CHAPTER-VII

The City and The River
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Arun Joshi’s last novel The City and The River (1990) also centers on the basic principles of Hindu philosophy, which teaches an affirmative attitude to life. In a way, the novel is, “a continuation of and an improvement upon Joshi’s major thematic concerns.”¹ The nature of the novel is explained on the blurb of the book, which reads as under:

Narrated with humour and a gentle irony, The City and the River strikes an entirely different theme from Arun Joshi’s earlier novels. At one level, it is a parable of the times; at another it deals with how men, in essence entirely free to choose, create by their choice the circumstances in which they must live. It also explores the relevance of God to man’s choices and whether all said and done, ‘ the world indeed belongs to God and to no one else.²

As ever Arun Joshi’s leit motif remains the same – an anguished man’s quest for survival and search for a viable alternative amidst materialism, corruption, cynicism, alienation and dwindling spiritual faith. Unhinged from its cultural heritage and spiritual moorings, his protagonists find themselves lost in a grossly materialistic industrial society. In this quest they are led into the labyrinths of life and death, and sometimes into the labyrinth of the world of spirit. As a matter of fact, in this novel “Joshi has set out on a quest for spiritual commitment for a still centre amidst the turmoil and uncertainty of contemporary life.”³
The novel presents before us a city which is in the jaws of destruction due to its people who never seek the righteous way of living. Though the city dealt with is apparently contemporary, the issues, which Joshi has raised, are cosmic and philosophical. Throughout the novel, there is a conflict in the city folk to choose between the “allegiance to god” and “the allegiance to Man” or in other words between religion and politics. The city dwellers adopt a wrong path and face their doom. The river that flows by the side of the city represents Nature and it takes the shape of an irrepressible ocean and sweeps away the city. The doctrine of *Karma* asserts that man’s final growth depends on him. His future is not predetermined. He as a responsible agent, by the “integration of *karma, Jnana* and *Bhakiti*”\(^4\) reaches his salvation. If he chooses the opposite, he is bound to face his doom. In this way, the city dealt with in the novel is a collection of individuals who if taken together make their “own horoscope” by their actions. If the city is destroyed in the end, it is solely because of the wrong doings of its inhabitants. This novel has a clearcut message for its reader to uphold tested values of conviction and commitment.

Joshi has used various myths, legends and archetypes to suggest the value of an authentic life, faith and right action – the barest necessity of modern man. The novelist depicts the horror and terror unleashed on
society when a handful of individuals like the Grand Master become ambitious and selfish. This political scenario of the city is used as backdrop of the novel which helps the novelist in presenting a contemporary problem with the metaphysical overview of creation and disintegration, srasti and pralaya dealt in Indian myths. Whenever human beings degenerate, anarchy and meaninglessness take the ways The process of srasti and pralaya after a period of time is to go on unless the whole world is purified. The canvas of The City and The River is very vast It encompasses within its range time, God, Man and Nature.

The novel opens with a Prologue, which relates the last day of the Nameless One with the Great Yogeshwara his teacher. The narrative framework of the novel is mythical and its narrational pattern reveals that it is a story told by an old wise teacher, a Guru, to his keen disciple preparing him to enter a new world after the complete destruction of an old city:

Do you hear music, my son? asked the Great Yogeshwara. Yes, father. And the dancing of a god.

That is good. I shall tell you now a tale and in my telling, perhaps you will know who you are. Listen, this is how it goes.  

Right from the start of the novel the reference to myths and archetypes is quite suggestive. The sound of the dance is the dance tandava of Lord Shiva who dances to bring ‘pralaya’ in the world when it becomes sinful

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and corrupt. The conflict between the spirit and the body is also suggested in the Prologue:

Both kinds of thought shall I teach you. I shall lead you to the grain and I shall lead you to the chaff. Keep the grain and the chaff apart, always, for much harm has come of their mixing.

The Great Yogeshwara narrates the events of the last cycle to the Nameless-One who is “the illegitimate child” sent on a raft into the unknown at the end of the cycle. While narrating the events, Great Yogeshwara celebrates his pupil’s thirtieth birthday. He is now to be sent to another similar world as another Hermit of the Mountain to stop the “endless repetition” and “the periodic disintegration” (262) of the new city, which is in the offing. The occasion is the beginning of a new era but the Great Yogeshwara wants to inform his pupil about the past city and the cause of its end before the Nameless-One enters the new world.

The remaining nine chapters that follow present a city governed by the Grand Master and his Ministers. The City has seven hills and people live on them according to their social status and profession, which determine the geographical locations given to them on those hills. The Grand Master lives on the highest hill whereas the Ministers occupy the other hills according to their position. The middle class people live on a lower ground in pink brick buildings. The poor people including the
boatmen live in an area along the river bank, which is lowest in height. The Councilors of the Grand Master include the Minister of Trade, the Education Adviser, the Master of Rallies, the Astrologer, the Commissioner of Police, the Commander of the Army and General Starch who assist the Grand Master from time to time.

It can be observed that the city is obviously contemporary because it is divided in so many classes and social stratification. This kind of class division gives birth to political trickery and the resultant conflict spoils the very health of the city. The question of allegiance raised by the Grand Master is the first step to consolidate his position. It starts the imminent conflict between the Grand Master and the boatmen. The boatmen assert their allegiance to the river because it is a question of grave importance to them because, "they consider themselves to be the children of the river, and to the river and river alone do they hold allegiance" (14). It evidences that the novelist is more interested in depicting archetypes and thereby giving a mythic perspective to the novel. For the boatmen the river "is a symbol of divine mother. Of God himself " (22). The boatmen are her "children" and they are ready to die for her. Further mythic perspective is added to the novel by the Grand Master's dream and the prophecy given at the very opening of the novel. Though its meaning is obscure and ambiguous, it suggests that there is nothing final about the fate of the city.
An unending debate starts between whatever is destined to occur and the will of individuals like the Grand Master who want to mould the circumstances to their advantage. The prophecy reads as follows:

Who knows, who can read the signs, the workings of immortal time? A King I see upon a throne, In astronomer’s grove the boatmen mourn, A thing of darkness growing dark, On city walls the shadow’s mark. The river, I see, from a teacher rise. The hermit, the parrot, the teacher die. Under a rain the waters burn, to his kingdom at last the King returns.

