

Post-Independence Themes in Arun Joshi's Novel: *The Apprentice*

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Abstract

Ratan Rathor is the main character of Arun Joshi's third book, *The Apprentice* (1974). He is an original soul caught in a materialistic and urbanized society. The hero's self-analysis is the focus of the novel. Ultimately, he finds solace in daily devotion to the devotees, which serves as atonement for his actions. Gandhi's teachings, as well as those of Western and Indian philosophers, influences Arun Joshi. The novel's central theme is a post-independence letdown. The unavoidable nature of evil returning to the evil-doer is the subject of the other dynamic leitmotif. Despite the perplexing surroundings, the focus always remains on the individual, who calculatingly chooses evil and then repents. Ratan looks like a victim of the contemporary world. This paper examines the notion of attempting to sort through the confusion that pervades modern life.

Keywords: desolation, despair, Ratan Rathor, Arun Joshi, anxiety

1. Introduction

The novel *The Apprentice* by Arun Joshi delves deeply into the character's inner consciousness to examine the human psyche. Because his morality demands that he make up for his sins of timidity and betrayal by disrespectfully revealing his own identity, the hero, Ratan Rathor, shares the human secret to his survival. He has a rigorously existentialist attitude, is unqualified and sensitive, and is far from himself and his surroundings. He is made weaker by Billy or Sindi (Author's previous novels' protagonists).

Ratan Rathor is from the Rajasthani revolutionary family. However, they have made their home in the Himalayan foothills. Ratan is an intelligent young man who moves to Delhi for a career. He joins the Army Store department as a clerk. After many years, after his service regularization, he worked as permanent staff and became an officer. The narrative describes how a young boy's life evolves through time amid city dwellers. He is aware of his internal pain, though, and his continuous goodness prevents him from harming others, allowing him to be of service to others. He satisfies this need by working as a shoe shiner on the stairs of the Delhi temple. Joshi writes about Ratan Rathor's heartbreaking situation is senses caught in a world of confusion, exploitation, and folly.

In this novel, the hero uses the confessional way to show his chaos in the present world. Ratan is the narrator of his story about the unknown young cadet. It is considered a monologue. The novel includes the Indo-China War. The setting of the story is the Indian urban middle class. In *The Apprentice*, Arun Joshi (1993) had the main character set out to find himself separated from his fellowmen. The shocking details of his self-revelation are the most critical points in this novel. Arun Joshi created a makeup like Coleridge in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and Ratan mirrors his skillful manipulation of confession. This novel provides a personal touch to the summary of the story.

2. Analysis

An essential aspect of the novel is that Ratan Rathor only confessed his guilt to an unknown young student. That young NCC student from Punjab reminds him of his father. His father was a selfless man who sacrificed his life for the nation. This thought keeps ringing in his memory. He expresses remorse for his decline and deterioration of his father's appearance. Ratan's parents brought him up with two different principles. On the one hand, his father, a successful lawyer, followed Gandhian principles and was honest, selfless, a hard worker, and a patriot. His father's world was an ideal one which was the opposite of his mother's materialistic worldview.

Ratan's father left his job and family to join the freedom movement. He was dead while leading a protest. His mother was sick with tuberculosis. After his father's death, Ratan lets go of his ideals, but his mother's money-oriented mind influences him. Ratan's mother shows the terrible reality of this materialistic society, and she advises her son not to fool himself. She added that money was the only thing that they needed to survive. She was sure that money was the most important thing. For his mother, her husband's ideals were nonsense and would not contribute to life. According to her, money is the only way to gain respect and security. She said money alone would make friends, success, laws, and orders. Ratan was taken aback by his mother's counsel because he had upheld his father's lofty aspirations. His life's purpose now became altered by the importance of money.

After graduation, he searched for a job to no avail. It took much work for him to get a good job. As the son of a freedom fighter, many companies did not respond to him positively. Ratan found there existed no practical value for his father's principles. Consideration of the sacrifice of his father, he then stooped to several corrupt practices while looking for a job. His intellect and learning did not save him.

