

**INDIVIDUAL URGE FOR PRIMITIVENESS: A CRITIC OF MODERN
TECHNO CENTRIC WORLD IN ARUN JOSHI'S
*THE STRANGE CASE OF BILLY BISWAS***

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Abstract

Under the impact of unprecedented technological advancement, modern man devoid of faith and enlightenment remains in a self centered vacuum unable to breathe the refreshing air of a liberating truth. The industrial and technological advancement have created suffocation in the society and in the individual. Arun Joshi carries his study human predicament which is the result of modern techno centric world. Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is an attack on the technological progress where man has forgotten his culture and attaches himself to the mundane and fleeting pleasure of materialistic world. The protagonist of the novel, Billy Biswas is dissatisfied with rapid scientific and technological progress; the present civilization may be termed as a scientific civilization: the central weakness of our civilization being the defeat of man by the material. Billy finds this world is like a pseudo world where lack of mutual understanding, he leaves New Delhi for Malawika Hills in search of peace, his spiritual soul. The novel is a severe indictment of the meaninglessness existence, mechanization, urbanization, discontent, changing values and spiritual uprootedness of the society in the modern civilization. This paper describes Billy's reluctance towards westernized society consequently his existence craves for primitiveness which is the root of human civilization and perfect place for contentment.

Keywords: Techno centric, Primitiveness, Human Ecology, Existentialism

Arun Joshi's second novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), seems to be a sequel to his first novel; *The Foreigner* is spiritual quest of the protagonist and his longing for identity in the modernized superficial world. In *The Foreigner* the protagonist, Sindi Oberoi, measures a long way all through from Boston to New Delhi with the purpose of knowing the meaning of his existence and finding a place which he may call his own. In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, protagonist Billy Biswas continues this odyssey and leaves New Delhi for Maikala Hills in search of inner peace, his spiritual roots. *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is a journey from the Civilized World to the Primitive World and the supremacy the Primitive World. Billy seems to mediate between New Delhi and the Satpura Hills, both the geographic locations representing the sophisticated and the primitive world respectively. The novelist presents the upper crust of Indian society turning to be materialistic with spiritual shallowness and imitating the western culture blindly forgetting its traditional values and beliefs and all times hover around materialistic world where no solace Billy Biswas a Ph.D scholar in anthropology son of supreme court judge when returns to Delhi where he joins Delhi University as a lecturer in anthropology. After reaching India Billy unable to cope with the situation in the prevailing so called civilized and techno centric society. Despite getting a permanent job in a reputed institution Billy's inner self gets no satisfaction. The beginning of the novel describes restlessness of Billy. Romi, friend of Billy from New York relates the story and calls him "a man of... extraordinary obsession" (*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* 7.)

Further he explains how his fascination towards anthropology: "All I want in to do in life is visit the places they describe meet the people who live there, find out...the aboriginalness of the world" (*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* 12.)

His longing for the primitiveness is not sudden rather it is from New York where he pursued PhD with Romi and a Swedish girl Tuula, doing advance course in psychiatric social work. She is sensitive girl and understands the reasons and impacts of hallucinations in Billy's life. She knows "what went on the in the dark, inscrutable, unsmiling, eyes of Billy" (*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* 15.)

On reaching Delhi Billy marries a Bengali girl named Meena Chatterjee who is quite pretty girl in westernized form. Billy takes these very important decisions of getting married hastily because of his hallucinations, which make him feel very depressed and really shaken up. His marriage does not offer him peace rather he is depressed again and a kind of hunger emerges from unknown. Within a year after his marriage Billy realizes that he has committed a blunder. His wife Meena represents the hollowness and superficiality of the modern phoney society. She is unable to pacify his inner tension. She is short of that rare degree of empathy that might have enabled her to get her husband's vexed mind. It is Meena's lack of empathy and sufficient idea of human suffering that lead to a conflict in their marital life. For Meena Billy is getting stranger and stranger with every passing day. As a wife she is unable to understand him. Billy's inner restlessness and sense of isolation is enhanced by his failure to establish a meaningful contact with his wife and with the society she represents.

With the increasing gap between Meena and Billy, he turns towards Rima Kaul, a girl in Bombay. He establishes a close relationship with Rima and seduces her one day. Her faith in him receives a setback.

The meeting of Billy-Rima plays a very significant role in making Billy realize his mistake. Rima's seduction leads Billy to alienation not only from his family and society but also from his true-self. His soul pinches him to fly away from the civilized world, which is

responsible for his degeneration. And during one of his anthropological expeditions he vanishes into the forests of the Maikala Hills in central India.

During tribal area of Maikala Hills with his students. While placing a tent in the forest he comes to know that one of his students has left the rope at the station. With the purpose of collecting rope Billy goes to a nearby village, which is known to him because he had been here earlier too. Dhunia, the village headman, asks him to wait for Bilasia's return from the forest. These two incidents — the boy's losing rope at the station and Billy's wait for Bilasia's return — prove to be the turning points in his life. He himself says:

When Billy first beholds Bilasia he feels fascination for this tribal girl. First time he realizes that something unusual (is) happening to (him), that (he isn't) behaving quite normally. On returning to his tents he is lost in thinking of Bilasia. He feels some strange fever rising within him. He feels an irresistible pull to the primitive world. He seeths to forget his identity. His meeting with Bilasia completely transform his way of thinking all of sudden, he realizes his true identity in the contact of rustic area and rustic people not in the contact of technocentric jungle. It was as though I was not Bimal Biswas, graduate of Columbia, the only son of Supreme Court Judge, husband of Meena Biswas, and father of a handsome child; it was as though I were not all this but the first man on earth facing the earth's first night. There is a conflict between his present identity in the civilized world and his soul's craving for identity in the primitive world. All the phenomena of nature — flora and fauna — seem to be waiting for him and calling him to join them. A conflict between two forces — modern and primitive — going on in the mind of Billy ends with the ultimate victory of the primitive force. Billy decides to go to the village to attend the dance for which he has been invited by Dhunia. On reaching among these primitive people Billy unconsciously behaves like a tribesman. Like the tribal folk he, too, begins to wait for the rising of the moon. Thus, sitting in the shade of a tree Billy Biswas, a refugee among these tribes-men, undergoes his final metamorphosis like lord Buddha had got enlightenment under people tree in Bodhgaya. In this way it is a nature nurture human beings in better than anything else

To conclude, a critical reading of paper as a true and valuable critic of techno centric society and that is why Billy run away from this so called civilized pseudo society. Billy's escape from a civilized society to a primitive world not for becoming a Yogi, but because the phony atmosphere of the modern society which is nothing more than the making and spending of money. His soul craves for the real meaning of the life which is in the contact of primitive life. Billy is like Gipsy of *The Scholar Gipsy* who flee away from this world in order to get real contentment of the life and no more return back. Again, he is like Kurtz of *Heart of Darkness* who renounces this pseudo world when he knows the real life is lying in mossy and dense forest of Africa and decides to never back in this civilized world. Similarly here in this in the contact of primitive elements Billy gets a new rebirth when the union takes place between Bilasia symbols of prakirti that transforms his life.

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