The dream of the Grand Master is in conformity with this prophecy. For the Grand Master, his dream cannot be a faithful herald but according to the Astrologer’s understanding the Grand Master’s dream suggests that the present Grand Master will be the king of the city in future as he says, “yet such dreams come out of the depth of great truths and carry in them the truth of the times. If the times are troubled, the troubles must be faced. It is no secret that the city has become an unruly place, a plaything of asuras” (15). Whatever follows later on in the novel presents the Grand Master’s effort to become the king of the city. To fulfil his dream, he lets his coteries adopt ruthless measures to crush the masses when he fails to deviate them from their righteous path in spite of the tactics that he employs in the beginning.

As the first step to consolidate his position, the Grand Master with the assistance of the court Astrologer announces “The way of Three
Beatitudes” in front of a large crowd. He begins with a pompous language in his introductory speech, “My children, God has sent the Grand Master to be your servant. Looking after this city is a yajna from him, his life is the ahuti... a large number of asuras have descended to disturb the yajna” (7). Then he announces the way of Three Beatitudes in an ancient tongue, which increases the ambiguity of his speech:

One, the Grand Master of the city is the father and the mother of the city. All citizens are his children equally. Let them offer their allegiance to the Grand Master as a child to his father.

Two, the wealth of the city belongs to everyone. However, since there are too many of us, let it be resolved that henceforth there shall be one, and only one child to a mother and two to a home.

Three, while happiness and prosperity await the city and all those who follow the triple way, for him who chooses the opposite path and prefers to become a millstone round the city’s neck let him be received without mercy and be treated—according... law of compassionate righteousness. (17-18)

Though his speech pleases the city folk, no one understands the concept of “one child to a mother and two to a home.” The “Law of compassionate righteousness” is also not very clear to them. It is only the Headman, the leader of the boatmen who understands the plot and design of these endeavors, “it had a meaning which was not apparent on the surface” (18). Here it is interesting to note that the leader of the boatmen is a woman, who, by uniting the male and female principles, becomes an
instrument to present the existential vision of the novel. She warns the Astrologer against such crooked announcements to befool people:

You think that an ant is born on this earth without God’s will? If it is His will that there should be only one child to a mother then surely it shall come to pass. There is no need for the Grand Master or you to pass a law ... You said that the wealth of the city belongs to the people ... let the city’s wealth be put to use for the benefit of all (20).

The announcement of “The Era of Ultimate Greatness” follows the ‘Three Beatitudes’, which leaves the city people with fear and foreboding. In the guise of it, the Grand Master orders the police to crush the people who have denied allegiance to him. The arrested people are taken to a prison house euphemistically called the Gold Mines. Thus the ways of a corrupt regime are adopted to arrest those people who owe their allegiance to the river. The expressions like “Three Beatitudes,” “The Era of Ultimate Greatness,” “Gold Mines,” and “The Law of Compassionate Righteousness” are nothing but misleading euphemistic expressions. The way of “Three Beatitudes” is an enforcement of a new code of conduct for the people whereas “The Law of Compassionate Righteousness” means ruthless punishment to the unwanted people. Likewise “The Era of Ultimate Greatness” means the loss of individual freedom resulting in arbitrary arrests by which innocent people are condemned to a debased
life of suffering and agony in a big underground passage which leads to a complete extinction of the soul.

To follow the mythical narrational pattern, Joshi has given mythical names to his characters that are against the rule of the Grand Master and support the boatmen. Bhumiputra, Vasu, Dharma, Shailaja and Patanjali are characters that have the courage to lead a meaningful existence along with the boatmen. The only character having a modern name is the Professor who is the teacher of Bhumiputra. All these characters are linked to the Grand Hermit or the river that represents God and his divine powers. The Grand Master is always in search of these characters mainly Bhumiputra who is a teacher and is believed to be the kingpin of the conspiracy against the rulers. Bhumiputra’s disappearance from the scene leads to the arrest of Patanjali.

Another attempt to gain popularity is done by the Grand Master in the form of the Festival of the River through which the Astrologer again makes an attempt to take an oath of allegiance from the people:

In life and in death, I shall not rest, until the last of the asuras, the last of the conspirators; the last of the traitors is eliminated from our city and laid in the grave.
In this struggle, I shall hold my allegiance to the Grand Master and to no one else. If I break this covenant, entered this day of the festival of the Great River, may the Great River curse me, strike me dead, lay waste my seed for twenty generations so help me God (100).
The Grand Master follows the way of all despotic rulers. The end of the oath taking ceremony results in the coronation of Grand Master’s son as the new king. First, he elevates himself by becoming the king and then he wants to ensure the succession of his son to the throne. He also creates the impression that he is obliging the country by making his son the next king. The Astrologer is Grand Master’s tool and he advances attractive arguments in order to justify the identification of the Grand Master with the river. He tells the Headman, “Do not bring the Great Yogeshwara into this, Headman. All I ask is that you also swear to the Grand Master. He and the great river are one” (164).

The river is an embodiment of Time and divine mother to whom the boatmen owe their allegiance. In this eternal conflict between good and evil, those who have faith and pursue the right action acquire the affirmation of life. It is entirely left to man to choose his course of action and determine his future. The king and his men are blind to see this reality because they are devoid of faith. Even the Education Adviser who goes to the Great Hermit clarifies:

There is nothing inevitable about the prophecy. The hand that made it believes, above all, in man’s capacity to change his fate. So even if it speaks of the coming of a king, men can so conduct them, so choose, that the king does not come, or the king that comes is of right kind (68)
A person can reach salvation in life only by profound belief in God and by following the righteous of living. He explicates further:

God too is a king, Minister. I am sure you have heard of him. ...here, there, in you, in the beggarly boatmen and has boat, in all that you see. The world belongs to God. Let him be the king of what is His (69-70).

