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CRISIS OF CHARACTER IN ARUN JOSHI'S NOVEL *THE APPRENTICE*

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ABSTRACT

The novel, *The Apprentice* is about the protagonist's alienation from his pure self. He is a victim of corrupt society in this materialistic world. The writer very dexterously presents alienation from self and society, existentialism, identity crisis of character of modern man after independence. The protagonist is the representation of modern man who leads identity crisis. Discontent, frustration and dejection of modern man is reflected through the character of Ratan Rathor. The opposing ideals lead the protagonist to the crisis in his identity. He appears to be incompetent in differentiating right and wrong. Living has become more important than the life of ideals. Money madness results in selfish nature of man. The materialistic progress has left man in the labyrinth of life in which it has become more difficult to come out. The novel teaches a lesson to the youth of India that national security, pride and honour is of prime importance. The novel is an attempt towards the understanding of life.

Keywords: Nation, security, bribe, corruption, identity crisis, penance etc.

Introduction

Arun Joshi, an Indian writer in English was born in 1939. He obtained an engineering degree from the University of Kansas and a degree of Industrial Management from MIT Cambridge, Massachusetts. He achieved his literary distinction by his novels *The Apprentice*(1974), *The Foreigner* (1968), *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*(1971), *The Last Labyrinth* (1981), *The City and the River* (1990), and the collection of short stories named 'Survivor'. He was conferred the prestigious Indian honour Sahitya Akademi Award for his novel *The last Labyrinth*. Through his remarkable writing he left distinctive place in the field of Indian writing in English. He tackled the themes which ushered in post- independence due to materialistic progress in industrial and technological sector. Through all of his novels, the themes of alienation, involvement, East-West encounter, compromise, quest for the meaning of life, existentialism and materialism are reflected. He presented his theme of identity crisis with seriousness of intent and solidity of the content. This novel takes his understanding of meaning of life.

The present paper shed light on how young generation fall prey to materialistic progress and loses mental and physical health at the cost of morale, honesty and Gandhian ideology and national security.

The novel, *The Apprentice* is a real master-piece of art. Through his work he provided the required moral nourishment to his readers, which is the reflection of true artist. Like other novels, the present novel is also about self-alienation, sense of void, inner conflict, and search for meaning in life. The theme of alienation to inner self and to the society is prominent. The writer explores the human mind with the inner consciousness of the individual. The novel narrates the story in the form of monologue in a confessional mode. He addresses to a young cadet telling the truth of his wrong deed. The story is related to values and ethics which are getting deteriorated in this materialistic world, and also how the young generation is keeping aside these moral ethics for personal benefits. Joshi probes into the psyche of his protagonist. His protagonist suffers from evils of materialism which leads him to up-rootedness, and an identity crisis.

In the post-independence period young people are torn. Materialistic progress brought in its wake a growing sense of loneliness, purposelessness and drift. They are caught in dilemma. The protagonist RatanRathor, a victim of materialistic aspirations, discloses the secrets of his life because his conscience exhorts him to confess his sins of dishonesty to the security of the nation. After independence disillusionment was prevailed due to materialistic progress. Modern man is caught in dilemma. The unemployment has surfaced up after Independence. Ratan's life story is the reflection of that disillusionment. The post-Independence period is characterized by high level corruption at the risk of national honour, national security, national pride and prestige. This is nothing but an indigestible shame for India. To expose this, the writer uses Indo-China confrontation in the novel. Man's alienation from his fellowmen, from himself and search for identity is the thematic concern of the novel.

The protagonist RatanRathor is a well-educated village boy. He belongs to revolutionary family of Rajasthan. After some years his family settled in the foothills of Himalaya. When he was left alone in this world to seek job and secure his existence, he realized the utility of the two ideals inherited from his family. Ratan goes to Delhi to make his career. He was full of hopes and optimism. He wants to earn name, fame and prosperous future for himself. He undergoes humiliating experiences.

He says, "And I had no doubt thatI should make a mark as visible and striking as my father's." In his search for job, "being examined, interviewed, interrogated and rejected" his efforts yield to get him a job of temporary clerk in the Army Store department. For that job he was confirmed and rises to a special assistant and finally becomes an officer of the government of India. In the course of time this honest and hard-working boy becomes a conceited man due to the influence of urban people's behaviour. As long as he followed his father's idealism, he retained his moral values. But the cut-throat competition in this materialistic world fails him in his ideal legacy of his father. His short sojourn to Delhi changes his inner and outer personality forever. He was in badly need of money and this resulted in his self disintegration. He becomes slave of money. His throughout change is reflected in his own statement when he confesses: "I had added a new dimension to my life. I have become a hypocrite and a liar at the age of twenty one."

RatanRathor is a child of two kinds of inheritance. On one hand there is his father's Gandhian ideology which teaches him to become an honest Indian devoting all for the cause of nation and the people of country. And on the other hand there his mother's advice to be practical in this selfish world. His father gives up lucrative career of a lawyer in order to serve his country and fights for its independence. To pursue a career for personal benefits is termed by his father as 'Bourgeois filth'. Ironically his mother has pragmatic worldly view and approach towards life and money. He remembers her advice:

"Don't fool yourself son, she said It was not patriotism but money that brought respect and bought security. Money made friends. Money succeeded where all else failed. There were many laws but money was law unto itself."

The protagonist Ratan was seeing his dark future. He recalls:

"After my father's death, things were bleak. The three of us were left alone in that little house—I, my mother, and her illness. The people for whom my father had squandered a lifetime had forgotten him with the year."

