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## THE PSYCHO-LABYRINTH IN THE NOVELS OF ARUN JOSHI



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### ABSTRACT

In the novels of Arun Joshi the labyrinth is a, creation of the individuals. Arun Joshi's characters are masters of the material reality in which they exist and therefore the labyrinths lie in their own consciousness, arising from the past, or present. The labyrinth motif in the novels of Arun Joshi points out the internal labyrinths which choke the vitality of an individual. Arun Joshi is delving deep into the structure of human psyche to show the efforts of individuals to come out of their own labyrinths or their misery or what happens when they fail to come out and thereby fail to connect themselves with others.

**KEYWORDS :** Psychological Labyrinth, Modern Indian Novel, Materialist Culture, Conscience,



### INTRODUCTION :

The difference, in the treatment of the labyrinth motif in the novels Mulk Raj Anand and Arun Joshi, is a measure of the change which Indian novel in English has undergone. In the novels of Mulk Raj Anand we see labyrinth is external though it impresses itself upon the consciousness of individuals whereas in the novels of Arun Joshi the labyrinth is a, creation of the individuals. No doubt behind any act of an individual his socio-economic and cultural background is there but it has been subtly

kept afar from the drama of consciousness by Arun Joshi. Arun Joshi's characters are masters of the material reality in which they exist and therefore the labyrinths lie in their own consciousness, arising from the past, or present. Ratan Rathore in *The Apprentice* is suffering from his own acts in the past which have resulted in his alienation not only from people but from his own spirit Ratan at present is a civil-servant in his late-forties with a wife and a daughter, and a car too But every morning he can settle in his office only after he has smelled his hands which smell of "a hundred feet" (p149) The road out of his dark labyrinth lies in Rattan's philosophy which he receives from his father, "whatever you do touches someone somewhere" (p .149) Cleaning the shoes, outside the temple he does not enter, is Rattan's tragic effort to connect his self with the humanity outside.

He imagines himself an "apprentice" in the difficult vocation of connecting himself with others, "it is humiliating at times but apprentices need to be put in their place"(p149) Rattan's predicament is the document of our age of material progress and cut-throat competition but Arun

Joshi is more concerned in exploring the dark labyrinths of the so-called successful people in such a society. Ratan Rathore tells in his confessions, "When we are pleased with our selves", we are "in advance of our times, 'pioneers of the age'. When not so pleased we are men of our times as though a criminal is any the less a criminal for being chained to twenty others" (p.147). The cost of advance and success is the creation of labyrinth around oneself. One is able to ride over others and sink deeper in his labyrinth, "to be a man of your times is a shrug, my friend, a shrug after which one may proceed to resume whatever rackets one is occupied with" (p.147). But such a shrug makes a man sink like "a stone" (p. 129) where nobody can share the darkness of your labyrinth and even Ratan's wife is miserably unable to understand him. Ratan takes a bribe without needing the money actually and the consequence of his action is the death of many soldiers, and the Brigadier who was Ratan's best friend. Ratan could have saved the Brigadier but he simply would not for his own survival. Now Ratan realizes "God is not mocked" (p.129) and how Ratan lives in a world of faithless, anchorless reality, a world of hallucinations and he is getting choked in his own labyrinths:

"There is no fear like the fear of madness. All the other fears are common to men and can if you have the luck, be shared, those who descend into madness descend alone. Immobilised, fuddled, tongueless, misunderstood, laughed at. Thus I sank. Like a stone" (p.129).

However the seeds of this labyrinth are in the cultural fabric of our materialistic modern society and Arun Joshi gradually reveals late in the novel when Ratan learns that actually he has been used as a "pawn" (p.134) by the trio of politicians (the Minister) - bureaucrats (the Secretary) - businessman (Sheikh), the trio that "incidentally runs the country". Now Ratan realizes his position, "But if something went wrong it was no doubt that the paw would be chopped" (p. 135). And though Ratan escaped the police dragonet he realizes the force of, "some other powers, of the earth or of the sky, or those that dwell in the hearts of men ..." (p.136). Whose "judgement" (p.136) now Ratan is working out, "In a world where people need rackets (p.148) as we need "oxygen." (p.148) where one has no faith either in "Revolution or God" (p.148) Ratan has developed a path, a sort of personal faith, which will lead him outside his own labyrinth. Ratan agrees with his practical friend that life may be a "zero" (p.148) but one should not make "it Negative" (p. 148) by "taking things out of it" (p.148) because life becomes "negative when you take out of it your sense of shame, your honour" (p.148). Ratan realizes the fabric of all personal labyrinths which lies in "the crookedness of the world the crookedness of oneself" (p.148), and he evolves an active personal faith of connecting oneself with others, "But time is short and one must begin somewhere. Anywhere" (p.148). This faith will certainly lead out Ratan from the ultimate misery in which he has put himself in, the misery of the knowledge that one's life has been a shameless tale told by an idiot, "Death, in the knowledge of one's shame, in the knowledge that one has made a hash of life's purposes, is unbearable" (p. 147). This awareness itself coupled with Ratan's faith is more than a passport for him to sustain him in his ordeal and possibly liberate his self from the dark labyrinth which he has created around it.

