

## The Last Labyrinth: Study of Existential Fix

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**Abstract:** The Sahitya Akademi Award was bestowed upon Arun Joshi's novel *The Last Labyrinth* because of its exceptional depiction of the problem of the existential predicament that contemporary Indians find them in. It was Arun Joshi's fourth book, and it was about the inner and outward lives of an Indian aristocrat who had become too westernised and had forgotten his spiritual roots. The protagonist of the book was a man who had lost touch with his spiritual roots. Arun Joshi is sensitive to the multiple levels of stress that are placed on contemporary man as a result of the convoluted nature of society and the expectations that it holds for him. He is worried about the predicament of modern man. The character of Som in "The Last Labyrinth" suffered from mental illness and was filled with misery, self-hatred, and self-pity. This was caused by their perception that they were on the outside of this physical universe. The author explored the concept of the self throughout his works of fiction and made it a central focus to investigate the degree to which one is estranged from one's family and society. Joshi worked with the modern guy who had no feelings of connectedness to the world that was happening around him. He felt burdened by the very existence of his own life. In order to find a solution to the awful situation in which modern man finds himself, he has two choices: either he can attempt to blend in with other people and the system while simultaneously concealing who he truly is, or he can work towards preserving and expanding his individuality while isolating himself from society.

**Keywords:** the last labyrinth, novel, existential, fix, Arun Joshi.

### INTRODUCTION

The novel "The Last Labyrinth" encompassed an entire universe of human feelings on every page. Its investigation into the various levels of reality and its complex narrative approach dealt with the ceaseless search for a meaning in human living. The tale was filled with both passionate love and mysterious enigmas. Additionally, it had a number of motifs that were in direct opposition to one another. It was about a disturbed individual looking for his identity as well as a practical alternative for materialism, corruption, alienation, and a lack of spiritual faith. The main character had a difficult time finding himself.

Basavaraj Naiker (2003) The fundamental objective of this research is to analyse the ways in which Arun Joshi's works present a sense of disconnection and emptiness. The modern man is cut off from both himself and his fellow humans during times of peril because he has no reliable support system to fall back on. The spiritual anxiety and pressure that are typical of today's world have played a significant role in significantly exacerbating the predicament that modern man finds himself in. In a spiritual sense, the modern world has shrunk, and its inhabitants are increasingly mired in insecurity, discontentment, disintegration, and a lack of meaning. The most troubling problems that man is today confronted with are those involving feelings of estrangement and a lack of fulfilment in life. The decision of the novelist to depict the predicament of sceptics who do not detect any metaphysical control outside of this physical cosmos is a striking contradiction from the point of view of philosophy.

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He remained a guy who was cut off from society right up until the very end of his life. The majority of the action in the story took place in Bombay and Benares, and it detailed the romantic and professional endeavours of Som Bhaskar. His perspective was that Bombay was superior to Benares since it was the location of a greater number of talented industrialists. He only believed Benares to be an ancient city that held significant historical value and made the observation that bandits were regularly found in the city. Bhaskar was under the impression that he had feelings of loneliness and seclusion regardless of place. Both of them were quite busy, but neither of them could provide him the sense of community that he yearned for or alleviate the intense, awful, and unexplainable feeling of isolation that he had. In *Som*, a sense of emptiness coexisted with a peculiar detachment from one's surroundings. It was an elaboration of the subject that he had introduced in his previous works, and its purpose was to offer a presentational image of the tormented perception that contemporary man experiences when confronted with the possibility of absurdity. Even the ideas from his past books have made their way into this one. When compared to the previous novel, it demonstrated a greater level of experience. If Som Bhaskar's consciousness is not sufficiently fortified with appropriate amounts of willpower and fortitude, then Basavaraj Naiker says that Som Bhaskar runs the risk of plunging into a virtual black hole.

