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ARUN JOSHI'S THE APPRENTICE: A JOURNEY FROM 'PARADISO' TO 'INFERNO'

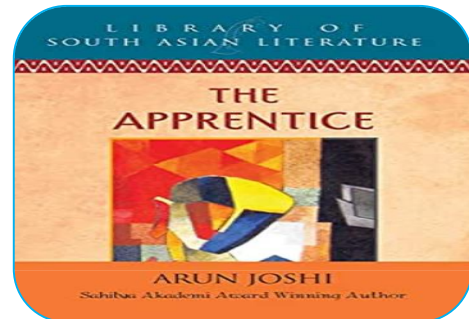
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ABSTRACT

Arun Joshi's novel, *The Apprentice*, presents the life-table of a young unemployed man, Ratan Rathor, who like his own father wants to live a life of use to others but soon he finds himself in a hostile world where it is difficult even to get a job without recommendations. Soon, he starts compromising with the corrupt system of society. In the beginning, he succeeds and earns a lot of money but the death of his friend brings a turning point in his life. After realizing his guilt he takes a positive move and starts his life in a fresh way.



KEYWORDS : *Apprentice, young, corrupting forces, and transformation.*

INTRODUCTION

Arun Joshi holds a distinguished place among Indian novelists writing in English. His fictional world consists of five novels, *The Foreigner*, *The Apprentice*, *Last Labyrinth*, *Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, *The City and the River* and a dozen of short stories published under the title, *Survivor*. In his fictional world, he gives an expression to his indigenous feelings. He was highly influenced by the Indian Scriptures including the Gita. His second novel, *The Apprentice* like his first novel, *Foreigner* is also influenced by the theory of action as mentioned in *The Gita*. Side by side, an emphasis is laid on the purity of soul, soul as the best guide and on the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi who showed us the right way to live, to exist. The novel presents before us the picture of a degenerated society with its meaningless pursuit of success and career, unscrupulous amassing of wealth in defiance of the sanctified values of its tradition like honesty, integrity of character, selfless service and honour. The immoral, corrupt, and degenerated society unfolds itself in the confessional form through the protagonist, Ratan Rathor. He is the child of double inheritance; his father was a revolutionary and believed in Gandhian pattern of thinking, while his mother advocated the pragmatic attitude.

"I had not thought that death had undone so many."

'Burial of the Dead'

—T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

DISCUSSION:

The novel portrays the two worlds; at first, the world of honest people that includes Ratan's father, the Brigadier, the auditor, and the young officer in Ratan's department, and secondly, the world of corrupt people that includes Ratan himself, the Sheikh, the Office Superintendent, and the Secretary.

The views offered by the Office Superintendent about God, theory of Karma (action), evil and good, truth, money etc. represent the views of the people in our own times: "There is no point in looking for truths aside from the truth of God. Money in the world always changed hands God was only concerned with what one did with the money. Did a man, for example, use it for good purposes?" The theory may sound strange to all those who consider it "bourgeois filth" like Ratan's father but the people in modern age find it very convenient. People do not bother about the source of the money but about its use. And so long as the question of the giver is concerned; it remains only to be a myth conceived by the good people. It is totally against the Aristotelian or Gandhian approach, which insists on the purity of the source as well. The Office Superintendent like the modern people does not want to indulge in the mathematics of right and wrong, good or bad, moral or immoral. To him it is the skill of manoeuvre that matters: "One was like a sailor on a lake, concerned not with the destination but only with the manipulation of the sails, the riding of the wind." Like the Office Superintendent, people in the materialistic society believe that it is sufficient to acknowledge God. The other things inextricably belonging to God like good, bad, evil, moral, immoral etc should not be our concern: "What is easier, after all, than to accept a God who wishes only to be acknowledged and could not be bothered with the details of one's actions directed at good or evil, as long as the allegiance to Him is duly renewed."