The Education Adviser's ambition to become the king of the city has made him blind and proud like the Grand Master's Due to his shrewd mentality he is far from understanding the eternal truths put forth by Great Yogeshwara who develops into the most prominent archetypal symbol in the novel.

The next chapter "The Lottery Stall " depicts the increasing opposition against the Grand Master. The professor and Shailaja's brother use Bhom's parable about the naked king to expose the moral nakedness of the Grand Master. The hollow character of the system is revealed to the people and they think that they "had been lulled into sleep and were now awakening to their surroundings" (127). They have awakened only after much harm has been done. The rule of the Grand Master has a corroding impact on the souls of those who struggling against their extinction. Dharma's father sees a hole in his chest, " It had started one morning when shaving before a mirror, he thought he saw a hole in his reflection" (133) When he asks his friend he says, "It is three Truths
Syndrome, Stasis of the soul. Atrophy of the brain and locomotor functions” (135). It is a clear picture of what man becomes when cruelty, corruption, violence, hypocrisy, deception and material benefits dominate the society. Both the Great Yogeshwara and the Nameless- One are “instruments …of the great God …who is the Master of the universe.” They are sent with a mission to purify the city of its “egoism, selfishness and stupidity.” (263) which have taken the city in their grip.

The next chapter “The Return of the Teacher” brings Bhumiputra that he is just a tool in the hands of God. Bhumiputra works as a teacher and a guide to the boatmen and becomes a mouthpiece of the novelist to present his Hindu existential vision. Lord Krishna talked about Jnana Yoga in the context of body and soul and impressed upon Arjuna that the ultimate reality is soul because it never dies. The Bhagavad-gita preaches, “wise men do not grieve for the dead or for the living.” A man who practises Jnana yoga treats “Pleasure and pain, gain and loss and victory and defeat” alike. Bhumiputra inspires the boatmen with a similar vision:

For if you are afraid to die then your soul is already dead and the river, your mother, cannot help you even if she were back from the dungeons of the shadow. If you choose the death of your soul above the death of your Body, then no one, man or god, can help you (146)
Further Master Bhoma inspires them with a similar vision of the immortality of their soul:

The guns can kill your bodies, yes. Are you then afraid to die? ... What is man, howsoever powerful! That he so fills you with dread, that you let him come between you and your understanding ... What do you choose, then this wisp of the mist or the great river herself? (146).

Though Master Bhoma advises and invites them to revolt against the Grand Master, he is himself afraid and says, “the thought of the Grand Master’s prisons fills me with dread... I have done my bit and cannot go on” (155). The Great Hermit encourages Master Bhoma like Lord Krishna where he asks Arjuna to shun all the worldly considerations and adopt the way of Dharma and Kartavya:

The city, this world, all this is the manifestation of the one and not the shadow of the Grand Master’s ego, as the Grand Master might imagine. And it is He, the one without a second, who secretly supports and guides all that you see, and what you do not see (156).

It is the Will of God according to which the world runs. Great Yogeshwara further explains the role of man in the plan of the Universe and the value of individual choice:

But the Almighty can manifest through men only what men allow Him to manifest. This is why men and cities and nations must choose. There is the upward path that leads to freedom and there is a downward path that, for the moment at least, must lead to perdition (156).
The doctrine of *Karma* tells us that man’s final growth rests with him self because his future is not pre-determined. Reiterating the importance of individual choice, Sartre realized that man may choose to be “nothing” like a “table” or may “choose to reach above the stars” ¹⁰. The *Upanishads* much before Sartre have insisted that a man can break with the past through concerted will and action. Man’s growth rests on his way of living and thus he is not an insignificant unit of the universe but an active agent and it is only through his actions that he can achieve his personal salvation as well as collective salvation. Likewise the people of the city must decide their course of action in future from the options to them.

The prison houses euphemistically called Gold Mines are a part of the *maya* (*Sansara*) which like a labyrinth destroys man’s capacity to think and confuses him so that he fails to choose the path of affirmation. The Professor and the Headman are put in those ‘dark dungeons’ where any thought of self and affirmation is gradually dissolved in the darkness. Plunged into suffering and torture they bear all the injustice inflicted upon them by the rulers. The Headman is blinded by them and the Professor goes on fast until his death to oppose the despot, The Grand
Master. The Great Hermit claims all these happenings a part of his yajna to purify this world:

This yajna of mud people, Patanjali, burns only on sacrifice. When the fire is low, when the flame is dying, men must feed it with their own lives. And who knows, the gods now call for the professor's life? Who knows this be the great purpose that they have reserved for him? (166).

The death of Professor becomes a matter of grave concern for the Grand Master and to project a clean image, he orders the release of all prisoners. The issue of such a decree is followed by another order by the Grand Master, “No prisoner was to be set free unless he proves his innocence” (172). For Master Bhoma, “the decree was further evidence of the contempt in which the Grand Master held the inhabitants of the city” and it “was not worth the paper it was written on” (174). The news of Professor's death and the sad plight of the Headman results in the strike of the boatmen leading to a complete disruption of river transport in the city. Further dragnets are launched to suppress the boatmen and the mud people. The conflict between the boatmen and the police reach its zenith signifying the conflict between good and evil. Due to internal rivalries and a secret deal between the Education Adviser and the Minister of Trade, the shock Brigades which consist of students and teachers join the boatmen and give the Commissioner a humiliating defeat. A second Deed
of National Partnership is signed between the Army and the Minister of Trade to support the candidature of the Minister of Trade for Grand Mastership of the city. Thus, it is clear that the city has reached its hour of crisis and the administrative machinery of the city is cracking slowly.

