

INTERPRETATION OF EXISTENTIAL STATE OF HEROES IN ARUN JOSHI'S NOVELS

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Abstract:

*English has a very recent history, which is one and half century old. Indian English Literature has passed through several phases such as Indo-Anglian, Indo-English, Indian Writing in English and recently Indian English literature. In spite of its diverse cultures, races and religions Indian Writing in English has successfully recaptured and reflected the multi-cultural, multilingual society. The works of various writers get not only a vast category of readers, but also receive a vast critical acclaim. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, some Indian novelists and their novels have emerged on a literary scene. The novels of this period delineated private tension, self-alienation and loneliness. Anita Desai described the disturbed lives of the middle class. Shashi Deshpande described the personal domestic life of women. Arun Joshi is one of the Indo-English authors who gave the new direction to the Indian Fiction written in English. His novels are based on the rootlessness of the characters, who are always in search for his identity. It seems that his own experience of living abroad is portrayed in his novels in the form of various characters. Arun Joshi focused different faces of alienation in his novels like *The Foreigner* (1968), *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) and *The Last Labrynth*.*

Key Words: *Rootlessness, alienation, loneliness, multi-cultural and multi-lingual society.*

In order to search for better life, man has uprooted himself from his own culture. Materially he achieved all the comforts, but he has lost his mental peace. Arun Joshi depicts in his novels, that man can attain materialistic comforts but his search for peace remains unachievable. This search makes man to struggle to achieve the peace is possible only through complete detachment from himself. This paper attempts to depict the existential state of men in the novels of Arun Joshi.

There are moments in the protagonist's life when he realizes the vainness of life which is one of the basic problems of existentialism. The novels take us to the depths of human suffering and the inferno of existential agony, which becomes more acute in his subsequent works. Arun Joshi explores the individual's anguished consciousness of being isolated from the whole apparatus of Pradip N. Pawar social conventions and moral proprieties.

The Foreigner is a touching portrayal of Sindi Oberoi's unhappy and meaningless existence. In it, Sindi Oberoi attempts to understand the abominable absurdity of the world. He is a man without roots and so he feels lost, alien and alone wherever he goes. He fails to perceive any meaning or purpose in life. Born of a Kenyan-Indian father and English mother, he is orphaned at the age of four when his parents met their end in an air crash near Cairo. Deprived of parental love and affection in his very childhood, he becomes broken anchorless. With the death of his uncle, who brought him up in the absence of his parents, Sindi has lost his emotional anchor forever.

Against this background of emotional rootlessness, the various incidents of Sindi's life appear more comprehensible. The rootless Sindi finds a direction and purpose of life. He is not alienated from the society but from himself. Shutting between attachment and detachment; love and hate;

participation and withdrawal; he finally settles down in India where he truly belongs to it. From a life of alienation in America and England, he moves to a life of identification in India. The place of action in the novel shifts frequently. It has the distinction of being one of the few novels on Indo-English fiction which pointedly deal in artistic terms, with the pros and cons of the existentialist thought.

The Strange Case of Billy Biswas depicts the emptiness and haughtiness of the modern civilized society provokes the protagonist to desert the civilized life and seek refuge in the simple and primitive living of the tribes of Orissa. Biswas belonged to a high profile society by virtue of his father being a judge of the Supreme Court of India. His father wants him to acquire the best kind of education available. Biswas is sent to America for studying Engineering. But in America Biswas prefers to study Anthropology and specialized in the subject. On his return to Delhi he gets a job in Delhi University as a Lecturer in Anthropology. But the metropolitan life of Delhi does not suit his temperament. Biswas finds the life at Delhi quite unnatural, pretentious and hypocritical.

