



The Identity Crisis in Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*

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Abstract

The paper intends to study 'The identity crisis in Arun Joshi's novel – 'The Strange Case of Billy Biswas'. The identity crisis is one of the misery experiences of a man. A man needs a sense of identity and belongingness in which he can derive his culture. A sense of insights, security and belongingness is necessary for one's happiness. Indian English Novelist Arun Joshi has constantly highlighted the aspect of identity crisis. Though the person is blessed with all the resource like health, wealth, well sophisticated family but his inner mind questions about his own self-identity. Arun Joshi s' novel the Strange Case of Billy Biswas talks about such a character who is lost in search of his own identity. His struggles to meet his inner self are brought out in this paper. In the present scenario we witness many young youths who resemble the character of Billy Biswas trying to find their own identity. Identity crisis of a man forms the essence of Arun Joshi's novel. It is rightly said that mind is the thinking faculty of the soul, we see many youths struggling to resolve the fights between their mind and brain on a most frequently encountered question of 'Who am I'. Therefore, the the identity crisis of Billy, the protagonist in Arun Joshi's novel – 'The strange case of Billy Biswas'. It also intends to connect the character with the dilemmas faced by youth in present generation.

Key words: identity, alienation, primitive, vision, peace

The second novel of Arun Joshi, *The Strange case of Billy Biswas* throws light on some of the key issues faced by the youth in the present scenario. The novel portrays the struggles faced by man in the course of search for his own identity, the grapples to turn his dreams in to reality, and the war between illusion and reality. When the protagonist Billy Biswas encounters himself with the search of his own identity, he moves further to find answer for 'Who am I?' As he questions himself who he was and where did he come from, he feels alienated and detached from the world, in his quest for inner ease. He realizes that he lives in a world of drama where everyone played their respective roles given by the almighty. When a person questions his own cultures and values gradually it converts in to a philosophical problem.

In today's world where development is taking place in almost in every field like education trade technology and the like with cultural consent at the global level which're creating a paradigm shift in understanding of self-hood and identity. Arun Joshi's novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* exemplifies with the character named Billy belonging to well known, sophisticated family who is trapped in search of identity crisis and inner peace. The longing of a man to meet his inner self and peace with in is beautifully pictured in this novel.

The novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is an attempt to show how the normal and the abnormal, the ordinary and the extraordinary, illusion and reality, resignation and desire associate with the journey of life. The noteworthy character

Billy Biswas is a man of sensational zeal. Despite of being blessed with all material amenities, Billy seems discontent with his life. As the tittle of the novel suggests the protagonist is a strange character full of perplexity, mystery and devastation, He was completely different from others in every aspect of his life.

Being the only son of a highly placed Indian Government officer, Billy chose Anthropology over engineering though his father was desirous of his son to become an engineer. This was the initial sign of Billy in being different. Nevertheless, continued with many strange things. According to Billy Engineering meant money. Money meant status in the society. He always believed that money could buy some respect for a person's status but not for his soul. Being the son of supreme court judge Billy lived at Harlem in America, a slum area, a place which was famous for all the illegal activities but Billy found the people of Harlem are more civilized than others because they lived their life the way they liked. Such thought of Billy reveals his unusual character.

There is always a phase in everyone's life, where come across hallucination and phantasm. Most of us avoid such thoughts, some of us escape from that. And a very few chose them and, in this course, they start thinking philosophically. They start searching for their identity and feel that the world is immaterial. Man fails to relate himself to the worldly system and relations. As a result, he develops a divided personality and gets alienated. his inner self fills with disgruntlement. this failure to identify his own self, makes him to think where he hailed from, what is his destiny. These thoughts haunt him now and then. Then the man starts swinging back and forth between the primitivity and modernity. He faces a lot of struggles during the search of his identity. Billy also encountered with such a situation. He starts walking on the never-ending path of search of his identity.

On the other hand, we see the young generation heading towards technology advancements, we also see people like Billy Who follow their inner peace and go beyond in search of 'What is life?'. Billy was very much absorbed by the

primitive force. He wanted to find the primordial of the world. Hence, he honestly reveals "All want to be in the life is to visit the places they describe, meet the people who live there and find out about the aboriginals of the world." Through this novel, the author advocates that the meaning of the life does not exist in the external world but it is within us, when a person is longing for his inner self, he is supported by his family members and friends then such problems of identity crisis can be avoided. In this novel Billy's close friend Tuula Lindgren a Swedish girl was the very first person to recognise the strange primitive force that was in Billy .She once spoke to the narrator of the novel about it and said that the passion in Billy may come out at any moment .Billy had organised his life around his interest in primitive world. Although Tuula Lindgren and Romesh knew that. Yet they could not succeed in bringing Billy out from his illusion because they were with him only some point of time.