The ultimatum given by the Commissioner to the boatmen proves to be futile. The Headman tells the Colonel, “The boatmen are also committed to die to the last man” (207) and advises the boatmen to fight for their freedom:

There are perhaps other ways to fight this, but we do not know of them. It is an ancient evil that has come out of the Seven Hills. So, let the boatmen fight it in their ancient way. The beast we now face is deaf and blind and is set on a single purpose, the Astrologer’s oath. The king that was naked is naked still. Death, I say, is preferable to surrender to the king (208)

He tells Bhumiputra about the inevitable death, which awaits everyone at the appointed hour, “Death is certain for all and here is a reason to die. As I told you, the course of our struggle is set. Let it run” (208). Thus the crisis which has enveloped the city gets bleaker and alarming. The Grand Master calls the members of the Supreme Council and after much deliberations over the caste and heredity factor in the choice of a king, they select the grand master as the king and the minister of trade as the new grand master.
The circumstances of the city suggest to the great hermit that there is no time left to mend. He puts the same question to the river: "what should I do?..... Is there still time? Is there hope? Is there a point?" (216) He opens the city's horoscope and sends it to the court astrologer for further interpretation:

Astrolonger, I send you my greetings. What I send you here with you will doubtless recognize. The wheel has nearly come full circle. The hour of God is upon us and the time is short, As you had hoped, a king now sits on the throne. My death and the death of the teacher are certain.... I beg of you to once again consider the meaning of the line we have so long disputed. I beg you to bring both the interpretations to the knowledge of the king. Let him choose ..... More then the future of a king, astrologer, what is involved here is the future of the city, a civilization. I hope you will not misunderstand. And now, farewell -till, in another birth we meet again. (217)

The Astrologer realises his fault but the Grand Master is devoid of any faith in God: "And god – what is god? Where is He? Does he even exist? He must surely have other things to worry about than intervene in the affairs of this city where we in any case now rule" (219). For the great Hermit, it is not difficult to guess the future of the city. All the three wings of the forces are brought into action by the Grand master with their modern weapons; helicopter, gunboats, commandos, laser beams and

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tanks which crush Master Bhoma, Dharma and others who are so determined to preserve themselves from corruption and trickery.

While this suppression goes on, a change in the river is noticed by the Great Hermit: “The sky had once again become overcast. The clouds hung low and they were black. More clouds were rolling in from the horizon. Below him the river was rising” (227). The river continues to rise with music of drums and engulfs each and everything in the city in its domain, “To the melody now other notes are added, and the sound of drums and instruments of which man has no knowledge” (251). For the Grand Master and his allies, the river becomes an identity of horror and awe, “all of a sudden the river was not a river any more.... The inmates of the place shuddered in horror as the new Grand Master’s building broke in the middle and flood by floor, frame by frame, fell into the sea. One last wave uprooted the foundations and sent them flying into the sky” (257). All of them perish in the river water and Great Yogeshwara ends the story of the city and its king saying

For seven days and seven nights it rained without a stop. On the eighth day the sun rose and from a clear sky stared down at a vast sea of water. The sea was calm and gave no hint of the agitation that had gone into its making. Of the Grand Master and his city nothing remained (260).
Thus the river which is an embodiment of Time (129) becomes almost
“the primordial sea” and wipes out everything and through her the Eternal
or Divine reasserts itself. The city has met its end but it is not an end. A
new city has to emerge on its ruins. The Great Yogeshwara tells the
Nameless-One:

On the ruins of that city, as always happens a new city has
risen. It is ruled by another Grand Master, which, of course,
need not always happen. In the new city is another Professor,
another Bhumiputra, another tribe of boatmen. There is another
council and another set of councilors. The men have other
names but the forces they embody remain unchanged. And into
all this when you go you will, perhaps, be known as another
Hermit of the Mountain. And it is possible you will have a
disciple whose name will be Little Star (262).

The end of the novel is full of optimism and hope for affirmation as we
see Great Yogeshwara sending his disciple to teach people the
significance of prayer, faith and understanding to the new city:

The main thing is to prevent this endless repetition, this periodic
disintegration. But to achieve that we need purity.

Purity?
Yes the city must purify itself if it is not to dissolve again.
Purity itself of what?
Of egoism, selfishness, stupidity (263).
The negation of these weaknesses is a pre-requisite to self-knowledge that brings understanding and unfolds the truth. Understanding brings commitment to pursue the righteous path with full vigor and faith in God. Though it is not easy but one must try as Great Yogeshwara says: “The question is not of success or failure; the question is of trying... The city must strive once again for purity. But purity can come only through sacrifice” (263). The novelist thus explores the very foundations of faith and right action. The significance of God to man is shown by The Great Hermit and he affirms God as “the highest Truth”; He is “the noblest thing each of us can imagine” (70) and “belief in God restores peace to human soul” (76). It is not success that we always get because “in any case we are only instruments... of the great God in the highest heaven who is the master of the universe... His is the Will, His is the Force” (264).

When we observe the mythic perspectives and archetypes other than the city and the river, the Great Yogeshwara and the Nameless-One have different mythical associations. The Great Yogeshwara is the “Puran Purush” and his pupil, the Nameless One suggests Manu on the raft at the time of pralaya. Other semblances make us believe that the Great Yogeshwara is Lord Krishna telling his pupil the gospel of Dharma and revealing to him the mystery of the world and of Himself. The concluding
verse of Gita names Lord Krishna as Yogeshwara and he is the one who watches this 'leela' (play) very minutely. The Nameless-One is Arjuna, who is hesitant at first, but proceeds to undertake the assignment after being enlightened. Both the Yogeshwara and the Nameless-One are "instruments of great God in the highest heaven who is the master of the Universe" (264). This suggests Lord Krishna's avatara in human form when the Lord chooses to enter into His own world.

The Nameless-One is also a messianic figure like Christ. He is an "illegal" child but he is the chosen one. Running parallel to these archetypes is the symbol of the great mother—the river. The boatmen are her "children" and they are ready to die for her. The great river speaks to her children whenever they are in trouble. The Professor often goes to her to seek her advice. The Professor is like a Bhisma-figure seeking help from his mother Ganga in The Mahabharata. The river sustains the city like a protecting mother and destroys the city when it becomes too overbearing. It is on her bosom that a child is born to the Great Yogeshwara so that he is properly instructed and sent to yet another city as its saviour. The Hermit of the mountain is the saviour of human race because his timely action saves the Nameless-One who is to be sent to the new world. The child that he selects is the chosen one. The Hermit performs the yajna to erase the blasphemy of the Astrologer and calls the
child to pour “Ahuti” in the Hermit’s “yajna” near the river. When the Nameless-One is sent as a future Hermit, it indicates the psychological rebirth of the Great Hermit.