If in *The Apprentice* the labyrinth is created by the actions of Ratan in the past then in the *Last labyrinth*, the labyrinth which Som Bahskar creates, encompasses past, present and future. Even the sense of time or place is lost. The labyrinth in which Som Bahskar lives is made up of Som's consciousness of his experiences in Benares and Aftab's Haveli, in Bombay and in Delhi. In fact Som himself finds it difficult to distinguish the places in his hallucinations. For him his reality has got fused with his dreams which he sees even during the day and his dreams are visions of his own labyrinthine nightmare where ultimately, what lies in the last labyrinth is a faithless, lonely "death" (p.37) about which Aftab is very sure.

The nature of labyrinth in *The Last Labyrinth* has got very personalized, we can even say that the

labyrinth exists at the sub-conscious level of mind. But this labyrinth does not drop from the sky, in *The Apprentice* Arun Joshi reveals the culture of decadent materialistic society, behind Ratan's actions then in *The Last Labyrinth* in the very beginning he takes care to establish the socio-cultural substratum of the industrial class which moulds Som's structure of consciousness and thereby his modes of perception and communication with the outer world. Som Bhaskar remembers his father's death as an event of acquiring property, "I was twenty five and a millionaire" (p.10). He cannot also share his father's mystic views on "a First Cause" which his father believes to be behind everything, "sound," "Heat," "love," "Hate" and "Anger"(p.27). This is so because Som seeks "evidence"(p .27) for it. Som belongs to a culture where solid material reality and that too in his own terms, is important.

He wants to acquire "share" and Anuradha and everything he may need. Most of the women have been "One shot obsession" (p.59) to him. With Geeta, "it had been different" (p. 59) but "that too has not been a resounding success" (p. 59). In fact he got married to escape "Melancholia" after his mother's death .

Melancholia ! For God's sake! I couldn't imagine more ridiculous, foolish, humiliating death. I would rather fight it to the bitter end. And to fight it to the bitter end. And to fight I would have all the equipment, Money I already had. If it was a whore a so much I already had. If it was a whore a so much the better. I shall have a wife and children and fame (p. 72).

This is the psychic structure of a materialistic compartmentalized mind, a mind which views the outside reality as objects to be acquired. A mind which sees even fame as "quantitative" (p. 73), which could be acquired and possessed, "Fame was factual, quantitative. . . You knew you were tenth or sixteenth" (p. 73). The mind with this mode of perception is bound to fail in viewing things and human personalities as a whole, such a mind cannot give itself to others and therefore cannot form meaningful relationships with others. The tragedy of such a compartmentalised mind is that outside reality is an object for it so it is also dead for the outside reality.

Som Bhaskar is troubled by the tired ancient cry: "I want. I want. I want" (p. 126) and he also suffers from "voids" (p. 118) and depressions. The reason is simple he wants to acquire shares, women in his own terms so the moment he acquires them the obsession is finished and there are "voids" again and the cry of "I want" again. What he wants is neither the satisfaction of the spirit nor of the body but a satisfaction of possession through which Som thinks he can escape "death" and find a "brief respite" (p.74).

In fact Som is so much obsessed with his own self that any reference to the unknown whether of Krishna or "First cause"(p.27) as a threat to the labyrinthine reality of his own world. He feels irritated when Anuradha wants him to open up to the higher reality, when she tells about the "god up there"(p.126) in the mountains, "on a hill lined with lepers"(p.126). The immediate reaction of Som is, "I am not a leper" (p .126). The path of self-purification is a path of suffering as Ratan also realises in *The Apprentice*. Gargi also tells Som, "God will send someone"(p. 118) who has "known suffering" (P .118) to help you. But for Som there is no evidence of God, and no faith in human beings. This is the reason for his "restlessness"(p.118) and "voids" (p.118) which are "within and without"(p. 118). These are the voids of the frustration arising out of the breaking of human relations, "It was the voids and not the guava groves that I had walked through that morning my mother died; and voids too in her room in Bombay; and voids each time an affair ended; and the morning my daughter was born, and on and on voids all" (p.48). These voids are the inevitable results of Som's structure of consciousness. Leela Sabnis comes closest in analysing him when she tells him, . . you have built a shell around yourself " (p.80). But she cannot cure him because her analysis remains coldly intellectual and she needs "detail" (p.80) and "data"(p.80) to understand him. She is right to tell him "You are always playing games with the

world" (p.80), but it is Anuradha who tries to cure him by sharing his misery as her own background had also been a sad one. In Aftab's Haveli when Som is dreaming about labyrinth Anuradha joins him in blouse and petticoat" I asked her, "What is in the last labyrinth, Anuradha?"