The most important conflict in the book took place at Lal Haveli, where Bhaskar was trying to buy Aftab's shares. There, he found himself pitted against death and emptiness. Its mazelike pathways and gloomy interior, which was situated at the end of a dead end street, served as a figurative setting for Bhaskar's struggle with the choices he had made in his head. Som Bhaskar's intellect was extremely clever and scientific, but it was also plagued by distracting thoughts, and he was perpetually caught up in a tumult of ideas, as well as ethical, philosophical, and metaphysical issues. His independence was comparable to a void, in which he was able to suspend himself while he investigated the labyrinth of life and death in an effort to get a handle on reality. Ghosh, Taban Kumar (1996) To Joshi's credit, the figure of Som Bhaskar in *The Last Labyrinth* was just as firmly rooted in a genuine Indian context as Raja Rao and R. K. Narayanan's characters, who were both westernised heroes who belonged to the upper class. The work is reflective of a certain subset of contemporary Indian society in its cynicism, hedonism, lack of religion, and confusion of values and concerns. Rajeshwar Mittapillai (2003) *The last labyrinth* shed light on Som Bhaskar's journey from the maze of contemporary society to the radiance of an ancient mountain divinity. He was well-versed in the western way of life, with its emphasis on materialism and sophistication, which he was familiar with. Despite this, he was well conscious of the fact that "money was a dirt, a whore, just like houses, carts, and carpets."

Som Bhaskar was a billionaire businessman by the time he was 25 years old. He had been fortunate enough to inherit a major plastic manufacturing company. Rao, Ramakrishna A (1981) His education was obtained from prestigious educational establishments. He made the decision to wed Meena, and they went on to have two children together. In spite of the fact that he had an affair with Leela Sabnis, his wife continued to be dedicated to him even though she was well-bred and lovely. She was a psychiatrist from Michigan and had travelled all the way to Benares to visit Anuradha. The "hunger of the body and the spirit" that he felt, on the other hand, was never going to be satisfied. The existential viewpoint of Joshi became more evident, and it looked that he was emphasising the importance of realising the everlasting self, which liberates one from all of the afflictions that one experiences in life. If he possessed the same level of inner peace of spirit as his wife, he would be able to find solace in the prayers that he offers up to God. The fact that he did not have faith in God prevented him from even considering praying by passing a rosary through his fingers in the traditional manner. That cannot be the case. Som, a modern anti-hero who stands for anarchy and unpredictability, lived with a perpetual feeling that his life lacked both purpose and significance. Both his appetite and his restlessness were out of his control. He is unable to

reintegrate himself into society because he was unable to reconcile the moral and cultural alienation that he experienced. This character embodied the struggles that people have while trying to identify themselves and when feeling alienated from others. His struggle with his identity was sparked by the fact that he felt an inner void despite being surrounded by wealth and elegance. As Som sat with Aftab and Anuradha in the Haveli, he became conscious of the insignificance of his existence and the world around him. "If someone, man or god, had watched my life from a great height, would I have appeared to him as an ant threading through a maze, knocking about, against one wall, then another?" he mused. "If someone, man or god, had watched my life, from a great height." As a result of listening to Azizun's dismal tunes, Som realised that none of his efforts would be enough to move him up the success ladder. Only a straightforward existence that is guided by faith is significant in the long term. He had all he needed to enjoy the pleasures of the world, but it didn't stop him from being miserable. However, he was agitated and upset, and he suffered from worry as well as a fear of passing away.