Another factor which adds the mythic perspective to the novel is the repeated sound of music and drums whenever something crucial happens in the novel. This music is heard at the start of the novel when Great Yogeshwara is preparing the Nameless-One for his quest:

And when he had drained the cup the Nameless-One felt as vast as the sky and as tall as the mountain, and there came into his ears, as though from beyond the stars, the sound of a melody played on one string. The music rose and fell and grew in volume and was joined by the sound of dancing feet. And presently, the music and the dancing filled the infinite spaces of the cosmic night (11).

This sound of drums and music is heard intermittently in the novel to the last when the city is being submerged in the disastrous river:

The music rising to a shattering volume fills the four quarters of the sky. The notes leap from one pole to the other, awesome yet playful. To the melody now other notes are added, and the sound of drums and instruments of which man has no knowledge. And now another wind rises and there is the sound of dancing whirling feet and of laughter (251).

All these musical notes and dancing suggest the dance of Lord Shiva and awaken the reader to the universal stage on which the action of the novel...
is moving on. This indicates to transcend the contemporary into the cosmic and the transient into the timeless. The devastation of the city by the primordial waters of the river is a sort of cleansing of an impure, selfish and faithless creation and it is replaced by another world full of hope and affirmation.

According to Jean Paul Sartre, Man as an individual should preserve the authenticity of his self without taking refuge in “Bad Faith.”\textsuperscript{11} It is a matter of individual choice for human beings to lead an authentic existence which Sartre regards as an absolute virtue in Existentialism. This absolute virtue is wholly different from mere adjustment with the surroundings as Marjorie Grene opines:

\begin{quote}
The concept of authenticity is not a concept of adjustment-in fact with respect to the current ideal of the well-adjusted member of society, it is truly and deeply a heresy.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

When we see the individuals of the city from this angle, the elite Ministers and Councilors practice “Bad Faith” because they are conscious of the wrong they are doing, but they still continue doing so complying with the Grand Mother’s order. The middle classes who live in the colony of the brick houses never protest and thus they lack authenticity. Quite opposite to these people are Dharma and his father who are high officials in the Grand Master’s administration. When they realize the loss of their
authenticity Dharma begins to imagine himself a boatman and dresses himself like them whereas his father becomes a complete wreck when he observes a hole in his body. It is only the poor boatmen who have the courage to lead an authentic existence though they pay a heavy price for it. Grand Master’s father had once cautioned him regarding their honesty and courage:

They are not as simple as they seem...They consider themselves to be the children of the river, and to the river alone do they hold allegiance. They believe, unfortunately, with their hearts and for their beliefs they are willing to die. And don’t let their poverty mislead you into believing that they can be bought

(14).

Man’s liberty is completely thwarted nowadays due to different threats in the environment as well as by death, which is the irrevocable certainty and only few individuals, are brave enough to face them. For Heidegger, “genuine existence is existence which dares to face death”\textsuperscript{13}. In this respect the boatmen boldly safeguard their authenticity in Heideggerian sense. Their Headman (a woman) is the symbol of strength and commitment and she very well understands that the secret of man’s life is his liberty to choose. As Sartre says: “For the secret of a man is not his Oedipus complex or his inferiority complex: it is the limit of his own liberty, his capacity for resisting fortune and death”\textsuperscript{14}. A representative
case of the authenticity of the mad people is the old man, Patanjali. He is arrested as a substitute of Bhumiputra (Master Bhma) because Bhma is not apprehensible. When he is asked by Dharma to apologize if he wants to be set free, he replies: “But why should I apologize? I have done no wrong. Rather the Grand Master should apologize for making such absurd rules” (26). Likewise Bhumiputra, the Professor and Dharma’s grandfather also preserve their authenticity. The Grandfather grows unique roses on his farm in a city which is barren and he is yet another person to oppose the will of the rulers. Ultimately, all these people die in the extensive attack launched by the armed forces.

The political scenario employed by the novelist serves as a background as well as it lends contemporaneity to happenings of the novel. Absurdity, anarchy, alienation are some of the characteristic features of existentialism which are seen rampant in the city. There are shopping arcades, cigars, newspapers, lottery stalls, card-clubs, radio waves and conveyors that work on electricity. The weapons which are employed to crush the people include self-loading rifles, tanks, helicopters and lasers. The city has its class divisions as well as co-existence of different ways of life according to which people live on different geographical locations in the hills.
The Indian political scenario of the Emergency is in many respects paralleled in the novel. There is a despotic ruler (Grand Master) who imposes his decisions on other people though there is an outward appearance at the top where he is supposed to be elected by his councilors. He has a Rallies Master to organize rallies in his support to give the impression that he is popular among the city folk. The Minister of Trade proposes in the meeting of the “Supreme Council” that he be made King and argues that it is in the interest of the people. He says:

I shall briefly put forward certain criteria that the king of the city should meet. First, as already decided, he must be a wearer of sacred thread. Second, he must come from a family which has already demonstrated its willingness to make sacrifice for this city. Third, he must command the affection of our masses and the trust of the armed forces and the business class. Fourth, he should be above the petty squabbles of the bazaar... Now a gentleman, the only person who meets these criteria is our beloved Grand Master. I propose, therefore, that he be requested to accept the onerous burdens of the king's high office (213).

