



ARUN JOSHI AS AN OUTSTANDING NOVELIST OF HUMAN PREDICAMENT FOCUSSING ON THE PREDICAMENT OF MODERNMAN IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN MILIEU: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

*This paper is a humble attempt to picturize how fiction transmutes the facts of life and the novel, as a literary genre, is new to India. Epics, lyrics, dramas, short stories and fables have their more respectable ancestors and to project Arun Arun Joshi as an outstanding Novelist of Human Predicament Focusing on The Predicament of Modern man in Contemporary Indian Milieu through his notable novels such as *The Foreigner* (1968), *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), *The Apprentice* (1974) and *The Last Labyrinth* (1980).*

Key Words: *Predicament, Outstanding, Contemporary, Milieu, Fixtion, Genre.*

Fiction transmutes the facts of life. The novel, as a literary genre, is new to India. Epics, lyrics, dramas, short stories and fables have their more respectable ancestors. There were, of course, isolated marvels like Bana's **Kadambari** and Subandhu's **Vasavadatta**. The real beginning of the novel was with the work of great Bankim Chatterjee namely **Rajmohan's Wife** (1864). For the first time in Indian Literature, it was Tagore's **Choker Bali** that showed the actions and reactions arousing out of the impact of minds of individuals propelling the plot, rather than external became an integral part of Indian reality showing full cognizance of the changing facets of Indian life.

The Indian novel in English gained its form, content and respectability at the hands of "The Big Three" of the Indo-Anglian fiction namely Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. M.R. Anand gave the Indian novel a definite tone and texture. His novels are poems of suffering portraying impassionedly the inequality, poverty and exploitation of characters who were real individuals, lovable, thwarted, sometimes grand, sometimes weak and thoroughly Indian. R.K. Narayan the most prolific among the three, did not leave any field out of his novels and projected the protagonist of his as a fallen angle who came through the quest of truth, evolving gradually the necessary vision. Raja Rao's works were marked by his philosophy, intricate reflections on life and spirituality and his **The Serpent and the Rope** emerged as a richly ambiguous novel, where varied layers of experience sublimated into a vision of life. The great masters were followed by a host of talent writers such as Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Kamal Markandaya, Ruth Jhabvala and Khushwant Singh commenting on the fiction of these recent writers, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar states: "They have given ample evidence of vitality, variety, humanity and artistic integrity". (P 518).

The arrival of Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi marked a new phase in the Indo-Anglian fiction. The Indian novels in English seemed to move away from the traditional fields and caught up with the modern western novels. The camera eye of the novelist now shifted from the mind and heart. The women characters of Nayantara Sahgal were no longer subdued but were solitary individuals who tried to combat loneliness of living. Anita Desai's characters were completely opposite. They lived as total strangers, not able to communicate. In Nayantara Sahgal's or Anita Desai's fiction, the crisis was



born out of marital discord, a lack of understanding between man and women. As C. Paul Verghese puts it, “Arun Joshi, one of the modern Indian novelists in English in surge of new themes had renounced the larger world in favour of the inner man by engaging himself in a surge for the essence of human living” (PP 124-125).

The Post-Independence writers like Anita Desai and Arun Joshi have for the first time focused their attention to the inner psyche of men and women. The emphasis has certainly shifted from the socio-political environments to the minds of the characters. Existential tendencies are found in them existentialism as a philosophy was a continental phenomenon. This is an anti-intellectual philosophy of life holding that man is free and the existence can only be lived and can never become subject of thought. According to Ruby Chatterji, Existentialist literature tended to emphasize the following recurring themes: “Man alienated from an absurd world; the individual estranged from society; the individuality isolation and subjectivity, his guilt, his struggles to distinguish between inauthentic and authentic selves; his assertion of personal freedom through irrevocable choice, particularly in extreme situations, limit situations and crisis situations; death consciousness and the need to defend oneself against it; the victim here who creates his own values from within” (P 81). Arun Joshi could be considered a pioneer of sort, who dared to experiment with a foreign philosophy in the Indian context.

Arun Joshi, an outstanding novelist of human predicament, has brought out such four notable novels as **The Foreigner** (1968), **The Strange Case of Billy Biswas** (1971), **The Apprentice** (1974) and **The Last Labyrinth** (1980). These novels forma sort of “Corporate Cluster” and they are “quest quarters” (Prasad 25). The first novel **The Foreigner** evoked the central theme of a foreigner, a man without roots, suffering from loneliness, anxiety and alienation. The subsequent novels, were in fact, extensions of the previous themes. The focus of Arun Joshi was on the predicament of the Modern Man in contemporary Indian milieu. Born in 1939, Joshi had a brilliant academic career. Having obtained an Engineering degree from the University of Kansas and a degree of Industrial Management from M.I.T.Cambridge, Massachusetts; he worked for a brief period in 1957 at a mental hospital. After returning to India in 1962, he joined DCM in a managerial capacity on the recruitment and training side. He came from an enlightened family. His father, an eminent Botanist, was the Vice Chancellor of Punjab University and later Banaras Hindu University. Joshi was awarded the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award in 1983 for his novel **The Last Labyrinth**.

