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FROM INNOCENCE TO ENLIGHTENMENT: ARUN JOSHI'S, *THE APPRENTICE*

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ABSTRACT

Arun Joshi has influenced by Albert Camus, the famous existentialist writer. He has also influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and the Bhagavad Gita, and almost all his protagonists have under these influences. In all his novels, his heroes are foreigners either to the environment or to themselves. They are exposed either by sensitivity or lack of identification with the world around to a knowledge of themselves.

RatanRathor, the protagonist of the novel, *The Apprentice*, is very ambitious in his teens. In the beginning, he wishes to live and act like a model citizen. But later he is largely trapped by materialistic world. As a result, he gropes in a world of corruption and physical pleasures. Consequently, he suffers from a sense of alienation, estrangement, and unfulfillment. At the end, the mystical experience permeates his blindfolds and leads him out to realize the self. This research paper aims at the finding out Arun Joshi's underlying mind set about the predicament of man in the modern world.

Key words: innocence, corruption, alienation, estrangement, predicament, enlightenment

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Arun Joshi unravels the facets of crisis in modern world. All his novels deals with the predicament and the labyrinth of modern man's life. His protagonists encounter all these labyrinths. But their groping in the dark reach is an illumination of some sort or other. Their dilemmas are eternal quest for self-realization and fulfillment of a spiritual and cultural identity which distinctly reflect Indian overtones.

The novel, *The Apprentice* (1974) is a stark exposure of the sordid social corruption and a powerful indictment of the tyranny of bureaucratic organization that depersonalizes man. The story takes off at the time when all the Indian leaders were arrested as a result of the Quit India Movement, led by Mahatma Gandhi. Attainment of freedom has been the singular motto of the Indians for which, a weapons like non-violence, sacrifice, satyagraha are used. Ratan's father, who noticed Gandhi's greatness, gives up lucrative practice and plunges into the freedom struggle. It is his greatness that he identifies a cause and suffer for it. He believed that nobility and dignity lay in suffering and self-effacement. It has been a spectacle of great inner strength that he made himself a martyr, leaving behind him a sick wife and a child.

RatanRathor, the child of a free India expects India to be a land of justice, order and joy. But the suffering and sacrifice of great martyrs like Ratan's father have been rendered a waste. Life is not that easy. Even Ratan's mother speaks of the stark reality: "Man without money was a man without worth. Many things were great in life, but the greatest of them all was money" (The Apprentice 20). She also adds, "It was not patriotism but money that brought respect and bought security. Money made friends, money succeeded where all else failed . . . money was law into itself" (20).

The devolution of patriotism experience by the wife of a martyr brings a sort of insecurity to all our lives. It has its own effect on Ratan and he feels, "I felt as though I had lost all control over my destiny which from then on would be governed not by what I worked for or how good I was but by some intricate laws of money of which I had no knowledge" (21). But, in the beginning Ratan tries to follow the ideals of his father and join the army of Subhash Bose. When he becomes disheartened, the world appears to him, "as bundle of mirrors, tempting and somehow held together, but on the brink always falling apart; or like a boat managed by incompetent hands, a boat that would any moment over turn and drown its riders" (18). He undergoes a humiliating experience while hunting for a job.

Very often,Ratan remembers his father's mocking reference to an average man's goal to prosper in life, as "bourgeois filth" (33). Ratan feels and experiences the breakdown of faith, "it is not the facts themselves that hurt. What hurts is the collapse of the faith that they destroy . . . you assume that your wife is faithful, your children love you, your boss fair or that God exists. And, some day proof comes along that nothing is so. This is what hurts" (24). Ratan's futile attempts to seek a career in the metropolis of Delhi is very sensitively criticized by Joshi, "It was expected that the jobs would be filled by people who had, in some manner, been pre-selected" (30).

With the help of a roommate at the Inn, Ratan finally gets a job as temporary clerk in a government office for war purchases, with a salary half the turner's. From then onwards, the "docile", "yes sir, no sir", "pretending", "practical" Ratan never looks back and keeps on rising professionally. He even refuses to peep into his own past life. He thinks, "I was a different cut: educated, intelligent, cultured, and it was my right that I should rise in life, to levels higher than the others aspired for" (32). This he calls as, "an instinct for survival", i.e., "a tiger does not think of dashing into a hole, or like a dog, lick the hands of his adversary. Some survive through defiance, others through ability. Still others through obedience, by becoming servants to the powers of the world" (35). By this, we can see the clear build-up of confidence of Ratan to fight against the disillusioned and corrupted world. Speaking about his docility, it is not that he felt one way and acted another, but he liked to please, as a fish likes to swim, his superiors. His only aim in life is to make his 'career', after the confirmation of his job. He marries the boss's niece in return for his confirmation. His wife always feels that Ratan ignores her because of his preoccupation with his career.

Now Ratan feels that he has "the power of a gospel before which the highest would freeze" (43). The influence of the Superintendent onRatan, regarding bribery is such that he says to Ratan, "Money in the world always changed hands. God was only concerned with what one did with money" (45). His training had not been invain. He also says, "keep your eyes open, but never let them know that you know. And don't take to heart what you hear. Never forget. Strike, if you must strike, at the moment of your choosing" (50).