The Rallies Master, the Minister of Trade and others are all subservient to the status and will of the Grand Master. Indian Emergency also had legislatures and judiciary though they were totally subservient to the chief of the executive. To enforce his laws, the Grand Master uses all kinds of suppression with the help of guns and by the use of army and the police,
though the army and the police are kept to protect the city from external and internal aggressions. The euphemistic declarations and decrees by the Grand Master meet the Twenty Point Program followed by a strict control of media and the satellite (173). The Rallies Master is made to organize rallies so that people may form the impression that the Grand Master and his son are very dear to the masses, as the Rallies Master tells the journalist: “And now, journalist, I must gather rallies not only for the Grand Master but his son as well. The city must now face its final humiliation and I must be an instrument to it” (76). The Grand Master regulates an impractical family planning, “One, and only one, child to a mother and two to a home” (18), which seems to be taken from the happenings of Emergency in India. Further a straightening of roads is done by the use of bulldozers devastating the houses of hundreds of people who live there because the Grand Master’s wife wants it to be so for no reason other than of having a nicer view. She says: “How much nicer would the view be if there was a straight road running from here to the river” (37). Later on those people are allowed to stay at the same place, now called “Avenue although” as if their houses were still there. There are references to money power (90), hoarding (93) and adulteration of oil (153). The conversation between the Minister for Trade and
Pinstripe suggests how even the Government officials are involved in raising the price of commodities:

Principe went on: In the light of the approaching Festival of the River cooking oil can bring in excellent revenues. Princes can be pushed very high if the produce of the Gold Mines is cornered. I shall do what I can do (64)

The suffering and torture to which people are subjected in the Gold Mines is also contemporary. They are sent to prison without a trial in the court of law. Later on the Grand Master instructs the Astrologer to issue a decree but has no intention to implement it as the present day leader befool people by promising big things but doing opposite in practice. This can be seen when the Grand Master tells the Astrologer:

Yes, Astrologer, let us decree that all prisoners shall be told their crimes, or set free.
Issuing a decree, Astrologer does not mean its immediate implementation (167)

In order to accomplish his motive, the Grand Master gives ministerial posts for political reasons irrespective of talent and potentials. In the present circumstances of power politics where so many parties are involved, it has become a major issue which dominates the formation of any government. In order to keep the shock brigades away from joining hands with the boatmen the Grand Master appoints the Education Adviser
to the Council. As the Little Star tells the Professor: “When the Grand Master inaugurated the New Era the Astrologer advised him to appoint the Education Adviser to the Council. That was the only way of keeping his shock brigades from joining hands with the boatmen” (35-36). This Education Adviser has nothing to do with education, talent and capability. The only thing he has is the support of students and teachers, whose support the Grand Master wants to win.

Further contemporaneity is provided to the novel when the Grand Master imposes restriction on the freedom of the press and does not let any independent newspaper flourish. The Little Star informs the Professor:

There are two newspapers in this city. One of them is owned by a trust of which the Astrologer is the head. The other is owned by a girl. The girl is five years old and cannot manage a newspaper. It is managed for her by the Master of Rallies. The Master of Rallies also controls the satellite. The satellite controls the radio and the video. The Master of Rallies controls the satellite on the Grand Master's behalf because the satellite is the private property of the Grand Master (88).

The impact of Gandhian thoughts can be traced in the activities of the Great Yogeshwara, the Headman and Bhumiputra. The Hermit never incites anyone for a rebellion but tries to the last extent to persuade the Grand Master and his allies to learn by themselves:
God resides as much in a Grand Master as in you and me. Is not therefore always room for hope? We never know when the soul of a Grand Master is touched and in that hour his life is transformed (263).

For the upliftment of the whole society every individual has to be purified. Once this is done, the "endless repetition," "the periodic disintegration" (262) will be prevented and a stable society will come in existence. All this meets the Gandhian vision to achieve Ramrajya by resistance and service. The Hermit advises the Minister of Trade not to be ambitious but to defy the Grand Master and expose him, because "a man aspiring to rule this city must first learn to be the slave of this city" (113). The echoes of Marxism are also discernible in the novel when Bhumiputra advises the Boatmen:

Brother and sisters, the pyramids, the palace, the Seven Hills deaf though they now be to the boatmen's cries, it is by the sweat of the boatmen's brow that such things are built. And it is by the sweat of the boatmen's brow that brick mansions are raised, and avenues laid, and avenues made straight, and the amour of the soldier bought. It is by your sweat, my brothers that the wealth of the Soldier bought. It is by your seat, my brothers, that the wealth of this city is produced. And now,. I say to you, you will refuse the shameless phantoms the sweat of your brow, the skill of your hands (178).
By presenting politics in the novel in an allegorical way Joshi succeeds in transcending its contemporaneity because the novel contains characters that are archetypes rather than recognizable human beings with individual characteristics. It is remarkable to see that the novelist succeeds in providing a message to us without the psychologically realized characters. When the prophecy and the statements of Great Yogeshwara are observed minutely, there is a kind of controversy in them. It is suggested that the incidents that are happening in the city are destined to occur according to the prophecy so the persons who are involved in it cannot be blamed. If the Grand Master is believed to be a tool in the hands of destiny, he cannot be blamed of having realized his ambition at the cost of people’s liberties because the prophecy claims the coming of a king: “A King I see upon a throne,” and it clearly asserts that the Grande Master is just a play thing and Fate has chosen him to be that way. The Astrologer says: “Grand Master, the time has come to let you know that there exists a prophecy that speaks of the coming of a king. Your dream is the herald that we have been waiting for” (15). As it is foretold in the prophecy that “A thing of darkness growing dark/On city wall’s the shadow’s mark” (216) it can be understood that the king is bound to be ruthless and oppressive. If the Grand Master is a phenomenon then it is not his own fault but it can be the fault of his chair, which corrupts him. If
everybody behaves in the same manner as this Grand Master has behaved, then the present Grand Master who has made him king cannot be regarded as guilty. A person can only be blamed if he chooses the absurd path himself. He must have his free will to choose between allegiance to God or to man like the boatmen.