In our age, man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but also from an inner problem, a conviction of isolation, existence, which perhaps is the result of the societal culture. Even the great genius is necessarily moulded by culture, ideals, mental and moral tendencies of the society into which the writer is born and the character of what he produces is therefore to a large extent determined by these. In this sense, every writer has to be regarded as a product of his time. Arun Joshi, influenced by the problem of the self, deals with theme of alienation in all this novels.

Arun Joshi has brought out in his novels the inner crisis of modern man. A certain awareness of man’s rootlessness and the consequential loneliness and anxiety is the keynote of Arun Joshi’s unique vision of the predicament of modern man in contemporary Indo-English fiction. In his words, the puzzles and contradictions of life cannot but be resolved through faith. That is why, despite all the corruption and degeneration, there are no viallains in the fictional world of Arun Joshi. Fear, insecurity and cowardice are the real evils. For instance, in the case of Billy the protagonist of **The Strange Case of Billy**



Biswas, it is the society which is the social convictions and the conflict within the society expects them to be are the main themes of his novels.

The source of most of Arun Joshi's novels is actual experience. He feels a need to shape his experiences and a need to discover the reality which lies hidden in the actuality of his own life. Joshi's protagonists are singularly individualistic and completely self-centred. Though highly educated, some of them having studied abroad, their behavior are incompatible with the natural laws of everyday reality. They violate norms of social life and indulge in actions which are instinctive and irrational. Alienated from the sinister materialistic life around them, they try to work out their destiny in their own way. Though successful in freeing themselves from the restraints of their external environment, they remain subjected to the urges of their sub-conscious self. This existential state of disappointment, isolation and meaninglessness has received adequate attention in the novels of Arun Joshi. But in spite of their weaknesses, they are, however, genuine seekers who strive to grope towards a purpose in life and self-fulfillment.

In his first novel **The Foreigner**, Joshi explores the individual's anguished consciousness of being isolated from the whole apparatus of social convention and ritual. A surface reading of **The Foreigner** gives the impression that the theme of the novel is East-West novel confrontation. This novel may, by turns, be considered as a love story, a literary representation of rootlessness or an artistic triumph that unifies feelings and ideas, characters and events. It may also be interpreted as a satire on man's exploitation by man in free India, on the corruptions corroding. Our social fabric, on population explosion and overcrowding in India amidst poverty and disease. At a deeper lever, **The Foreigner**, can be viewed as an attempt to plumb man's perennial dilemmas. The discrepancy between the individuals pursuits and the extent to which he is able to reach them is the central point of novel. Though Joshi exposes the constraints of society on individuals, he is unable to come out with a definite solution to wake up men from the slumber caused by identity - crisis. "One may establish a tenuous relation among different solutions put forth by him but there is no progression of thought from novel to novel" (Pathak 62).

In **The Foreigner**, the story is told in a series of flashbacks with a clever ordering of past events to maximize suspense. Though the narrative includes Babu, an Indian student in America, June, a simple but passionate American girl, Mr. Khemka, a Delhi industrialist the novel is in the main the story of Sindi Oberoi – a rootless young man. The story is narrated from Sindi's point of view. The division of the novel orders the events, as the first part lights up the beginning of relationships, the second growth and decay, and the last, defeat and destruction. Joshi's second novel **The Strange Case of Billy Biswar** deals with the predicament of the alienated personality of its title hero Billy Biswas who is obsessed with a sense of alienation from the human civilization. He feels emptiness within himself as much as he tries to attune himself to the civilized society. He finds himself engulfed by a Vacuum surrounded by lifeless shadows. Search for truth has to be a lonely business and Billy arrives at the fork in his life. His marriage he compares to on 'ill-fated ship' that gets smashed up in a gale" (Billy 185). The corruption that sets in makes him feel like a swine who wallows in filth. His soul is eager to face the 'other thing'. Billy now realizes that however drastic the choice may be has to act before corruption eats his soul". I had greater responsibilities towards my soul" (Billy 186), says Billy as he sets out on his last expedition renouncing the civilized world. He is very well aware of the fact that 'to establish a link' with the other world, will only play havoc with his present life'. In the words of O.P. Bhatnagar,



“Billy is not a stereotype of a traditional Indian hero posing wisdom through philosophical speculations but a character effecting metaphysical manifestations. He is rebel. He has no cowardly compromises like the hero of **The Foreigner** nor pity for himself” (P 36).

In **The Last Labyrinth**, Som Bhaskar’s quest for peace is a cry of consciousness, a deeper search than Sindi Oberi’s. The protagonist is suffocated in the labyrinth of life and the author presents a powerful analysis of his sufferings. Som Bhaskar is a representative of the rational and sensuous culture. But deep inside he feels the want of something which would gratify his hunger. He wants something where in the world of spirit and the world of matter combined. This is a juxtaposed concept and his very name indicates his attitude. ‘Som’ means ‘the moon’ and ‘Bhaskar’ means ‘the sun’. He wants to quench the hunger of the spirit and also the hunger of the body. The agony of Som is nothing external. He has all material benefits which man hopes to have and even more. His crisis lies deep within him. He is always on the run in search of means, through he could save his soul. He cries to Anuradha even after his death to placed on his behalf to God to have mercy on him. By the end of the novel, Som gets over his doubts regarding the very existence of God. Som loses himself in the chakravayuh of life and death, reality and truth, doubt and faith” (Prasad 106). Thus, Arun Joshi has successfully re-enacted the dilemma of the modern man and explored the human predicament with great factorial forte and skill.

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