

Integration Of A Disintegrated Soul In Arun Joshi's *The Apprentice*: A Social Relevance

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Abstract: *Arun Joshi has been dealing with the theme of alienation in all his novels but at the same time he also gives a way to his protagonists to overcome such soul threatening situations. These ways of getting out of the trying circumstances may be a lesson to all. The Apprentice was written in 1970's social background. Corruption was prevailing in the society. Even after about fifty years later, the social behaviour prevailing in India has not changed, as far as corruption is concerned. Several laws have been formed; many strong steps are taken against it but the results are not very encouraging. This paper suggests a new approach to get rid of such evils. In the novel, the protagonist indulges in corruption and becomes a victim of the same. When he realizes that his deeds are against society and at large, against humanity, he develops a sense of guilt, resulting in to alienation. Reaching at apex of self- alienation, he decides to integrate himself with the main stream of society and gives himself a second chance to do something for society and humanity. Sometimes, in modern society, when a person gets involved in such situations, most of the time, s/he does get a right path to come out of that. Through Joshi's novel this paper tries to explore ways to eradicate corruption from society, a new way to serve humanity. The discussion made in this paper may be helpful.*

Key words: *alienation, social behaviour, corruption, humanity.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Self alienation is an important aspect of identity crisis. Taviss defines self-alienation as: "Self alienation, however, means the loss of contact of the individual selves with any inclination or desire that are not in agreement with the prevailing social patterns, as a result of which individuals are forced to manipulate in accordance with the social demands or feel incapable of controlling their actions.

(I.Taviss, "Changes in the form of Alienation, American Sociological Review, 34/1 February 1969)

Ratan Rathore is an instance typical self alienated individual. *The Apprentice* portrays the precarious situation of an individual who is "sailing about in confused society without norms, without direction, without even, perhaps, a purpose" (T A, Joshi, p 70). Sindi Oberoi in *The Foreigner* and Billy Biswas in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* do not compromise with the world and consequently suffer from acute sense of alienation. But Ratan Rathore's alienation in *The Apprentice* is presented in different manner. He always hopes to achieve material success and, in his efforts, he himself is victimized by malevolent social forces and finally becomes self alienated. D R Sharma observes *The Apprentice*: "as study of the loss and retrieval of one's soul" (1977) R J Das considers of Ratan as a man who has "at the core of his higher self...an impassioned faith in the dignity of a man, the holiness or feelings." (1981) R

K Dhawan finds in Ratan “neither a rebel nor a dissident, but a victim.” (1986) Thakur Guruprasad sees a “tragic flaw” in his “fear of failure.” (1986)

Ratan, the protagonist, belongs to an impoverished middle-class family of a freedom fighter. He had to decide his own method to fulfil his dreams and to pay for it in this society. Although he was not happy to do immoral activities to get success, he did not leave his path. Arun Joshi experiments with the dramatic monologue form to unfold the life of Ratan Rathore, who struggles for a career in this corrupt society and in this way becomes disintegrated. While he gradually ascends the ladder of social and material life, on moral scale he goes down and suffers diminution and so feels from his family, his friends and ultimately from his own self. The technique of dramatic monologue suits the narrative for it enables the protagonist to lay bare his soul before a young listener, a young student and relate to him the story of his material rise and spiritual downfall. Here the young student symbolizes the young readers. C N Srinath says, “In fact, if we come to think of it, it is not the story of Ratan Rathore alone but maybe every one of us.” (1986) Tapán Kumar Ghosh writes, “In *The Apprentice* Joshi presents an individual who suffers the agony of soul not due to his escapism or rebellion but due to his conformity to, and victimization by, a crooked and corrupt society.” (1996) “The Apprentice in more after Albert Camus’ *The Fall*, where the hero exposes the perfidy, chicanery, cowardice and corruption of his own character in a mock-epic way” (1984).

Ratan inherited dual idealism from his parents; his father’s idealism is different from the ideology and dreams of his mother. Ratan is deeply influenced by his father who was actively participating in the freedom struggle of the nation. He was ten years old innocent child when his father joined freedom movements led by Mahatma Gandhi. One day, Ratan was watching the procession of freedom movement very curiously, suddenly he saw that his father was gunned down. The happenings of that procession, made an unforgettable impression on his mind. Ratan is always obsessed by his father’s idealism of, “to be good, to be respected and to be of use.” (T A, Joshi, p 18) He followed his father’s idealism and even adopts to be associated with the secret army of Neta ji Subhash Chandra Bose. His mother, however, ...vehemently dissuades him from taking such a step. His father was patriotic, on the other hand his mother has worldly and practical wisdom. She advises him not to befool himself because for her “man without money is man without worth. Many things are great but greatest of them all was money.” (Joshi, 1993, p 19,) She often reminds Ratan that: “...it was not patriotism but money...that brought respect and brought security. Money made friends. Money succeeded where all else failed. There were many laws...but money was law unto itself.” (T A, Joshi, p 19)

