in the novel. The dream in totality recalls the illness of his mother and with that the cause of her death which he thinks is “Krishna.” The image of labyrinth stands for the haveli as well as some other mysterious place.

In his dreams Som moves freely. Within a moment he reaches from Bombay to Benaras, from Gargi to his mother. The alley changes into the Blue Room in his dream world. Aftab’s ancestors who are in no way concerned with Som do appear to him. Various unrelated images are juxtaposed – light and darkness, life and death, suffering and wedding.

In short, Som’s inherited culture and values, his desires and yearning in his life crying for fulfillment otherwise are given an expression in the form of the dreams. Each dream looks like a shattered mirror in which he looks deformed and distorted. The dream as a whole reflect the inner conflict in Som’s mind.

It is appropriate to conclude the psychoanalysis of the novel with Tapan Kumar Gosh's statement –

“The failure of Som Bhaskar to resolve his dilemma is, thus, his individual failure. The novel suggests ways through which Som could come out of his ego centric isolationism and the maze of intellectual doubt. But, proud of his western education and cynical about the religious beliefs of his community, he refuses to avail himself of them.

The Last Labyrinth becomes in the ultimate analysis, a warning against a particular state of mind, that, devoid of faith, seeks to unravel the mysteries of life, death and God through western, rationalism and discursive reasoning. The book suggests that egress from the intricate labyrinth of life can be found not in hedonism or rationalism and self imposed isolation from one's cultural heritage but in love, sacrifice, communal faith and adherence to one's tradition that may provide one with a positive framework for individual self-definition and meaningful existence.”

The novel, like **Hamlet**, is “an exploration, and implicit criticism, of a particular state of mind or consciousness. It is convoluted state of mind in

which the contradictory pulls of emotion and reason, love and lust, curiosity and distrust co-exist and in which attitude towards the self and towards other persons and the world at large, are revealed through a series of encounters.”