Ross, Robert (1990) Both the beginning and the end of the story establish the unsolved internal conflict that he has between his foggy subjectivity and the rational equilibrium of things. At the end of the book, Som Bhaskar was still around, albeit he was only a shadow of himself and was intensely preoccupied with the dream he experienced in Anuradha. He made the following statement: "The novel starts with Joshi Arun (2012):

Through the light of my days and the blackness of my nights and the disquiet of those sleepless hours beside my wife, within reach of tranquillisers. I had sung the same strident song: I want. I want. I want

He was completely preoccupied with the things of this world. He continued to fight for his life, clinging to one item or person at a time and looking for fulfilment in sex, money, and celebrity status among other things. He felt emptiness, sleepiness, and mental disorientation throughout his encounter. Because Som confused his mind's restless wanderings with a desire for sexual activity, he engaged in a number of different sexual engagements. The conclusion that may be drawn from Som's psychoanalysis by Leila Sabnis is that "you are much too high stung without reason." You suffer from anxiety and are a serial fornicator. In this work, the battle that the protagonist, Som Bhaskar, had to wage was not against other people or against society as a whole, but rather against beings and forces that defy logic and reason.

When Som began receiving education in each of these distinct cultures, his discomfort became significantly worse. He was brought up by a mother who had strong religious convictions, and he was born in India, which is where he gained his understanding of spirituality and religion. During his time spent studying in the West, he gained exposure to western ways of thinking. As a consequence of this, he developed a greater conviction in logic, common sense, and a scientific worldview, all of which were further strengthened by his father once he relocated back to India. As a direct consequence of this, he possessed an unstable personality that lacked both faith and mental tranquilly. He was astounded by the "going forward and backward and sideways of the mind" as his life began to resemble a ship without a rudder that was being tossed around by turbulent waves. He developed an addiction to fornication and began to seek it out with a variety of women in an effort to appease his restless spirit and satisfy the last of his unsatisfied sexual needs. Every romantic endeavour of his was doomed to failure, leaving him bewildered and all by himself, and he was unable to determine the best way forward. He noticed a mist in every direction he turned. He is able to recall R.K. Dhavan (1986):

I was a womanizer all right, and a boozier, but my womanizing and boozing had not settled anything. I had inherited the afflictions of both of them – for what were they if not afflictions,

afflictions that had led me into unbearable entanglements. A year ago, although battered, I was getting by fairly reasonably.

As Som hopped from one lady to another and from one business endeavour to another, it made him even more dissatisfied than he already was. Nothing had been solved by his engaging in sexual activity with other women and drinking to drown out the voices in his out-of-control vacuums. His dawning comprehension of the pointlessness of life only served to exacerbate the difficulties he already faced. He was of the opinion that life is "a labyrinth within a labyrinth" of challenges, and that the world lacked any meaningful function. Both Lal Haveli and Benares, which had a role in the events, include physical components. On the second level of symbolism, the Lal Haveli stood in for the labyrinth of life, while the labyrinth of death itself served as the last representation. It was much more mysterious than the very existence of life itself. The city of Som was the world's first to intentionally incorporate a diverse population. He came to terms with the fact that he was unique once he was exposed to the primitive and superstitious society. The story revolves around Som's illogical quest to possess Anuradha; yet, this quest took on metaphysical dimensions as Som encountered the secrets of life, death, love, and god. The plot of the novel centres around Som's quest to possess Anuradha Arun Joshi, 1986. According to the statements made by Tapan Kumar Ghosh

The idea of love consumes Som's thoughts, but it is not the kind of love that Bilasia and Billy share in "The Strange Case of Billy Biswas," the kind of love that sets him free and satisfies his wants. Because he is so egotistical and possessive, he finds himself unable to move. Som's frantic and dogged pursuit of Anuradha—an agonising struggle that compels him to confront his failings in life, death, love, and religion—could be considered the central conflict of the novel R.S. Pathak (1986). This complex scenario, in which the physical and the spiritual elements are tightly intertwined with one another, is played out in a fascinating juxtaposition of locales.

He appeared to see everything through a cloud. He was overcome with a sense of unease and lost his composure. I am in a state of dislocation, he told Anuradha. Why am I in this place? What compels me to be here? (R.K Dhavan, 1992). The statements made by Som offer compelling proof that he is experiencing an identity crisis. In *The Last Labyrinth*, Arun Joshi investigated the confused psyche of Som Bhaskar, which was befuddled by notions about the purpose of life, existence, and the difference between dreams and reality.