Divided into two contradictory beliefs of life, Ratan comes to know that it is very problematic from the starting to survive peacefully in “petrified and frozen world” (T A, Joshi, p 89) of civilization. Ratan Rathore represents an ordinary modern man: “The modern man may either try to adjust to ‘others’, to society, to system, abdicating his true self or he may strive to keep and develop his individuality and thus alienates from society” (1978). The alienation of both types can be seen in the characters of Ratan. He starts his life with great ambition and morals, being true to his own self and to be honest and make a mark in the world. Abdul Saleem comments, “Disorder in the inner world of Ratan Rathore and his quest for an order irrespective of any external force, leads him to an intense self-examination.” (2007) He has to abandon his ideal self to survive into the unethical the social order and make out an existence. He becomes disintegrated from his real self in pursuing this practical way of life.

Being alienated from his own self he chooses himself to prevailing paths of the world. Ratan has a strong desire for his existence, his identity and for surviving in the society. He

knows well that people are there who live through disobedience, while others survive with capability and they are some others who survive by sycophancy and by being servile to those in power.

Sindi Oberoi in *The Foreigner* depends on his philosophy of non-involvement, whereas Ratan, here holds on to his career. Sindi slowly learns that real detachment lies in involvement, similarly Ratan's sense of disintegration makes him learn that an amalgamation of humanism and religion may be a good grace of humanism steeped in corruption.

Ratan starts his life as an ordinary young man full of his ideals. Ratan recollects his father's reverence for Gandhiji whom he called a "man of suffering" (T A, Joshi, p 7). He tries to follow his father's idea of 'to be of use.' But Ratan soon discovers that being the son of a patriot is of no importance in real life whatsoever in contemporary world. His father having died a martyr to the cause of country's freedom, leaves behind an ailing, striving and cynical wife and a patriotic fortuneless son. The people, for whom his father had 'misspent' his life, overlook him just in one year. Ratan goes away from his home to pursue a job in Delhi, for it "was a city of opportunities. To fail in Delhi would have been a sign of greatest incompetence." (T A, Joshi, p 67)

Ratan tries to retain his moral core until he can but he gradually is contaminated in the viable urban setting. Disillusioned with a miserable future, without powerful acquaintances, he undergoes an embarrassing experience as he is disallowed and mocked at while seeking for a career. From here begins his alienation. His education, morality and intellect could not help him in his campaign. Then he acquires to keep up appearance by discarding even ordinary decency and friendship. That is how, he totally isolates himself from real self and ideologies. Ratan explains his aberration with a feeling of self consciousness and impartiality: "I had become, at the age of twenty one, a hypocrite, a liar; a sham. I had been insecure before and full of strange fears. But I had never undertaken such sustained, if harmless deception, for once I lied about having a job, I had to lie about numerous other things... I had become a master faker." (T A, Joshi, p 27)

V. Gopal Reddy observes that, "It is the story of a young man who out of sheer exhaustion of joblessness and privation is forced to shed the honesty and the old world morality of his father to become 'an apprentice' to the corrupt civilization". (1999) The sorrow of the plot is that whereas the society was accountable for crushing Ratan's temperament with its misperception of morals and resulted in estrangement, it has, yet, unsuccessful to support him to repossess his missing integrity to the self.

Spending a very hard life, hardly escaping himself from starvation during job hunting, ultimately Ratan gets an opportunity to work as a temporary clerk, with the help of one of his roommates, in a government office for war purchase. Ratan looks at it as an opportunity to rise. Henceforth, his only goal in life is to make his profession and money. From that day the 'practical' Ratan never looks back. He even surprises himself by ignoring those who saved him from starvation "I was a different cut: intelligent cultured and it was my right that I should rise in life, to level higher than others aspired for." (T A, Joshi, p 31)

Quite often Ratan remembers the mocking references to a common man's strong wish to flourish in life, to be involved in a profession to which his father derisively said "bourgeois filth" (T A, Joshi, p 31). The irony comes in full swing when a son of a freedom fighter devotes himself whole heartedly in building his career by fair or foul means. His alienation takes him away from his self that inherited from his father. In fact, he was shattered down by the collapse of faith:

"What hurts is the collapse of faith that they destroy. You believe there is justice in the world. You go about the world for fifty years, this belief sitting in your heart. Then something

happens and you go seeking justice. And justice is just not there. Or, you assume your wife is faithful, your children love you, your boss comes along that nothing is so. That is what hurts.” (T A, Joshi, p 39)

C N Srinath remarks about *The Apprentice* that “It is the tale of consistence- torn man with a curious mixture of idealism and docility, a vague sense of values, a helpless self -deceptive effort to flout them for the sake of career, in short, with a deep awareness of conflict between life and living.” (1976). Although Ratan was well settled in life but he never felt a sense of satisfaction. It does not take much time for him to realize that the world run on ‘deals’: “Deals, deals, deals...that is what the world runs on, what it is all about. If men forgot how to make deals, the world would stop” (T A, Joshi, p 48). Disillusioned he interprets life in terms of algebra:

Life more than ever reminds me of those complex sums of algebra that we do in high school, sums involving twenty equations, all directed at discovering the missing x with which they are in some way related. But they are also related among themselves, acting upon themselves, holding each other up, at times destroying each other and in the process. And at times they are wrongly set up so that the missing x is never found, or they are short by one or two and there can be no equation of finding x, try as you might.” (T A, Joshi, p 51)

Alienated Ratan, though advancements upward in social status, becomes gradually deceitful and unprincipled. He rapidly accepts bribe. At the time of war, he feels strongly for his country. He himself tries to find out who is responsible for this war and finally reaches at the conclusion that “What was at the root of our downfall was not the military, not the politicians, nor yet the treacheries of weather but the INDIAN CHARACTER.” (T A, Joshi, p 55)

Alienated from his ‘true self’, Ratan becomes a whore pursuing his profession and money. He takes bribe from Himmat Sing ‘Sheikh’ to approve the defective war materials. He finds himself trapped in the corrupt system “where men were weighed in money or power.” (T A, Joshi, p 62) After taking bribe from Seikh, Ratan himself could not approve his deed of taking bribe “The first that came to me was: what would people say when they come to hear of this?” (T A, Joshi, p 106). But he tries to justify his ‘deed’ by commenting upon a cross-section of the Indian society:

“If I had taken a bribe, I belonged rather to rule than the exception. Peons were frequently taking bribe. So were the government officials and the traffic policemen and railway conductors. A bribe could get a bed in a hospital, a place to burn dead. Doctors had a fee to give a false certificate, magistrates for false judgements. For a sum of money changed sides. For a larger sum they declared war. Bribery was accepted by factory inspectors, bank agents and college professors; by nurses, priests and chartered accountants; by all who acted in public interest. Men took the bribes to facilitate the seduction of their wives, women for seduction of other women. All this I knew and had known for twenty years.” (T A, Joshi, p 108-109)

But all this argument was just to overcome his subconscious guilt and to justify his fraudulent tactics. His heart cried “the poor voice, nearly fearful.” (T A, Joshi, p 25)

Very soon a Brigadier in Indian army, an intimate friend of Ratan, is reported lost. After returning from the battle front, the Brigadier has a nervous breakdown. He is shocked when he comes to know that the purchased war-materials were defective and it was purchased by his own approval. Ultimately, feeling himself responsible for the death of so many soldiers, the Brigadier commits suicide. It reminds us of Joe Keller in *All My Sons* by Arthur Miller. At this moment Ratan realizes the gravity of his ‘sin’ of taking bribe to approve defective war-

materials. He feels alone: “I feel betrayed, let down. My friend appears no friendly than a street full of strangers. I was, I never know, alone.” (T A, Joshi, p 123)

His material prosperity gives him spiritual bankruptcy. At last his alert consciousness disintegrates him from himself as well as from the deteriorated society. Ratan himself pronounces his own aberration with an emotion of self-awareness “Twenty years and nothing gained. An empty lifetime what had I learned? Pushing files? Maneuvering! At forty-five, all that I knew was to maneuver. A trickster, that was what I had left life make of me. Did I know the meaning of honour, friendship? Did I ever know it? Would I ever know it again?” (T A, Joshi, p 133)

Stunned and upset by the suicide of Brigadier, his intimate associate Ratan decides to retaliate upon Himmat Singh “Seikh” who offered him bribe to approve the supply of defective war materials. To his utter surprise he comes to know from Seikh that only he was not accountable for the ‘deal’; the secretary and the minister were also party to it. Ratan was made a scapegoat because he was a “spineless flunky.” (T A, Joshi, p 131) Ratan comprehends that there is no end of human vanity, or for that matter to human stupidity. The thought of the Brigadier’s suicide and the subsequent guilt haunts him wherever he goes. Ratan is jam-packed with endless torment of guilty feelings.

