

THE INTERNAL AWARENESS OF THE HUMAN SOUL IN ARUN JOSHI'S NOVEL "THE APPRENTICE"

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ABSTRACT

The Apprentice (1974) Arun Joshi's third novel explores deeper into the inner awareness of the human soul. It depicts the tormented attempt of a guilt-stricken individual to retrieve his innocence and honour. In all his novels, Joshi describes the painful predicament of his protagonists. In his first novel The Foreigner the protagonist Sindi Oberoi, an alienated rootless young man searches for his identity and roots, withdraws himself from all humankind. Finally, when his vision is clear, he returns to the human world from detachment to attachment. The Second novel The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, describes the withdrawal of Billy Biswas the protagonist, from the civilized society and emotionally dehydrated which he belongs to. He finds himself the primitive society of the tribals into which Billy vanishes deliberately. And in The Apprentice (1974) Arun Joshi depicts the protagonist, Ratan Rathor, estranged from his unpolluted self and as a victim of money-minded corrupt society. Finally, he tries his amendment through humility and penance by wiping the shoes of the temple-visitors daily.

The Apprentice is a confessional novel wherein the narrator protagonist unfolds the story of his life in the form of an internal monologue. Ratan Rathor, who is both the hero and the antihero of the novel, probes into his inner life and exposes the perfidy, chicanery, cowardice and corruption of his own character in the mock-heroic novel. He is neither a rebel like Billy Biswas nor a rootless foreigner like Sindi Oberoi. He is a practical man who, getting his idealism shattered in the corrupt society, proposes to survive by sycophancy and practically adapts himself to the mysterious ways of the world. The novel is both a treatise on current social and political scene and lament of a distressed soul. The novel reminds us of Charles Dickens' Hard Times. Here the social reality becomes the nucleus of the novel where in Ratan, like Sindi and Billy, comes out yet another reflective introvert whose life corresponds to bitter social norms and consequently undergoes suffering and, of course, salvation towards the end.

INTRODUCTION

The novel enacts three stages in the human-divine comedy of Ratan. The pre-independence period is the dawn, the period of idealism, the phase of innocence, the post-independent India is the broad daylight of experience, the inferno of corruption, and the last part is the area of expiation and is the door to the purgatory. Thus, the novel stands as psychological study of innocence, experience and expiation of the protagonist's life.

An apprentice is “a person who works for an employer for a fixed period of time in order to learn the particular skills needed in their job,” “a beginner, a novice.” He is essentially a diligent learner of a skill, craft, or trade leading to a vocation in the sense of a profession, a means of livelihood. But to a serious learner, whether of a craft or art, the process of learning can be never-ending. No one with any conscience can ever say that he has fully mastered what he set out to learn. In this sense he remains a beginner, a novice who has miles to go. For such a person learning itself becomes a vocation, an all absorbing activity which gives meaning and significance to his life.

Joshi employs the word ‘apprentice’ in this broadened sense of the term in the novel. Ratan the apprentice of the novel himself explains in what sense he regards himself an apprentice in his middle age, and the nature, purpose and goal of the apprenticeship he has been piously pursuing: What am I apprenticed to? If I only exactly knew! Or if I could put into words what I do know. But life runs on 96 approximations and if an approximation will do, you could say that I am learning to be of use. I know it is late in the day. But one must try and not lose heart, not yield, at any He is fully aware how hardship and humiliating this exercise. This unusual apprenticeship is not only not going to be easy but its results, which are expected to be mental, moral and spiritual, are not yielded easily and quickly either.

Ratan is aware of it too. Having lived a life of false values for long, he has to educate himself from scratch in those true values of life which make life meaningful and purposeful. Further, to be of use not to himself but to others, the community and society, he forgets himself and thinks of others and his responsibility towards them. There is no end to this apprenticeship and Ratan may well remain an apprentice all through his life. The exploration of a guilt-stricken conscious and compulsive forces that lead to confession as well as the relevance of confession to the tormented and confused hero are the major concern of modern confessional novel.

Though this advice finally prevailed, he would not give up at once his ambition to follow his father’s example little realizing that he never had his father’s mental and moral equipment, will and selflessness.

when he was flung unaware of the world of youth full inexperience, impractical idealism, dreams of honor and greatness, in to the world of harsh realities where the ideas of right and wrong, honor, usefulness and service he had been taught were treated with cynicism in difference and contempt. What makes Ratan’s character three dimensional and interesting is that he was not without doubts and misgivings about his unscrupulous pursuit of a career. His wakeful conscience raised from time to time inconvenient questions about what he was doing and means he adopted. Its voices were feeble but could not be silenced or muffled. It was clear to him that he could not take any changes regarding his career. And he got the rewards for his obedience to his bosses and was promoted to a higher position.

Ratan began to taste power which fed his ego. A brief note by himself nearly drove a contractor bankrupt and rendered helpless his friends among the higher-ups. When he turned down a bribe of ten thousand rupees offered to change his noting, he “felt both righteous and proud”, though the bribe offered could have met many of his needs. His refusal was not motivated by any sense of doing what was morally right and just. It was actually an act of egotistical pride and vanity disguised as an act of impartial justice. Ratan was to find answers to some of these questions by the hard way in course of time. For the present the oracular utterance of the superintendent left a wide breath for one to interpret as it suited one’s convenience. The mature Ratan, grown wise and humble after prolonged and scrupulous self-analysis of his own motives and actions, realizes how he

himself succumbed to the widespread amoral, utilization, and commercial attitude to religion and God, acknowledging.

Ratan had to ask himself what had happened to him between his earlier and blunt refusal of a bribe by the contractor when he had of the money, and his later acceptance of it when he had none at all. In an effort to find an answer to those questions Ratan looks back at his own career between the days of independence and the India-china war. He notes that many undesirable changes had taken place in himself and in the social, political and moral environment of the country, and become gigantic.

At first, he is confused about the ways and means of spiritual rehabilitation and getting rid of the crookedness of the world. Ratan seeks the remedy for his soul's melancholy through his flight from the treacherous society and in detachment. He remains in the profligate society of which he was a part and learns to be of some use to others. He begins the process of a novel evolution in his inner world by cleansing the filth gathered on it and realizes the God within him who's other name is Truth. The choice is entirely his own taken by himself without any external pressure. The means he has adopted is selfless service which according to Gandhi is the greatest religion of man. He and others like him worked enthusiastically and sincerely night and day. What is important is that he is punished by his own conscience much more than any court of law ever can.

Finally, Ratan is able to pursuit, and acquire a sharpened awareness of himself, his morning which he had lost for a time. He realizes the imperative need for relatedness as an individual as well as a social being. He reaches the conviction that the only sustaining basis for action is that it should be of use to oneself and others. There are young men willing to learn from the follies of their elders. Willing to learn and ready to sacrifice. Ratan who is in search of his self finally realizes his self at the end. He is now a man with commendable sensibilities, who after rediscovering himself wants to dedicate himself to the welfare of the society.

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