The same is true in real life. When a person contradicts between illusion and reality, it becomes the prime responsibility of the family, friends and people around him to understand him ,support him and try to bring him back to life .Though Billy's parents were aware of the disturbance going on his mind they didn't get a clear picture about it. It is possible to come out of the identity crisis if a person himself starts seeing himself as a normal person rather than behaving differently. It is also possible if he is supported by his partner in this struggle then there won't be any separatism or isolation. Here lies the core problem. Modern young men and women do not make any effort to understand their spouse. Relationships are restricted to physicality. People have forgotten about the fact that there is a life beyond physical relationships in marriage. The essence of life vanishes somewhere in the surge of making money, having luxurious life and maintaining status in the society. Despite of having all the pleasures of life, man feels hollow inside. Then the relationship which began at the ice-cream parlour collapses with the fight in the court. But if a person has a strong inner self vision, he doesn't want to give it up for any reason. When the inner call is strong enough a person starts feeling that he is on the wrong path and must go in search of inner peace.

Ultimately what matters to man wants peace of mind. The protagonist Billy encounters the same situations. He always knew that there was some passion in him towards the primitive world. When Billy was fourteen, he had gone to Bhubaneswar where he had come across the same feeling of isolation. He had also tried to run away from his house, but this longing faded for some time. When he went America to study Anthropology the primitive potency grew away steadily. As the days passed, he started hating the civilization of which he was the product. However, he tried his best to conquer it. Even he wished to lead a normal social and domiciliary life as usual. So, he considered that maybe marriage would help him to come back to his ordinary life. Though he did not feel any love for Meena he got engaged to her. As the time passed, he realized that his decision of marriage taken hastily was cataclysm. Meena didn't try to understand Billy's vision of life. Billy wanted to live an ordinary life though he belonged to a sophisticated family. This was an identity crisis which originated from socio cultural clashes. Here Billy is just a subject. Through which the author has described how the search for identity and higher values in life can be contradictory to each other.

Billy's wife Meena Chatarjee was a beautiful lady and had all the social graces and attainments but she was not able to understand Billy's inner soul. On the contrary she had all the desires and expectations and demanding him. She was completely depended on Billy as like another Indian housewife. Billy's caring friend Tuula adjusted with him very easily. she was disclosed all the feelings 'but Meena only his wife nothing more than that. It is told that Wife is the best friend of life but Meena never become that type of partner to Billy. Finally, Billy takes the call from the primitive world.

In the struggles of identity, there are possibilities that a man can be trapped in alcoholism, drugs and crimes and many also go into mental depression. Billy had suffered many such traumas. Ultimately man needs to know himself and stay in peace. Billy disappeared from the face of earth and simply vanished into the Saal forest of Maikala hills. He joined tribal. There he met the Girl of his dream Bilasia who understood his longing for the primitive

world. Where he too sees his own identity. He decided that he would never go back to civilization and that wilderness was his destiny. Its' proved that the real pleasure, peace of mind and perfection can be in primitive culture not in the metropolitan culture.

Just as Billy felt a primal passion for Bilasia, she also felt irresistible attraction for the man of civilized world. Ultimately Billy -Bilasia's relationship fought against all the odds of life. Their relationship battled the ego, money, civilization, and all luxurious of life. It was as though they had been locked up together by some inevitable destiny which they could not escape from. Billy realized that he was born with an instinct for the primitive world with the passage of time Billy and Bilasia found true harmony and fulfilment in their relationship It was only once that he felt a sense of guilty thought of returning to the civilized world. But his passion bound him to his primitive world. Ten years later when Billy's family came to know about his existence, they tried their level best to bring him back to their world. They could not understand his vision till the end.

It is imperative to live by society's obligations in t he life of appearance. But it is stupid to say that those around us should behave and live their life as we please. Not all are the same. Life is different for different people. We cannot judge people by our thoughts. A person's desire and aspirations are different as the cultures are different. For some people their vision is so great that they ignore their responsibility too. It is clearly stated by the narrator at the beginning of the novel that, it is hard to know a person's desire. It is even more difficult to understand those desires. Thus, the alienation can be the answer if society understands it. Billy's character the strength and courage of a person to come out of his alienation from the world. The protagonist ends up with a tragic death. It becomes even more tragic when he focuses on, the peace but he paid a heavy price in the course of his search of identity.

In today's rapidly changing world identity crisis are more common. Man's life is a journey towards some end. Everyone has their own identity. Sense of identity is more important to everyone. It is

for a man itself to find it. It is not possible to live according to someone else's wish. We witness lot of identity crisis. This is because the modern world is filled with discontent, urbanization, changing values, psychological maladjustment etc. As a result, there will be separatism. According to Iyengar "The strange case of Billy Biswas proves that there is a little of billy in all of us, a desire to get away from it all, do something reckless or surrender to some extra ordinary obsession." When we seem strange not only to the outer world. But also, to ourselves. We understand the intensity of identity crisis. The reason behind this could be lack of right adjustment lust, unknown desire, anxiety emotional break down etc.

The world gives us a lot of opportunities to learn and to grow. It depends on how we take it and use the opportunities that come our way. We must always try to face the challenges of our life as the protagonist tried to face his challengers of a meaningless life.

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