Career consciousness, the ambition to become one with the ruling class, degenerates him from top to bottom. Himmat Singh who along with the Secretary and the Minister prepared a racket for the sub-standard war material supply, needed a suitable person in the office to share with him. Ratan Rathor, by accepting the cut, becomes an easy victim. But there comes a turning point in his life when his only friend, the Brigadier who was like his own brother, becomes the victim of his evil plan and commits suicide. The charges framed against him were false but there were no proofs to prove them. Superintendent of Police tries his best to save the Brigadier but Ratan is not ready to confess. The encounter with the death of his friend transforms him. In the beginning, he considers Shiekh responsible for the evil but Sheikh holds up the mirror before him. In other words, Sheikh is Ratan's own mirror. He succeeds in showing him his debased self, the final horrible vision of himself. Now he comes to understand that the real villain that he was wrongly searching outside was in him and undergoes the final metamorphosis. Joshi like Gandhi believes that means are equally important to achieve the good end. Moreover, he propagates that individual actions have effects on others and on oneself. So one cannot afford to continue with an individual existence but has to commit oneself to some point. This lesson he learns only in the end.

The Brigadier's death plucks his soul out. He comes out of his moral inertia and works for the perfection of his soul. He realizes his gruesome crime and comes to learn: "God is not mocked.... He has got a stick all right and he is not mocked and sooner or later, some place or another, He will rap your knuckles."

To detect the evil, he searches his own soul and finds that the villain is not outside but within him. Hence killing the Sheikh or Secretary will not solve any purpose. To restore his honour and remove his shame, he must work in some other way: "What was more, I knew that the villain I was hunting for had to be found elsewhere. I had been betrayed, obviously enough, but the culprit had yet to be found." (P.136) The change in attitude that the wrong is not with society, system or the people in the world but within us is reflected: "To know good, and to know evil and to choose evil.... Who does this choosing but ourselves."

He wants that Ratan should make a fresh start by following the ideals of his father who devoted his entire existence for the cause of others: "Try to put yourself to use, ... It might be too late. You have been too long the slave...But give it a try. One lost nothing." Detecting the villain, he works for redemption by confessing sincerely. His method of expiation is different. To remove the carbon of selfishness, ignorance, hypocrisy and shame deposited on his soul, he washes the shoes of congregation, begging forgiveness from all of them who were deceived by him.

A thorough study of the novel manifests that the world of corruption is captivating and has an attractive entry but no exit door to come out of it. Ratan, in the beginning, had a desire to live a life of

honesty like his father but he, tempted by money and its power, trapped in the whirlpool of materialism and suffers endlessly. In other words, he undergoes the sufferings of Dante's Inferno:

"... si lingua tratta Di gente,
chi'io non avrei mai creduto
Chi morte tanta n'avesse disfratta."
(Inferno,III,55-7)

On the gate of inferno it was inscribed, "Abandon ye all hopes who come here." It acquaints the reader with the shocking reality of hell, the crowd of people wailing, the endless sighing, sobbing and plaintive wailing.

CONCLUSION:

Joshi's novel, The Apprentice presents a realistic picture of a degenerated society that has lost all its norms and values that sustain the humanity at large. Irrespective of means, fair or foul, earning of money has become the summum bonum of life. Rattan Rathor, the protagonist, comes from a double inheritance; his father was a freedom fighter and he sacrificed his life for a pious cause, for the freedom of the country while his mother was a worldly woman who considers money as all in all: " money succeeds where everything fails." Unemployed, he struggles hard to get a job and moves from one place to another but fails to get it. Helpless and exhausted, he compromises with the Office Superintendent who offers him a job on the condition that he will marry his daughter. Deal takes place between the two. Tempted by the worldly needs, Ratan Rathor surrenders to the corrupting forces of society. It is the death of his Friend, the Brigadier, that proves to be turning point in his life. He considers himself responsible for his death. It is in the end that he realizes his guilt and makes a positive move in his life.

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