Ratan’s ethics is so totally battered that he cannot carry himself to admit before the authorities. He visits the temple. But even his religion offers him no relief and hope. Ratan goes to the priest but the priest is ready to grease Ratan’s hand to save his son, a contractor, who having used substandard material in construction, has been responsible for the collapse of many roofs and was facing punishment. He utters that even the religion is not aloof from corruption and no succor can be drawn from it. Ramesh Kumar Srivastav says, “Ratan Rathore confirms to counterfeit values of civilization at the cost of his individuality. Conformity is the height of alienation.” (1987)

Ultimately Ratan understands that one cannot live for oneself because no human activity is performed in isolation and without consequences. Therefore, each activity should be done with a sense of accountability. Ratan is so much devoid of his individuality that he compares himself with blotting paper which becomes black if the ink is black and red if red. He is merely a pawn in the hands of the minister, the secretary and Himmat Singh. His real nature is well summed up in words of Himmat Singh when he says, “You are bogus, Ratan Rathore, bogus. From top to bottom. Your work, your religion, your friendship, your honour, is nothing but a pile of dung. Nothing he said but poses, a bundle of shams.” (T A, Joshi, p 131)

Here we feel that Ratan’s alienation is complete. The reason of alienation and inner barrenness of Ratan is neither the rootlessness of Sindi Oberoi of *The Foreigner* nor the unusual urge of Billy of *The Strange Case of Billy Bisawas*. The captivating force of civilized society shatters the idealism of a young people like Ratan and compels them to run cynical and even hypocritical. Ratan regrets that his entire life has been a waste, a great fault without a purpose, without results. This is best reflected in his comment to the student, the young listener, “There are many sorrows in the world but there in nothing in the three worlds to match the sorrow of a wasted life.” (T A, Joshi, p 94)

Although the novel has an Indian setting, the problem is universal. But even after about fifty years later the situation is not very much changed. Corruption is still there in the society. People still choose unfair means to earn money. Nobody hesitates in giving and taking bribes. It does not mean that the government has done nothing to prevent it. But the results are not very encouraging. No law can remove corruption from society until an

individual listens the inner voice of his/ her soul. Only a morally strong person can keep himself away from such disease.

Secondly, there is no harm in giving a second chance to start new life that could be of use to the society and at large humanity. Escaping from the situation is never a solution to a problem. Whatever one does, one must think its consequences and its effect on the society. Once an individual is aware of these things, chances are there that s/he will not do anything wrong. Doing something big is not necessary always. Even small acts that helps the mankind will serve the purpose.

Here, Ratan Rathore, out of a critical feeling of alienation and a pursuit of understanding the system and the life, Ratan undergoes the sternest apprenticeship in the world. Symbolically he begins at the lowest dusting the shoes of the congregation outside the temple every morning on his way to his office. Thus, Ratan Rathore realizes the hollowness and the futility of materialistic life and society. Giving up all he becomes a shoe- shiner on the stairway of the temple and "...beg forgiveness of a large host: my father, my mother, the Brigadier, the unknown dead of war, of those of whom I have harmed with deliberation and cunning, of all those who have been the victim of my cleverness, those whom I could have helped and did not." (T A, Joshi, p 143)

He seeks his contentment in this symbolic act. He feels that his only sustaining basis for action is to be of use to others "without vanity, without expectations and also without cleverness" (T A, Joshi, p 143)

Ratan earnestly pleads the young, the listener in the novel, that there is nothing wrong to make a second start. "One must try and not lose heart, not yield at any cost to despair." (T A, Joshi, p 143) Ratan standing at the door step of the temple that offers a deserted look "frozen, petrified like our civilization itself" (T A, Joshi, p 144) hopes that the young can turn the tide. However, there is a hope- a cold dawn but dawn still, in which Ratan exhorts people to do something. He recalls old people who had advised others to be comfortable and to flow with current but he now exhorts them to give battle, even if the hour is late. He is no longer dehumanized, and feels "whatever you do, touches someone, somewhere." (T A, Joshi, p 143)

2. CONCLUSION

The discussion shows that corruption is still there in society. It always leads to some unexpected and miserable ending. Only laws cannot work to eradicate it from society. Corruption cannot be eradicated until an individual has a sense of guilt about it. It can be prevented when an individual has listens to his soul and feels that it is wrong. If one listens to one's inner voice, s/he will never go for such an activity. To think about the consequences of the deeds whatever one does, will always help to 'be of use' to the society. Ratan Rathore starts shining shoes of the congregation on the door step of a temple. It symbolizes that even the smallest work in service of humanity can help an individual to be integrated with the main stream of the society. There is no harm is giving a second chance to life.

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