By now, he knows only too well that the world runs on the basis of deals, and "if men forgot how to make deals, the world would come to a stop . . . It is not the atom or the sun or God or sex that lies at the heart of the universe, it is deals" (50). Ratan feels:

Life reminds me of those complex sums in Algebra . . . sums involving twenty equations, all directed at discovering the mission X with which they are in some way related. But they are also related among themselves acting upon themselves, holding. (51)

In honour of the creation of the Republic, Ratan has been made an officer. At the time of the Indo-China War, Ratan suddenly becomes patriotic and love of fellow citizens, in the face of a common peril like war, becomes a natural response. He gives donations whenever called for and donates blood also. We see his behavior taking new turns. He feels strongly that his country "had come to such a sorry pass". He doubts

neither the ill equipped military, nor the politicians, nor yet the treacheries of the weather, but the Indian Character" (57). His article on "Crisis of Character", consists of a review of the past of our country. In that article, he hits at the corruption in society and calls India, "a glorious monument in ruin, a monument of which even the foundations had caught canker" (59).

Just before the war, Ratan accepts a bribe from Himmat Singh popularly known as Sheikh, in connection to military materials. The acceptance of a bribe is not because he needs money. He attributes this to the prevailing degenerated atmosphere. As he puts it:

After two cups of tea, I need a third.  
I may drink it because others do or  
Because it is offered free, but I need  
It for neither survival nor happiness . . .  
I have a car, a flat, a refrigerator. (61)

Actually, when he was in need of money and was offered a bribe for the first time, he had refused, but he gradually succumbs to the prevailing environment. He finds himself trapped in the corrupt system where, "men were weighed in money or power" (65).

Ratan haunts with the words of his mother: "Man without money is worse than a beggar's shoe" (65). He justifies his action of taking a bribe by the excuse that a cross section of Indian society is corrupt, "If I had taken a bribe I belonged rather to the rule than the exception . . . A bribe could get you a bed in a hospital, a place to burn your dead . . . Now if I had happened to have accidentally indulged in a little slip-up, the sky was not going to fall" (112). He believes that what one really needed to do was to manage through life by hook or crook.

Ratan's Brigadier friend, who's not afraid of death is always in fear of the humiliation or defeat. He is probably the only friend Ratan ever had. For the Brigadier the world has been a beautiful whore to be assaulted and taken. The Brigadier is happy to learn that Ratan is not going to become something that the former would be ashamed of. He always had wanted Ratan to be his own master. But Ratan feels, "How was I going to be my own master when a system was the master of me" (65).

We find a tinge of escapism here, in the personality of Ratan when he says, "As I sat in my well and watched I felt choked, oppressed, rebellious but tied up totally in knots . . . What disturbed me the most was the fact that where I had expected new achievements, new standards, there were no standards" (66). His downgraded expectations rather, has resulted in causing restlessness to his soul which is sincerely followed by 'apathy' or 'indifference', like a boil or like leprosy.

As far as his married life is concerned, Ratan feels that he had somehow failed in his expectation of his life. He says, "where were the dividing lines: between success and failure, loyalty and betrayal, love and hate? The confusion reduced me to the status of those leaves of autumn that are blown here and there, at the mercy of the wind. Why be surprised if one of them falls into the sewer?" (73)

At Bombay, Ratan signs a deal with Himmat Singh and takes a bribe for the supply of substandard war material. Ratan satisfies himself by thinking that everyone is busy amassing wealth by exploiting the opportunities provided by the war. When Ratan shows some reluctances for taking the bribe, the sheikh i.e., Himmat Singh admonishes him, "There was no such law book, Rathor; What existed was not written by God but a silly society that would do anything for money" (76).

The most striking change in Ratan is his sudden interest in wine and women, a change which has come over him almost overnight. He feels, "It is possible I had always been interested in them but had kept my desire to myself, that I had lacked the courage to give them vent. I felt bold unfettered. I started at them the women. Openly; wilfully" (77). Even in his gait, there is a put on affair of a jaunty swagger now.

On his way to Bombay, it strikes him suddenly that he was a Rathor. He feels that "all of them were waiting for me down there, my ancestors, watching me go by . . . I could hear the voices of their spirits and I knew that they wanted" (79). But after reaching Bombay, he again becomes the same cocky self. Ratan is "at

the peak of the dung heap that I had been climbing all my life" (85). He feels that he had so much money now and so he should enjoy life. Honoured by a strange disturbance, he walks into a brothel even.

Ratan has a nervous breakdown after his friend Brigadier return from the battle front. The Brigadier deserts his post during the war due to the fact that he had been supplied with defective war materials which had been approved by none other than Ratan. Significantly, during their boyhood days, the Brigadier had saved the life of Ratan from a band of hooligans, to "fight for me, me who no one had ever fought for" (17). It is very ironical that the same Ratan is responsible for the Brigadier's death.