In the novel’s unnatural chaotic and spiritually sterile atmosphere, the characters have a sorry tale of their own to narrate. They suffer from alienation, weariness, boredom, rootlessness, and meaninglessness in their lives. The Rallies Master is unhappy and rootless: “His misfortune lay in the fact that instead of teaching him how to row a boat his parents had wanted him to join the ranks of the brick people,” (71) and was considered an upstart by the boatmen. The Professor too is tired of his existence and he tells Little Star, “I am tired of being careful, Little Star. I am weary” (87). To Bhumiputra, his life seems to be a mere waste: “Bhoma urged him to stay because he still felt very alone” (157). He was unhappy with “his own ineffective life. A sense of overwhelming futility filled him at such times, so much so that he found no point in living” (174). The Grand Master too is no exception. He is also gloomy and tired. The Minister for Trade tells him: “You are tired. In your weariness you let dark thoughts assail you” (203). Dharma’s father suffers from the “Three Truths, Syndrome, stasis of the soul, atrophy of the brain and
locomotor functions” (135). He confesses: “My insides are rotting. I too am just vanishing” (134). Thus, every character has “a strange sorry tale” (10) of his own to nature.

Of all the people it is the boatmen who lead an authentic existence in the Hiedeggerian sense. The brick-people and the mud-people can be persuaded, “cajoled, distracted, and, if necessary, threatened” (13). But the Boatmen oppose the Grand Master’s plan and refuse to give in to his whims. Though they are simple and poor, but they are far away from being simpletons, they are prepared to pay any price for their authentic existence. They are courageous, honest and bold enough to call a spade a spade. The Grand Master regards them “incomprehensible and stubborn” (14). The Grand Master’s father had once advised him:

Boatmen are not as simple as they seem. They consider themselves to be the children of the river, and to the river and river alone do they hold allegiance. They believe, unfortunately with their hearts, and for their belief they are willing to die. And don’t let their poverty mislead you believing that they can be bought (14).

In the face of all odds, they stubbornly oppose the Grand Master to maintain their identity and way of life.

It is the high and middle-class people who lack in authenticity as they never protest and adapt themselves to the changing circumstances. The level of authenticity varies in inverse proportion to the status that
varies with the altitude at which they live. The lowliest and the poorest boatmen living in the mud huts are the most superior as they do what they feel like doing. For half of their time “they spend sitting about on the sloping river bank talking, singing, meditating, playing the one-string” (14). The middle class men lack in authenticity as they adapt themselves to the situation and do not practise what they feel like doing. They are unhappy because they have abdicated their freedom to the rulers in the hope of getting a higher position in the administrative hierarchy.

The highest or ruling classes lead the most inauthentic lives and impose the same on others. They are the most corrupt, morally bankrupt, utterly shameless hypocrites. The Grand Master, in the name of welfare and prosperity of the city, declares the Era of Ultimate Greatness with the motif of consolidating his own position to become king and pave the way for his son as well.

The Grand Master is “a master of ambiguity” (197). He sets to work only after sunset and works till dawn. He never sees the coming of dawn because wherever he is the first rays of the sun are never allowed to reach. Though he is good-looking and courteous, unlike Plato’s ideal Prince, the Grand Master “dislikes music” (48). On the night of the boatmen’s blockade in the river, he orders their simple musical instruments to be destroyed with laser-weapons. He and his Ministers
practice "Bad Faith." He is a thorough fraud. As per the Professor's last wish, he instructs the Astrologer to issue a decree but not to think of implementing it: "Issuing a decree, Astrologer, does not mean its immediate implementation" (168). The Grand master and his cringing council of ministers fail to look into the nature of their "freedom," freedom to become "for itself" or "in-itself."

To ensure people's allegiance to the Grand Master, the Astrologer carries the message of "the Triple Way or the Way of the Three Beatitudes" to the people. "The Era of Ultimate Greatness" (23) is declared to drum the fear of the palace into them. It enjoins them to follow the Astrologer's Three Beatitudes. But the Boatmen refuse stubbornly to swear allegiance to ant human being. They prove the authenticity of their selves in Heideggerian and Sartrean terms. For Hiedegger, "genuine existence is existence which dares to face death." Every night a few boatmen are transported to the Gold Mines and are made to undergo physical and mental torture till "the idea of the self is suitably dissolved" (161). The case of Patanjali, who is arrested, as a substitute for Master Bhma, is exemplary. When Dharma tells: "You only have to apologise and you will be set free," Patanjali boldly asks: "But why should I apologise? I have done no wrong. Rather the Grand Master should apologise for making such absurd rules" (26). The
boatmen under Bhumiputra-a scrawny, bearded, mathematics teacher who hails from the mud-quarters - struggle hard to maintain their authenticity in the Sartrean sense of the term. Sartre says:

For the secret of a man is not his Oedipus complex or his inferiority complex: It is the limit of his own liberty, his capacity for resisting fortune and death.¹⁶

A state-sponsored terrorism is let loose and a large number of boatmen, who have spured the Astrologer’s Three Truths and burnt the Grand Master’s effigies, are thrown into the Gold Mines. Every effort is made to crush their protest and make them fall in line. The novel seems to have been influenced by the character of Kurtz in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness who wields great power over natives. A row of severed heads on stakes round the hut give an intimation of barbaric rites by which Kurtz has achieved his ascendancy.

There are some among the brick-people also who are concerned about their own existentialist lives. The professor sacrifices everything including his life, in search of his pupil Bhoma who has been picked up one of his night operations. In spite of the dire consequences he could meet, he does not shun his search. He too is thrown into the Gold Mines (the huge dungeon) where he gets emaciated and then finally dies. The
grand father, Dharma’s grandfather, is yet another character that risks his life by giving refuge to Bhoma at his farm. He, along with dharma, Shailaja and Bhoma, dies in the massive attack by the armed forces of the Grand Master.

