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“Primitive Longingness” in Arun Joshi’s *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*

Rashmi Singh

Lecturer,

S. V. Polytechnic College, Bhopal (M.P.)

(Ph.D. scholar at Swami Vivekanand University, Sagar)

&

Dr. Pankaj Dwivedi

Associate Professor,

Swami Vivekanand University, Sagar (M.P.)

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Abstract:

The Indian writer Arun Joshi, (1939-1993), deftly records the qualities of the cutting-edge civilized world, together with the primitive society, characterizing two unique social orders and cultures -one is acculturated society and other is the universe of tribals depicting various minds and behaviours. By comparing the propelling West and primitive East, Joshi investigates the issues of both the universe in his fictional work, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. He speaks of agony as a natural component of the world. The ball game between the sophisticated, cultured world and the primitive one is reflected as an alluring investigation by numerous novelists. Joshi's second novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* delineates the narrative of the hero, who is pulled by the obscure and mysterious universe of the ethnical, ancestral society. Billy's strange journey forces him to abandon his ascendancy, his advantageous role as the sole inheritor of an affluent family, and instigates him to go and live among the 'Bhil' folks in a primitive society. This paper takes a gander at the base of Billy's mission, which is discovered inalienable in his inclination directly from the youth days. His life in America and his instruction there offers him no comfort. The attraction towards the primitive world comes in the middle of his conjugal life as well and obliterates it. The investigation endeavours at seeing Billy's journey for individualization and self-character at the expense of leaving everything materialistic. At long last, this paper endeavors to portray the conflicts between the sophisticated world and the primitive one, while investigating Billy's negotiations with both. Comparing the propelling West and primitive East, Joshi investigates the issues of both the universes in his literary work.

Keywords: Primitivism, estrangement, industrialization, culture, civilized, tribal, longing, desire, dilemma.

“Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy-by one or more or all of these-and be free.”

-Swami Vivekananda.

Introduction

The plague of westernization and industrialization spread quickly among the individuals and screen their inner being to flee from nature. Individuals, being diverted for the purported great joy and bliss gradually blow some people’s minds off towards nature now, for the impacts of industrialization were too extreme to even think about bearing it. Yearning for a characteristic method of existence isn’t an insignificant dream or wistful impulse; it is consistent with major human needs, the satisfaction of which is a precondition of our endurance. In this state, one can stay delicately unadulterated and magically connected with Nature, its real humankind and intuitive suddenness. The hero Billy Biswas in the novel isn’t a holy person. He is a normal man and continues submitting sins after sins, yet a day comes when he feels pitiful for all the wrongdoings and vanishes into the backwoods of Maikala Slopes. He does so in light of the fact that the woodland with the primitive individuals in it, with a lot of widely varied vegetation, can keep him out of the wicked track and furthermore the relentless soul of nature can recuperate him of his evil present in his mind and physic. The experience that he gets in the wilderness is only a sort of profound recovery. Rather than going into the congregation, facing priest and admitting his wrongdoings individually, the contrite Billy Biswas goes into the Maikala Slopes and remains before nature in bodily form and genuinely feels dismal and get himself vindicated of everyone, of his transgressions and carries on with a calm life in ideal concordance with nature. In this novel, Joshi delineates the purposelessness and blemishes of our cultivated society which distanced numerous individuals like Billy Biswas, the hero of the novel; however, just a couple of individuals like him have the boldness to escape from it. *Mathur and Rai* actually remark that “The Strange Case of Billy Biswas is a fictional representation of the universal myth of the primitive in the heart

of a man ever alienating him from the superficial and polished banalities of modern Civilization” (143).

A striking differentiation between the infertile and imperfect contemporary sophisticated society and the prolific and flawless primitive society is envisioned. In spite of its unforgiving prosecution of the material concerns, spiritual degeneration of higher-class Indian culture, it is unmistakably positive, about the requirement for a guiding vision, regardless of whether magically good, to experience the contemporary disarrays of values.

Joshi investigates the profound centrality of primitive life as a superior option in contrast to our modern cultured society. In this novel Joshi present primitivism as a counteractant to the no man's land states of current mankind. Primitivism for him is an assurance of vitality, solicitation, request and religious completeness. The conclusion given by the primitive human condition is a sign implying unity, concordance, virtue and guiltlessness. In various Indian legends and the religious writings, individuals leave to the backwoods to mend themselves profoundly. Perhaps that is the thing that Joshi is recommending, however not deliberately.

Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* manages the contention among human advancements and primitive life. Joshi presents the truth of the cutting-edge world by introducing two unique social orders and culture-one is socialized society and the other is the universe of tribal's, in Maikala Slopes. These social cultures speak of two distinct minds. In spite of the fact that the battle of his hero, who is of individualistic nature, Joshi minutely speaks to the qualities of the cutting-edge world, just as a primitive society. Billy Biswas the hero is ruminating between two clashing powers the primitive world and the modern cultured and sophisticated society. *Lokesh Kumar* in this context rightly says that “Billy's inner self acts as a battlefield for two conflicting forces, the one being the money-centric society and the other being spiritual quest through primitive passions” (48).

He prefers the primitive world, over the materialistic society. His determination of the primitive world is a consequence of his tension and sufferings that he faces in his purported industrialized and socialized society. Joshi, in this manner, with the two-fold stories of the novel, tasks the contention between the modernizations versus primitivism. On one hand, he speaks of an unpredictable character of Billy, who finds up distanced from the advanced society and human advancement and then again, Billy, distinguishing himself with the tribal's, shows his longingness

for perfect primitive society. He grasps his demise when the edified society attempts to evacuate him from the 'Natural Heaven'.

Billy Biswas, the hero, faces the issues of infertile, modern, refined society and persistently desires for the inward harmony to be found in the congruity with nature. He had abhorrence for the exclusive class and its characters, and to him, all the individuals around him are 'hung on the peg of money' (97) and are simply 'a stack of tinsel' (141). The epic communicates his aversion for the money mindedness of the civilized individuals prompting the corruption of their spirits.

The fiction is an extreme judgment of the spiritual uprootedness of the post-freedom Western Indian culture. Billy is completely tired of the triviality of a terribly materialistic and sterile Indian society. His internal identity, which craves for the straightforward, simple culture, unspoiled by any sort of make-up from outside, gets no fulfilment. He finds the elite of Indian culture to which he has a place, is without spirituality and helpful concerns. Individuals have begun to copy the standards of Western culture. He labels the westernized Indians as "children of kings condemned to exile"(143). Billy's cerebrum all of a sudden goes to the unrefined side of life and he starts to feel inside him "an incredible power, uncraft..... an unrefined force"(23). As *R.K. Dhawan* composes, “In a bid to seek communion with the primitive world, Billy opts out of the modern world” (20). “.....His love for the primitive life make him leave his wife, his only child and his aged parents, ignoring family responsibility, filial expectations and societal obligation....(“ the fictional world” 32)

Billy denounces the upper-class gentry of Indian society for aping the Western materialistic culture. He doesn't comply with this prevailing pattern of the edified world and he, hence, turns into an outsider in his own highly cultured world. Billy's life, accordingly, might be divided into two particular stages- - the primary stage-manages social and scholarly life in America and New Delhi that builds up his character and gives knowledge of his inclination into primitiveness while the subsequent stage-manages the satisfaction of his Longing in the innate world.

Billy's profound love for primitivism isn't a sudden ejection rather it is his characteristic proclivity. Indications of his love and attachment for primitive self were gotten for the first time in the natural beauty of Bhubaneswar. Billy understands his draw towards the primitive world very right at the beginning of his life. A mishap in his youth, as described to Romi, affirms Billy's enthusiasm towards a world totally unique in relation to his own. At the point when Billy was a child of fourteen, he had gone to meet his maternal uncle along with his mother. At that time Billy

was absolutely liberated from his studies in Dehradun School. Visiting Bhubaneswar, Billy is promptly charmed by the natural scenery and the enchanting of the spot. The visit to Bhubaneswar is likewise noteworthy for Billy as this is where he initially gets the exposure to the inborn world. One day when he was in the nursery of his uncle's lodge he saw one worker going out. After asking, he answered that he was going to see a tribal dance in a neighboring town. Billy expressed his longing to see the dance thus after getting permission he accompanied uncle Chauffer to the close by innate town and got the chance to see their customs, moving, singing, drinking and lovemaking. Billy felt very glad in the organization of those tribals. Billy felt very much interested after seeing, a peculiar intrigue envelops the psyche of the little fellow and he comprehends that he is on the edge of a life-changing encounter.

