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QUEST FOR A MEANINGFUL SELF AND THE DYNAMICS OF CORRUPTION IN “THE
APPRENTICE”

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ABSTRACT

The Apprentice (1974) delves deeper into the individual’s inner awareness in order to explore “that enigmatic underworld that is the human soul,” as Arun Joshi puts it. Joshi delineates the agonizing problem of his protagonists in the novel. Today, in all walks of life, there is chaos, confusion, corruption, hypocrisy, and absurdity. The contemporary individual endowed with superb sensitivity feels powerless and alienated from his own self and his surroundings. He seems to be a victim of the “petrified and frozen” society of the modern dehumanized world which does not suit his temperament, and all efforts for adjustment prove suicidal to him. He, therefore, takes a bold step to reject the ways of the so-called civilized world and tries his best to discover some meaning of his existence.

Keywords: The Apprentice, Corruption, Dynamics, Quest

Introduction

Joshi’s third novel, “The Apprentice,” is based on Albert Camus’s “The Fall,” and depicts the pitiful predicament of the modern man “floating around in a confused society without standards, without direction, and probably without even a purpose.” It’s a confessional novel in which the protagonist’s narrator tells the story of his life through an internal monologue. At the mock-heroic level, Ratan Rathor, the novel’s hero and anti-hero, dives into his own inner life and reveals the perfidy, chicanery, cowardice, and depravity of his own character.

He is an existentialist figure who believes that man’s essence forms in the life’s course he lives and that in his choice, as Sartre would say, lays his freedom.

The Apprentice is a novel that has a radically different tone than Arun Joshi’s other novels and works. Ratan Rathor, the primary character, represents the upper crust. Because of his intellectual level, each man is the polar opposite of the other characters. Unemployed, he arrives in town in quest of work; unscrupulous and eager to sell sex for promotion; lured by materialistic principles, he accepts bribes to get many defective weapons. As a result, it forces a sergeant who is also his friend to resign from his post and commit himself to avoid embarrassment. Rathor, who is repentant, avoids revealing his faults and instead tries to atone by cleaning the faithful shoes every morning in a temple.

The Apprentice takes a distinct approach to materialistic principles. Ratan Rathor degrades in order to comprehend life and its assertions. It's told in a series of monologues about a young lad who consumes the tragedy of his romantic life, as well as the prices, motives, aspirations, conflicts, and obstacles of his history.

His works rarely combine empathy and talent. The Apprentice is a novel that is experimental.

Quest for a meaningful self

Ratan's human-divine life depicts in three stages in the story. Pre- independence India represents the dawn, the age of idealism, and the period of innocence, but post-independence India represents the broad daylight of experience, the inferno of corruption, and the final portion, the area of expiation, represents the gateway to purgatory.

The Apprentice broadens the definition of the word 'apprentice' to include the protagonist's entire quest to learn how to live a life that is both meaningful, in the best sense of the term, in a society where all values appear to have crumbled and there appears to be no one to guide, no matter to whom one can attach himself for guidance and a sense of direction.

A person who is learning a trade by being employed in it for an agreed period at low wages, a beginner, a vice, and an apprentice defined as -

"a person who is learning a trade by being employed in it for an agreed period at low wages".

The dynamics of corruption

This atypical apprenticeship will not only be difficult, but the expected outcomes, which are mental, moral, and spiritual, will not come easily or quickly. Ratan is well aware of the situation and educate himself from scratch in those fundamental values of life that make life meaningful and purposeful, having lived a life of false values for so long. Furthermore, in order to be of service to others, the community, and society, he must forget about himself and focus on others and his responsibilities to them. This apprenticeship has no conclusion, and Ratan may probably stay an apprentice for the rest of his life.

Confesses to a young student, an N.C.C. cadet, has arrived in Delhi a few months early to take part in the Republic Day parade. He is alert, intelligent, empathetic but cynical, and unmoved by the rot wreaking havoc in his society. As he narrates his experience to this young man he meets by chance, Ratan strives to clarify to himself exactly what events led to his own moral disintegration and raises several important questions that he has asked himself frequently.

He realizes his heroic gestures, the loud-mouthed beatitudes, and patriotic speeches, outbreaks of wrath, demonstrations of love for his fellow citizens, blood donation, and help to the war effort were all a pure lie, hypocrisy, and fraud. They were all examples of his antics and a mask to hide his perfidy, which he subsequently discloses. He also produced an article titled 'Crisis of Character,' in which he claimed that the failure of "Indian Character" was the underlying reason for India's decline.

Ratan's narration has now progressed to a more difficult stage. Because of a tangle of personal and public difficulties, he cannot speak clearly and fluently. This phase is about the India-China war, and it urged Ratan to discuss it with a listener who is curious about Ratan's actions during the conflict. It's "nothing but exemplary," according to Ratan.

The explosive irony of this assertion becomes clear when he elaborates on it. The very tone of his narration brings out his self-mockery and irony. In retrospect, he realizes the sheer dishonesty, hypocrisy, and deception of his conduct, his heroic gestures, the loud-mouthed platitudes and patriotic speeches, outbursts of indignation, demonstration of love for his fellow citizens, donation of blood, and contribution to the war fund. They were all instances of his histrionics and a mask to cover up his perfidy, which he reveals later.

Conclusion

Ratan's quest for self-awareness is divisive for him. On the one hand, he stands in his father's shadow, who loved patriotism and idealism for his nation. After his father's death, his father quit a job as a lawyer and gave life in the war for freedom against the British Company. Then, poverty crushed Ratan and watching no one had a step to help him in this materialistic world, a critical situation that caused his mother's death from TB (Tuberculosis). The corruption enriched Ratan to become more concerned with money than with countries' desires. He knows well that gunpowder was of poor quality, and that his friend Brigadier committed suicide as a result.

The author is showing government corruption and political clutching in order to sell for his own gain. Finally, Ratan attempted to fulfil this remorse until the end of his life, but he could not do it. He devoted his life to repairing moral principles, but hungry herb highs tempt people to perform shameful actions. He transforms into a comic by smelling shoes for atonement and remembering such a criminal act not to forget to repeat. Relying on the corporal is never to commit such heinous acts against the country and its people again.

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