To wipe out darkness in his future life, he goes profound change. Decency and friendship find no place in his life. This hypocrite society changes him completely. He realizes his deviation from the right path. He says: "I had a new dimension of lifeI had become a master faker... faker soon forgets who he really is...." His mother's practical view is more influenced in his life because he himself experienced his family's monetary condition. When his mother was suffering from Tuberculosis, he had no money for her treatment. At that time he realized that no one can survive without money in this materialistic world. His intellectual level fails to choose out of these two contradictory philosophies. As a result his self gets degenerated. His inner self finds in conflict. It continued to be corroded by discontent and despair in life along with lack of faith in traditional moral values that sustains human life. He says, "a young generation of frustrated men sailing about in a confused society, a society without norms, without direction, without even perhaps a purpose."

But RatanRathor cannot escape from lure of materialistic comforts. According to him living is more important than life and to live comfort life one needs career. Only career can establish one's identity in the world. In his pursuit of establishing identity Ratan becomes more and more ambitious. In that process he loses his reasoning power to distinguish what is good and wrong. He keeps blind focus only on the interest and happiness of his boss. It was his opinion that if boss is happy, all the staff members will be happy. His thinking and ambition compels him to betray even his friend. The deceit and treachery were the common means for him to reach high position. He always considers himself superior to his seniors who are academically higher than him. Even his insult by his friend had very little effect on him due to his practical approach. He takes it as a turning point in life and career. The promotion and materialistic facilities were more important for him. His definition of life is only going up and up and to get promotion by keeping his boss happy in all manners. He thinks that identity gets only through power and power that comes through money. Accordingly, he thinks aloud: "some survive through defiance, some through ability, still others through obedience, by becoming a whore or becoming the servant of the power of the world." The world had taught him the success mantra that is dedication not to the work but to the boss. He no more bothers what the others say about him. He becomes deaf and blind to everything except to the orders of the boss. Corruption has become a part of his life. Even for job security and promotion he agrees to marry his boss' niece because of which, he gets assurance from his superintendent that he would never be jobless in future. He looks at marriage as a deal in life to secure career. His search for identity keeps haunting him. Actually he has everything what his position in service could give but he is not satisfied with his lot. He spends sleepless nights thinking over his position and identity. So far as higher rank was truly a means to establish identity then he should have been satisfied. He finds that the legacy of his father's ideology is of no use. On the contrary his mother's advice becomes the guiding principle for success in life.

Being devout and seduced by materialistic values, he takes mis-advantage of his position in the Army. He takes a huge bribe to clear a large lot of defective weapons. As a result of this wrong done by him, a brigadier who is also his friend has to desert his post because he was supplied by defective weapons. It was the reason that he could not fight and had to recede. Due to this he was going to face court martial. The brigadier became mentally disturbed and had a nervous breakdown. The brigadier finally commits suicide. When Ratan looks back into his life he feels guilty for Brigadier's death. He feels ashamed of his extent of degradation in life. He is 'living' without 'life'.

All the happenings in his life lead him to inner conflict which has adverse effect on his metabolic and physiological order. He repents over his wrong doings but cannot stop his lust to lead comfort life. He desires to live happy life after seeing the attitude of people around him. He accepts indecent ways of life. His inner self tells him the solution of his problem. So following his lower level instinct, he again commits the same mistake of accumulation of materialistic possession. He purchases car, refrigerator, flat, and many other expensive things including heavy bank balance. Arun Joshi delineated a character of Ratan Rathor, who is an emblematic of today's modern man, can snoop to any level for fulfilling their ends. He was not free from his inner conflict of identity. Another side of his personality is reflected in his sense of patriotism. There is an indelible impression of his father's sacrifice on his psyche. At the time of Indo-China war his patriotism ushers. The father stood for courage and his nation so much that he sacrificed his life for the cause of nation. He

thinks that it is a shame for him to sit quietly at the time of emergency time of war. He remembers his revolutionary family background and his father's sacrifice. So he collects funds for the families of soldiers sacrificing their lives on the border. He sees that his country men are engulfed in ruin and debts. They have to save the nation and the legacy left by Gandhiji, and other patriots like his father.

We find there is a crisis in his character. After the death of his friend Ratan realizes his grave betrayal. He starts blaming others like Sheikh for all these wrong doings because it was Sheikh or Himmat Singh who brought offer to him. When Ratan comes in confrontation with Sheikh, he realizes that accusing others is nothing but an escape from one's own mistakes. He makes an honest confession of his wrong deeds before an image of his father's ideology. His father stands as an epitome of sincerity and selflessness. He has learnt from advocacy of truth from the Gandhian philosophy and this quality adds new dimension to his life. So, in a sense of repentance, he feels the pangs within and his ever alert conscience keeps on pricking him. He turns himself 'to be of use' to others. Every morning he goes to the temple and works there of cleaning and shining of people's shoes. The protagonist feels confused and lost in a world of chaos, corruption, hypocrisy and absurdity. He confesses and discloses his disloyalty, pettiness, chicken-heartedness and degradation of his character. It is a self-analysis of his crisis of identity and consciousness. The personality of the protagonist has changed, it starts degrading and his identity is under threat. Youth following crooked ways for the personal benefits leaving nation's security at stake is very dangerous.

Conclusion

In this novel Joshi delineates the agonizing predicament of the protagonist. Man has become so selfish that accumulation of wealth is the only goal of life and keeps him-self aloof from all the values, ideals, morals. He falls prey to corruption and leaves national security, honour and pride at stake. In the post-Independent India the Gandhian ideology has been replaced by the crooked beliefs and practices. Modern man has been engulfed in his own created labyrinth into which one enters but cannot come out. Corruption has become a national threat which has to be rooted out. Proper counseling and value based education for youth is must. Above all, does cleaning and polishing shoes of people recede the gravity of national offence committed by RatanRathor.

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