"She laughed, "If you want to sleep by me it is all right by me" (p.82).

Som loses himself for some time with her but, "In a couple of hours I had to catch my plane" (p.82). Anuradha fascinates Som because she is open to many rhythms of life. While Som's failure is to connect himself with the various rhythms of life. Som cannot respond to the spiritual aura of Benaras; the astrologers, rope-dancers, and jugglers fail to attract him, and he also fails to respond to nature during the journey across the Ghat to Gargi's cottage. While Anuradha is open and warm towards all these rhythms of life Som suffers because he cannot understand other's suffering, Anuradha has warmth towards the sufferers whether Som, Aftab or the lepers but Som kicks a beggar in Benaras who "tried to grab my put." Som is also closed to the religious rhythm of life, a rhythm which takes us out of our selves and as the psychiatrist tells him points towards a "higher goal" (p.74). But Som wants to live in his own world of "evidence" and any such reference is threat to his own self. When on Janmashtami Anuradha asks him to join her for the celebration of Lord's birth, Som feels, "I thought of her standing naked near a window saying, "There is a god in the mountain" (p. 129). For Som the entire gaiety and enthusiasm of the festival is a mere "Rubbish" (p.130).

Som is so much closed to life that while being together with Anuradha he is thinking of acquiring Aftab's shares when Anuradha tells him in his position she wouldn't do the same, he thinks she is trying to make a "bargain" (p. 107) with him. The industrialist in him puts detectives in use to find out about Aftab's lost shares. Anuradha fails in making him come out of his own labyrinth and respond to life and open up towards higher reality. Som cannot understand what Gargi meant when she called Anuradha his "Shakti" (p.121). Instead he made her his weakness, "Yet each meeting, far from cooling my passions, served only to fuel them" (p. 121). Anuradha realizes this fact when she points out towards god in the mountain to him and Som persists in making love to her which he finds like "making love to a corpse" (p.127). She tells Som that she wants to go "back" (p.121). Anuradha realizes the failure of their relationship when she tells him, "it's not me that you want."

Som's self absorbing compartmentalized mind cannot bear all this and he suffers a heart-attack, he survives it by a miracle which he is not ready to believe because there is no evidence of it. He thinks it could be "a gimmick" (p.213). However Anuradha leaves him for his own sake, when told by Gargi to do so. Som becomes aware of this complex labyrinth which his mind has created when he finds that even his wife responds sexually to his image entangled with that of Anuradha, till now it was Som who used to think of other women while having sex with one. While having sex with Anuradha he is comparing her body with those of Geeta and Leela "She was tall, long-limbed full, hot petit like Geeta. Or skinny like Leela Sabnis" (p.107). He is aware of his own self-caused tragedy. He is stuck deep into his labyrinth. Now Krishna is no longer a simple thing to be ignored, Som comes to find Krishna "as simple as the labyrinths of Aftab's Kaveli" (p.173)

Ultimately a victim of his own labyrinth he becomes a neurotic as this labyrinth overpowers his unconscious mind and he runs to see the generator so that he would not get choked in the lift, he finds "Taraki peeping to murder him. He goes around carrying his revolver with him. His dog Banjo follows him as his only companion, his wife tries to understand him but fails. He has sunk too deep in his own creation where he is appealing to Anuradha to "... tell his God, to have mercy upon me. Tell Him I am weary. Of so many fears; so much doubting. Of this dark earth and empty heavens. Plead for me, Anuradha. He will listen to you" (p.223). But it is too late now. Anuradha is nowhere near. His bridge to God has been lost.

#### THE PSYCHO-LABYRINTH IN THE NOVELS OF ARUN JOSHI

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Thus we see that the labyrinth motif in the novels of Arun Joshi points out and the internal labyrinths which choke the vitality of an individual. Arun Joshi is delving deep into the structure of human psyche to show the efforts of individuals to come out of their own labyrinths or their misery or what happens when they fail to come out and thereby fail to connect themselves with others.

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