He was pulled in several directions, causing him to experience a crisis of awareness as a result of the competing desires of his intellect and intuition, his scepticism and faith, and his scepticism and mindless obedience. Because each new relationship and experience he had added to his sense of hopelessness and made him feel more inadequate, he persisted in making his way through the complex maze that was his life. The strange voices and visions that he kept having left him feeling dissatisfied and agitated. He couldn't focus on anything for more than a few seconds at a time. Sleeping pills, anaesthetic, and hot baths were not effective in relieving the excruciating anguish in his mind and the mounting tensions that he had built up. His background had a significant influence on his way of thinking and behaviour. His mother's unwavering commitment to Krishna, on the one hand, and his father's cynicism and analytical thinking, on the other, confuse and baffle him. The dichotomous ideologies and worldviews of his parents have a significant impact on the synchronisation and equilibrium of his personality (Hari Mohan Prasad, 1985).

If humans are capable of travelling to the moon, there is no doubt that they can at least scratch the surface of their understanding of who they are. Mysticism serves what purpose exactly? Either agree to it or disagree with it. The doctrine that "Take me or leave me; do not analyse me" serves no use and should be abandoned. Descartes is the thinker whose work you need to be familiar with. Bhaskar, Som Som's answer was that he had revered her discussion, which mostly focused on him,

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and that he had liked it. Because it indicated a separation between the physical world and the spiritual world, it did not appear that his situation improved as a result of Leela's advise. "Something, somebody, and somewhere in which the two worlds combined," were some of the necessities. It appeared as though he had been led on his trek to Lal Haveli and its labyrinths, which stood for "the microcosmic labyrinth of life and reality," by the incessant voice inside of him that kept screaming, "I want. I want." As Aftab explained to the other man, there are a number of rooms and corridors that do not take you any further than the starting point. Given that his predecessors built the Haveli with the intention of making their enemies' lives more difficult.

Dante's "Divine Comedy" is an epic poem (Narsingh Srivastava, 1992). However, in contrast to Beatrice in Dante's writings, Anuradha was unable to provide him with any explanations; all she could do was stop him from phantasizing about himself. Anuradha cautioned him, "You are not as intelligent as you believe you are." You are incorrect in a variety of regards. In point of fact, you have an incorrect perception of yourself. Despite the fact that you do not truly possess that much knowledge, you act as though you do. Anuradha went through things that no other person ever would have had to go through because she was an illegitimate child who was abused as a young child by her mentally unstable mother. a person who witnessed a murder. Attempts at self-harm, along with every conceivable form of evil that may be found on earth. On the other hand, she was flawless, and the great heat of the temple reduced to ash whatever that was impure about her. The shadows of Lal Haveli were so full of affection that its light shed a light on them. When asked about her relationship with Aftab, she previously said, "You can't marry everyone you love. It is to one's advantage to not be married to someone. If that's the case, why bother get married? She was a passionate disciple of Lord Krishna despite the fact that his existence was terrible, and she preferred to remain in this polluted world rather than run from it. She had already made up her mind to stay and put up a tenacious battle against the male-dominated forces of egotism, materialism, and dehumanisation. At long last, it seemed as if the world itself had appeared out of thin air as Som was bathed in the light of Moksha. Since Som was under the impression that the only way to solve this problem was to increase his level of education, he exerted a great deal of effort in an attempt to come to terms with his existence and understand the significance of life. On the other hand, this only served to further confuse him. It was highly usual for people of today's age to report feelings of fragmentation and a sense of absence in their lives. In spite of the enormous strides that have been made in technological development, we are still living in a prehistoric era in which we are forced to contend with vacuum, disorientation, and internal concerns. The majority of the characters in this book, especially Aftab, Anuradha, and Som, were anxious people who had a hard time overcoming their problems. In the novel, Joshi makes a fruitless effort, along with the assistance of the other characters, to steer Som in the direction of self-realization.