He visited Konark and after viewing different sculptures there, offered him the answer to the long-probing inquiries in his psyche about his identity. Revealing his emotions, he tells Romi that:

“.....he is fascinated by the imagery of the sculpture and feels for the first time that the true beauty of imagination is appreciated only by the Advisees. Also, that though the spirit may be very old, older than even the human existence itself, yet the knowledge of truth is embedded with the tribal behind —dark inscrutable faces”. (124)

Obliviously the seeds of desire are planted in his psyche that he should likewise have a similar sort of innate life and desires as tribal men had. It was his yearning for primitivism that spouted out unexpectedly:

“First a great shock of erotic energy passed through me..... when I was only fourteen, I remember saying: something has gone wrong with my life. This is where I belong. This is what I have always dreamt of.” (125.)

“He was one of those rare men who have poised without pose”(11). He favors a basic, simple life without conspicuous, an actual existence which has no desires for cash. Yet, sadly it is experienced that he is brought up in a deteriorated society which is bowed after wrecking all his natural and inborn ideals.

His inward urge which was smothered by his folks in his youth, grew up as his adoration for Anthropology, in America whenever he gets an opportunity to distinguish his self. His dynamic urge for studying Anthropology, though disliked by his father, demonstrates his loss, to conquer the conflict of Identity. He declares his urge that:

“..... I would like to travel, travel, and travel. A little bit here and there but mostly in India you have no idea what fascinating societies exist in India.”(12)

Billy conflicts with the desire of his father and began doing PhD in Anthropology as opposed to pursuing American University Engineering. This shows his tremendous love for the primitive and tribal network. So as to fulfill his internal desire he exercises his freedom of choice in choosing Anthropology. He experiences uneasiness in modern sophisticated society and likes to live in the Satpura Slopes, by picking the way that he thinks better for him by assuming the full liability of his activities.

His adoration for primitivism is additionally reflected in his preference of Harlem, dark Ghetto, rather than Manhattan. Therefore, he chooses to live in America's black colony where decent people don't like entering and mingling with them. Billy's Harlem selection makes it clear that he isn't made for the civilized world. So, he found a residence where he could feel relaxed and happy. In spite of the fact that he lives with them but his craving of the primitive world consistently awaits in his inner mind.

The unfortunate circumstance of Billy is the abnormal case as he turns out to be a split personality between "primitive" and "civilized". He abandoned the cutting edge of modern civilization and returned to primitive society. Billy claims the current human world is getting worse and meaningless. In the spiritually barren society, which makes him socially isolated and culturally uprooted, he finds himself, a misfit. Billy feels that cutting-edge socialized world is getting more regrettable and futile as he outlines:

“What got me was the superficiality, the sense of values. I don't think all city societies are Shallow as hours. I am, of course, talking mainly to the so-called upper class. I didn't really get to know the others. I don't think I have ever met a more pompous, a more mixed up lot of people. Artistically they were dry as dust” (128).

He rebelled against the enlightened world to understand the significance and reason for his life. Highly frustrated by the sophisticated materialistic culture, Billy suddenly enumerates a fault in his surroundings and later describes why the culture was so harsh. He says, they were frivolous and do not know the importance of love and intimacy in seeking wealth.

In America, he gets to know Tula Lind green, the Swedish woman who, being a learner in psychiatrist course comprehends an incredible dilemma of Billy's mind. She tells Romi:

“Billy feels something inside him, but he is not sure. Sometimes he is afraid of it and tries to suppress it..... a great force unkraft..... A primitive force. He is afraid of it and tries to suppress it..... but it is very strong in him but stronger than and in you and me. It can explode anytime”. (18).

Throughout his life, he seeks order and harmony that is seen missing in a shallow society. Tula, the Swedish woman remains as a primitive power for Billy who feels comfortable in her organization and imparted to her his sentiments of the general public, as she also has an enthusiasm for Indian tribals. Then both of them get occupied with talks identified with inborn individuals and their societies. It is Tula in whose organization Billy had a brief look at the 'other side'. He communicated his sentiments consequently:

“The other side. You know what I mean, don't you? Most of us are aware only of the side on which we are born, but there is always the other side, the valley beyond the hills; the hills beyond the valley.”
(15)

The above articulation clarifies that Billy gets himself an outsider in the advanced and acculturated world. The world where people are constantly pursuing to store money for sumptuous living. The creature symbolism utilized by Billy mirrors a rankling assault on the Anglicized Indian culture and shows his profound contempt for the exclusive class. A letter which was abandoned by Billy before heading off to the wilderness reflects:

“I see a room full of finely dressed men and women seated on Downy sofas and while I am looking at them under my very nose,

they turn into a kennel of dogs yawning and snuggling against each other or holding whiskey glasses in their furred paws.” (69)

Billy understands that his affection for primitivism is the only path that will lead him towards his optimal world. He is drawn by Bilasia by her simplicity and primitive sensuality. On one hand, the straightforwardness of tribal’s allured him to nature and then again, on the other hand, Bilasia encourages him to look through his personality and search his identity. In her company and in the company of those who belong to it, he comes into touch with the natural common world. He gets a feeling of friendship in the clans and they believe that he is a symbol of God. Dhunia tells that he has certain mysterious forces. He gets enormous love and friendship from the tribal community that he needed for an incredible duration among the alleged socialized individuals. *T.J.Abraham* remarks “he was perfectly at is with the tribal life, and as against the civilized world which dubbed him as obsessed, the tribal world represented by Duniya addressed him as his ‘Mahaprasad’, great friend.” (23)

The unexpected meeting of Billy Biswas with his companion Romi after ten years revolves on the complexity among modernity and primitivism. It was by chance that Romi after becoming a collector of Madhya Pradesh defies Billy Biswas by chance in the slopes of Maikala, where he began living with the tribals, wearing lion garments and strolling shoeless alongside the tribal network. On being asked by Romi, Billy uncovers to him the mystery of picking the natives over family life. He clarifies that money doesn't have any significance in primitivism rather their way of life rotates around nature. Billy explains that the straightforwardness of ancestral life is without misery and desperation. Despite the fact that they experience the ill effects of the genuine dry season but their dancing and singing don't give any brief look at their pressures and basic conditions.

It ought to be noticed that primitive society thoroughly changes the character and conduct of Billy. In the wake of experiencing the recovering procedure, Billy continues to play the part of a savior, a saint and a wizard who treats sick children. He guards of tigers and helps the primitive individuals with common issues and spiritual difficulties. While conversing with Romi, Dhunia tells him. “He is a magicianwe came to know of his powers only when he sent the Tiger awayHe brought my grandson back to life... He is our priest... He looks after us” (67). To the crude society, he shows up “like rain on parched lands, like a balm on a wound” (59-60). *Tapan Kumar Ghosh* remarks: “It was a strange process of regeneration”. (79)

Joshi not only discusses the nature-oriented lives of tribal's but also stresses the significance of herbal plants in relieving diseases in which current logical drugs proved futile. The occurrence of relieving Romi's better half, Situ, who was experiencing headache, brings Billy into contact with the acculturated individuals. With herbal medicines he cures Situ. She after recouping from the pain and agony gets inquisitive to think about the individual who relieved her. Romi doesn't take any question seriously in the beginning however at long last, he enlightens her regarding the whereabouts of Billy. Romi's wife Setu, mistakenly informs Mr. Biswas and Meena Mukherjee about Billy Biswas that he is alive. It was then he started searching with the help of higher authorities and consequently, Havaldar knocks Billy down.

It is intriguing to take note of the fact that Joshi calls these socialized individuals "irresponsible fools and common criminals" (The Strange Case 231). The irony is that most civilized people have killed Billy who became primitive. The mission for significance and self-actualization and self-realization by embracing primitivism fizzles due to the encroachment of the dehumanized edified society over the unrefined and blameless crude social orders in remote territories.

The hero Billy Biswas isn't against progress or society; however, he is against the outcomes that these advancements carry with them such as deceit, duplicity, deception and distress double-dealing. In short Arun Joshi, in the initial segment of the novel presents an intricate character of Billy, who finds himself distanced from society and human advancement. In the subsequent part, he discovers his personality in uncultured society. After abjuring materialistic culture, he grasps his demise when humanized society attempts to remove him. *Tapan Kumar Ghosh* says, "Billy's death is metamorphic. The modern Indian city is disoriented that kills sincerity..... This kind of killing goes on when the social organism does not know its values. We only understand the values of money and power" (183).

Billy bargains to his unexpected end and shuts his eyes without the throbs of death. Living under the heavenly impact of primitivism, loaded up with the abundance of spirituality and guided by divine soul, Billy isn't at all hesitant to confront any outcome whatsoever.

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