The self-examination of Ratan whether to save his Brigadier friend or be selfish still is such that, "for twenty years I had made bargains with life, taken a bribe, lied, debauched, and yet I considered myself as good as the best! I behaved as though all those had been peripheral romps, little adulteries of the soul that did not count" (117) and on other side he is very conscious about his career and reputation. The inner struggle of Ratan takes him nowhere. Ratan never goes inside a temple for he says:

That was my god, the God of my father, and his father before him, the God who took form after age when truth was threatened and evil prospered. That was also the god of the hide merchant and the owners of the imported cars. (122)

Ratan's morality is so completely eroded that he cannot bring himself to confessor before the authorities about the passing of poor war material. He visits the temple to get peace and courage but finds a priest who is ready to grease his palm to save the skin of his son, a corrupt contractor. He says that the world is such that even religion is not free from corruption. But Ratan, now, comes to believe that "God has got a stick all night and he is not mocked and sooner or later, some place or another, he will wrap your knuckles" (129). Ratan's life is filled with the filth of immoral actions till now. The death of the Brigadier is like an agent tormenting his soul with repentance. The victimization of the innocent in a corrupt society is well-presented through the death of the Brigadier.

Ratan resolves to take revenge upon the sheikh. To his shock, he learns from the sheikh that the secretary and minister are also responsible for the deal concerning defective war material. In the entire game, Ratan has been made a mere scapegoat by the trio, used as a 'paw' and "if something went wrong, it was no doubt the paw that would be chopped", and why he is picked up is because he is thought to be a "spineless flunkey" (136).

At the end, Ratan comes to realize the futility and hollowness of his entire life. He analyses his life of the past two decades – "I had lived only in smog: confused, exploited, exploiting, deceiving, and now deceived. Deceived beyond my imagination", and "an empty lifetime" (138). The sudden realization of Ratan that life is something else, now causes, him a lot of dissatisfaction brings about a feeling of 'loneliness', the lost feeling: "I felt lonely, thoroughly muddled and depressed" (139). Now he feels terrible that is, "a terrible sensation, the realization that one's life has been a total waste, a great mistake . . . there are many sorrows in the world, but there is nothing in the three worlds to match the sorrow of a wasted life" (140).

Each morning before going to work, he goes to the temple, but only sits on the steps of the temple, never enters the temple. Ratan begins the day at a low level, namely wiping the shoes of the gathering at the temple door. And then stands at the door steps and folds his hands, his hands smelling of leather, and begs forgiveness "of my father, my mother, the Brigadier, the unknown dead of the war, of the those whom I harmed with deliberation and cunning, of all those whom I could have helped and did not" (148). Now, he wants to be of use to all "without vanity, and without expectations, and also without cleverness" (149). Ratan's repentance opens avenues of self-realization and now he analyses his acts as:

What am I apprentice to? . . . One must try and not lose heart, not yield, at any cost, to despair. At our age, one must learn to be comfortable, to flow with the current. Let us hold on to the gains, my friends, what we have lost. It is too late to put up a fight. (150)

Though the country has a gloomy future, Ratan says that young people are still there, who might yet hold back the tide. He feels that there is hope as long as there are young men willing to learn from the follies of their elders, and willing to learn and ready to sacrifice, willing to pay the price.

Ratan feels strongly the stark reality of suffering even after independence. The devaluation of patriotism experienced by the wife of a martyr brings a feeling of insecurity to Ratan. The 'bourgeois filth' always referred contemptuously by the father of Ratan has its own impact on young Ratan. Against this social sickness, outgrows the suffering of Ratan. The life that he once considers to be a beautiful sacrifice turns into a stupid squandering of a life time as the circumstances force his consciousness to change the concept. The difficult life of an orphan sows the seed of insecurity in him.

Ratan realizes that earning money is not a real enjoyment in life. On attaining the enlightenment, he feels: "I was not enjoying life or what I imagined 'enjoying' life meant. The more money I accumulated, the more I was dissatisfied and the more I was determined to 'enjoy' life. And all the time I thought of death" (89). It is true that one never knows what 'emptiness' lies within one person. Now it is a 'quest for his identity'. Ratan like Sindi, remembers, the Geeta which asks people to perform 'karma' dispassionately and submit himself to him.

The Brigadier friend of Ratan "acts as a catalytic agent in precipitating the sense of evil in Ratan and tormenting him with repentance" (Arun 82). Remembering the heroic death of his martyr father, a symbol of Gandhian values, Ratan's feeling of loss deepens. Like Sindi, a protagonist in *The Foreigner*, Ratan also learns to serve others. He finds out that self-deception is not the solution for the alienating from self. Now, he decides to cleanse the filth of his soul by 'apprenticing' others. In killing his vanity, Ratan observes a metamorphic change in him and purification of his soul. Though his old memories haunt him now and then, he hopes to get rid of them in the process. Subsequently, he begins to believe in attaining purification by 'karma' alone. He professes that no other thing is as great as repentance which ultimately paves the way to salvation.

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