Bhumiputra, popularly know as Master Bhoma, is also one of the characters who is ready to sacrifice even his life for the authenticity of his existence. He is considered by the police as the “kingpin of a conspiracy” (43) against the Grand Master, and is arrested for “making subversive propaganda at the university” (43). Unlike other university teachers who side with the Grand Master to ensure his bleassing, Bhoma firmly believes that the king is “Naked” (153). Joshi here has used the parable-within-the-parable technique as in Vishnu Sharma’s Panchatantra. He begins to narrate the parable of the naked king (“The Emperor’s New Clothes”) to his students and the whole university is taken by storm:

By the end of the two weeks the whole place was talking about Master Bhoma’s parable. “The King is Naked” became a slogan, a cry of revolt. One morning an entire wall was found decorated with it. It appeared on blackboards and in toilets. The authorities started receiving letters that on being opened contained nothing more than a sheet of art paper, “The King is Naked” calligraphed neatly on either side. At the end of the fortnight, the staff secretary called Bhoma and told him to stop preaching his parable, or face serious consequences (154).
Bhoma finds himself in the grips of fear and assures the secretary that he would eschew such acts. But his authenticity makes him restless; he feels ashamed and is moved to tears. But before he has surrendered himself shamelessly to the spineless authorities, the Hermit of the mountain meets him. Like Lord Krishna, the Hermit helps Bhoma (Arjuna in mythological parlance) as to who he is and the role he is to play in the scheme of things Almighty has predestined. The great Hermit exhorts him:

You have been chosen to speak. The great river has chosen you to speak with the tongue of men what they cannot hear in her troubled lament...having spoken you will feel lighter. The weight shall dissolve, the shackles fall (153-54).

Like Mahatma Gandhi, Bhoma again raises himself to the occasion for he knew the rulers were nothing but the shadow of the evil that lurks beneath the seven hills. And if men free them of the fear of the shadow, and look it straight in the eye, it will "shrive and creep back into the dungeons from where it came" (155). The hermit tells despondent Bhoma about his own experience:

I learnt that nothing enfeebled man more than fear, that nothing but fear stood between him and his liberation... and I saw that where men had thrown off this blanket of fear there alone truth had triumphed and
great civilizations flourished and man had taken another step towards God (155-56).

In this novel the different characters react in different ways. He further tells Bhoma:

This city, this world, all this is the manifestation of the One, and not the shadow of the Grand Master's ego, as the Grand Master might imagine. And it is He who is the master of all men, including the Grand Master, and it is His will that men follow in every way(156)

Now Bhoma comes to realize that it was only fear that was to be feared that breeds confusion that leads to inaction. In the words of Hermit, we find reverberations of the Gita, and Bhoma chooses to act dutifully in the larger interest of the city: “He was at peace now. There was no choice in him except to go on preaching the king’s story” (158). He continues with his recitals that lift the shadow of fear from their souls and infuses hope and courage into them. As Arun Joshi says, “From the realms of a children’s story the parable has passed into the lore of a land of sorrow and despair that the boatmen had never known before” (175-76). The Grand Master, threatened by the possibility of a revolt, gets Bhoma arrested but he escapes to the great consternation of the authorities.

Now the Professor, an astronomer of great repute, decides to find Bhoma.Unlike the Astrologer who computes from the movement of the
planets the fate of mankind, the Professor, in his “Twenty years of friendship” (27) with the stars has earned “complete freedom” (28). He is so engrossed in his work that he remains totally oblivious of the political developments in the city. The news of Bhma’s arrest disturbs him:

His balance had been upset because the event did not reconcile with the laws that, according to his beliefs, underlay the working of the universe...how could men vanish without explanation if stars did not? To the Professor the vanishing of Master Bhma was no different from the unexplained disappearance of a star of the heaven (45-46)

In his search through the corrupt and apathetic administrative machinery, he is assisted by a Gandhi like figure called the Little Star—a shaven headed brown boy of ten or eleven in loincloth only. When the astronomer says that he seems to know a lot for his age, the little star smiles and says: “I am thousands of years old, Professor. Everyone is thousands and thousands of years old, tied as we are to the wheel of Karma” (42). This again reveals the influence of the Bhagavadgita.

The Professor, with the little Star by his side, searches Bhma everywhere and is shocked by the corruption, tyranny, degeneration and repression of the City. He fails to find Bhma and the search leaves him physically and mentally broken. He gives up the search and leaves the city. As Subhash Chandra aptly remarks: “Arun Joshi, therefore, in his
novel *The City and the River*’s is dealing with the universal predicament of the modern man, besieged as he is by debilitating forces.”

*The City and The River* thus does not constitute a departure from Joshi’s interest to explore the existential predicament of man but goes one step further in suggesting man’s metaphysical reconciliation as an answer to all his worries, agonies and alienation. He affirms the relevance of God to man in his life: “Here, there, in you, in me, in that beggarly boatman and his boat, in all you see and you do not see, the world belongs to God” (70). The final message of the novel is summed up in the Great Yogeshwara’s words: “His is the Will, His is the Force” (264) and so an unquestionable faith in God and surrender to Him is the only solution to our threatened existence. *The City and The River* by its theme and execution proves that Joshi has been deeply influenced by the Hindu existential vision and the novel continues the spiritual quest of his earlier novels through measured rhythms of myths, legends and archetypes. By the time we reach the end of the novel, we feel like completing a quest and it is a universal human quest for affirmation through negation of self. The question is not of individual success or failure but of collective efforts for the common good. Joshi’s obsessive preoccupation with man and his situation is his forte and he has explored its staggering variety with rare perspicacity and acumen.
Anup Beniwal writes: “The novel...ends on an optimistic note and certainly enlarges the vision of the reader by making him aware of the causes of this eternal conflict and suggesting panacea in the from of Great Yogeshwara’s advice to the nameless-One. The Great Yogeshwara says to the Nameless- One:

In any case we are only instruments both you and I- of the great God in the highest heaven who is the Master of the Universe. How perfect we are as instruments is all that matters. His is the will, His is the force. But I shall be with you always (264).

We can apply sum-up with these wards of Tapan Kumar Ghosh:

Indeed, as a re-affirmation of Indian and as an experiment of the parable as a fictional mode to convey mythic truths and political satire, *The City and The River* is a remarkable tour de force in contemporary Indian English fiction.
References


6. Arun Joshi, *The City and The River*. (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1994). All further references are to this edition. Page numbers are documented parenthetically immediately after the citation.


12. *Ibid*: 265