Som Bhaskar's desire to possess her was driven by the fact that she refused to produce for him. She reprimanded him by telling him, "You don't know what is wrong, and you don't know what you want." Because Som was disappointed with his inability to vanquish Anuradha, he and his wife Geeta decided to travel to Europe in an effort to break free of Som's preoccupation with Benares. He discovered that Aftab, Anuradha, and their Haveli were all just dull frogs that were imprisoned in their mucky wells. I came to the conclusion that in order to fulfil my true desires, I needed to get out of this nation and experience other cultures (Hari Mohan Prasad, 1985).

Bhaskar devoted his entire life to gaining an understanding of the reasons he should uphold the mystical beliefs of Indian heritage. The results of his search turned up no information that may be of any help to him. In the presence of his son, the man's father had voiced his doubts regarding the concept of the "First Cause." The father was interested in learning more about the connection between the two concepts of cause and effect. When Som's uncertainty was investigated in

accordance with the psychological heritage he received through his lineage, it was discovered that the division was not accurate. He could trace his ancestry back through two distinct branches. His father was a heavy drinker who also enjoyed seeking pleasure and engaging in sexual activity with other women. In addition to that, he was a physicist who had conducted research into the most fundamental aspects of reality. Som possessed the qualities of both his grandfather's womanising and materialistic desires and his father's scientific temperament to search for the original cause of "Whence and how arose the universe." Som's grandfather was a womaniser, while his father was a scientist. In spite of the fact that his father had shown him through his own experiences that "science could not solve the problem of the causes," it was the instability in his family during a vital developmental phase that had caused him so much anxiety later in life. His father had taught him this lesson by sharing his own experiences with him. The traditional Indian beliefs are taught to children, and as they grow older, the ordinary Indian comes to appreciate the significance of such beliefs. In Joshi's stories, the children who came from wealthy Indian homes were unable to take use of this opportunity. In the name of individualism and progressivism, the youngster had been left to fend for himself when it came to significant topics such as the child's religious views. He was exposed to the anxiety of being in a boat that did not have a rudder at an early age in his life. The feeling of belonging that the boy had with his own people provided him with a sense of security that could never be replaced by any amount of material possessions.

According to the findings of the investigation into the aforementioned story, Arun Joshi went to Indian philosophy to provide a form of confirmation for his protagonist's existential conundrum. The basic themes of the book were the hunger of the soul as well as the hunger of the flesh, and these two desires were intertwined throughout the story.

After Anuradha had triumphed over him, Som was supposed to undergo a metamorphosis. In other words, she terminated her relationship with Som and disappeared for a period of time whose duration is uncertain. In stark contrast to Som, who was broken beyond repair in some ways, she was in pristine condition everywhere she went. Even the great price that Anuradha paid in order to ensure his survival and rehabilitation was called into doubt by him. Anguish persisted in the form of unsatisfied desires regarding the search for an integrated identity and the truth. "The Last Labyrinth is a deep psychological exploration of a lost soul," says author Tapan Kumar Ghosh. Ironically, Som's investigation into her identity yielded no clear answers. Som Bhaskar was a representation of today's prosperous and educated middle class, which is avidly seeking to reconnect with its heritage.

## CONCLUSION

In the novel "The Last Labyrinth," the protagonist, Som, suffers from mental instability and is tormented by anguish, feelings of self-hatred, and feelings of sorrow for themselves since they view themselves as outsiders in the society in which they live. In his stories, the author investigated the idea of the self and charged the main character with the responsibility of assessing the degree to which they are isolated from their family and society. The modern man who was unhappy with his social milieu was the subject of Joshi's work. He had the impression that he was a burden to others. The dilemma that faces the modern man is this: either he seeks to fit in with others and the system while concealing who he truly is, or he strives to maintain and strengthen his individuality while withdrawing from society. Neither option is an appealing one.

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