Billy is married to a Bengali girl, but he is a total misfit to run a family. He found that the life at Delhi is much different from the American materialistic Society. He finds happiness neither in family nor in teaching and the Delhi life. He decides to leave his wife and the small child and go to the deep forests of Maikal Hills. Billy moves to the Maikal Hills near Bhuwaneshwar and confines himself in the tribal areas. He is compelled by a kind of primitive force to abandon the urban and civilized life. The jungle and Bilasia become object of his new world. "By becoming a tribal himself he comes to know that it is only in this world he can understand the ultimate motive of life" (Bhatnagar, 2000, p. 167)

In *The Last Labyrinth* The hero Som Bhaskar narrates his confession in flashback. He was confused in understanding the difference between 'being' and 'having' and this has made his life a void which later on resulted in his endless pursuit of mystical 'wanting' which further increased his fornications and turned him into a womanizer. As the story reveals, Som Bhasker has everything that is needed to lead a luxurious life - wealth, loving wife and children. Yet he is relentlessly driven by his undefined 'hunger of the body' and 'hunger of the spirit'. His rational mind assumes this 'wanting' as 'having' or 'possessing' and he seeks it by possession of an object, a business enterprise and another man's woman named Anuradha who becomes the centre of his existence. He is, therefore, curious to know the secret by his objective approach which does not solve his dilemma but aggravates instead and he continues to suffer in the mystic hollow of the empty and void world.

His curiosity is an attempt to come out of the labyrinth but he goes deeper as he wants to get up. The story continues amid this inferring and denying uncertainty from beginning till end. The dichotomy of being has made Som Bhasker a mentally shattered and morally degenerated man. Som's suffering is more aggravated when he begins his education in two cultures. Born in India and brought up under a religious mother, he imbibes religious faith and spiritual learning. During his study abroad, he comes into contact with the western way of thinking. Consequently, his belief in direct reason, practical wisdom and the scientific attitude goes sharper which is again strengthened by his father when he returns to India.

Thus, he possesses a baffled personality devoid of faith and rest in mind. His life becomes a rudderless boat being tossed on turbulent waves' horrified by "going forward and backward and sideways of the mind (48)". In order to settle himself and in search of the final answers to his wanting wishes, he turns in a compulsive fornicator and runs to different women to satisfy himself. Every affair fizzles out leaving him alone and puzzled and he fails to find out the true path. He finds himself a mist everywhere.

Som is still haunted by the mysterious questions like "whence and how arose the universe...arose whence comes this creation? Only that God who sees in highest heaven; He only knows whence came this universe (142)". But he must have valid proof. He even doubts Darwin's theory of evolution. He asks Gargi: The point is that the Spirit is there. And if it is there, if man has inherited it, then what is he to do with it? In other words, what precisely is expected of him, of you and me, of Anuradha, of everyone else? Darwin didn't say how we are supposed to evolve further. (120)

Som's journey to the mountains proves his journey "from agnosticism to an affirmation of faith"(Mathur, 425) leading towards self-realization and brings elusive experience to him but he fails to search any meaning. On the way he meets with various people. He detects from the boy an intuitive wisdom or what can be termed as a tough reasonableness that is a characteristic of very elderly people who have seen life and learns to accept the divine order of living. He has no question but only faith upon whatever he has learnt from his grandmother. Som's existential problem is heightened by the fact that life does not offer him any simple solution as it is available to this boy.

The simplicity of the boy is a perfect counter to Som. As such, both of them quest for their desired objects, but the difference is that Som is rational, the boy has faith, Som is possessive, the boy is submissive; consequently Som is restless, the boy is at peace. Again, Som encounters an old man who has travelled "nine hundred miles to die near the lake"(177). The individuals who meet him on his way are not well educated like him but only due to their strong faith, they live a more peaceful life than this multimillionaire Som Bhaskar. These happenings provide an enigma to him and conclusion that it is only faith that can eliminate the fear of death from one's mind as in the case of Som's mother and further, this old man.

Joshi's hero is lonely individual, faced with predicaments of existentialist order and proving misfit in the world in which he has to live. Joshi's career as a novelist so far represents various modes of quest for self, a common factor of them all being that of decimation of one's pride and cultivation of humility in the service of others.

On the whole it can be said that Arun Joshi's canvas is broad enough to embrace many aspects of life. He is successful in representing the quest of individuals for their individuality in the commotion of the world. His protagonists are lone questers in search of their uniqueness, consequently leading to the realization that only love, sympathy and devotion to one's own identity can balance the sense of worthlessness and barrenness in our life. Arun Joshi has an optimistic approach to life which sets him apart from the rest of the crowd and helps to find out the remedies for various troubles of our life.

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