Ratan would like to carry on his father's moral principles, but they are less vital in today's cutthroat urban world. Ratan's moral foundation, which progressively becomes polluted in the competitive urban environment, was preserved as long as he could recall his father. Ratan gives up Gandhian ideals in favor of fraud, deceit, cowardice, and hypocrisy. He moved from his hometown and is now looking for employment in Delhi. Ratan trusted his obtaining of food because of his father's connections in the city. However, he had only experienced disappointment. His goals and aspirations were all dashed. It has been a month, and he only has half the money. He lived in a Sarai near the Masjid with five other laborers. He shared a room with two brothers from the Mirzapur family and a turner and stenographer. In their research, they were all inferior to Ratan. They do, however, work. He faced the dismal experiences of examinations, interviews, interrogations, and rejection during job hunts. He became a master faker. Furthermore, all this happened within six weeks. He has always remained worried about his disappointment.

He does not like his roommates and tells so many lies that he works for a famous company. One day he is sick, and his roommates save his life. At that point, they understood that Ratan did not have a job. The stenographer hired Ratan as a temporary clerk in the division of war purchases. Ratan forgets everyone who has assisted him in a crucial situation after joining. He leaves the space and relocates to the city. Ratan ignored the folks since his mind had changed. In this way, Ratan's character noticeably changes, though solely in terms of his reliability with his circumstances. He is gradually changing some of the traditional immorality that his father used to criticize.

He got a selection order to become a permanent worker amongst the fifty workers, who are all temporary based on wages. There are many reasons to be mentioned here; why have they chosen him? He is diligent, efficient, obedient, but also flattery, obsequious, servility, docility, and shamelessness. Even Though Ratan has settled in life, he is not satisfied and fulfilled. He has sacrificed his father's principles and forgotten whatever his father taught him. Ratan has ample money but needs satisfaction from this job or life. He has felt that materialistic society has trapped him. For society's sake, Ratan has married a girl who was his Chief's relative, though the hero is uninterested. He has lost his originality and individuality. Ratan never thinks the world is running behind the deals; even his marriage also comes under that deal.

“If men forget how to make deals, the world will stop. It is not the atom, sun, God, or sex that lies
at the heart of the universe; it is DEALS, DEALS” (Joshi Arun, 1975, p. 48).

The modern man is cunning, cheating, selfish, careless, and easygoing. These are the skills that are suitable for Ratan as a modern man. He wants to rectify his mistake, but society would not allow him to become a good person. It makes a problem for him during the night time. It has created pain for him. He hurts from degradation and cannot sleep for many nights. Ratan feels terrible for his nation during the Indo-China war. Ratan, the hypocrite, presents his second self to the public. He is the first to donate to his nation, and he writes a letter to the newspaper in response to an article titled "The Crisis of Character" to convey his rage. He distributes it to his friends because this article did not publish in the newspaper. Ratan has a reputation for being corrupt and exploited. When we learn that Ratan had accepted a sizable bribe to allow the acquisition of defective military hardware right before the war broke out, his two unabashed facades become even more apparent.

Himmat Singh has met Ratan. He is the one who tempts him and offers a sizable quantity of bribes. He is the primary motivator behind striking a significant deal for the army's delivery of faulty combat supplies. However, the great scandal that has ruined the lives of so many people has no supporting evidence. Sheikh, a friend of Ratan's, tries to demonstrate this action and give an explanation, but all in vain. He informs Ratan that only fools and hypocrites enjoy death. Arun Joshi has beautifully symbolized Ratan's fall. As a temporary worker, he refused to get a bribe from anyone. However, now Ratan gets a bribe when Ratan is an officer of the central department. So he goes to Bombay. Before accepting the offer, he was filled with doubts and believed God made no laws or regulations. The corrupted society creates laws and regulations. Society would not hesitate to use dishonest means of making money. He exhibits another change in behavior in Bombay, where he is attracted to wine and ladies. Ratan Rathor is a sincere confessor who accepts even the impure aspects of his tarnished and deteriorated life.

The Brigadier is back from the conflict. The conflict is over. Ratan was relieved that Brigadier was injured. Initially, Brigadier appears to be in good health, but after a few days, Ratan learns he has a nervous condition. Brigadier admits to a hospital. Ratan was unable to see his friend in that state. Ratan is responsible for the Brigadier's deep state, knowingly or not. It discovered. He is unaware of what happened after that. He was startled by the contrast when he dialed the police station. He has been taken into custody twice now. He had stopped for one of his father's pickets during the war for independence. The Chief of police summoned him to question the issue of supplying low-quality war materials, which led to the loss of hundreds of lives. Ratan examines numerous questions about the probe himself early on in the investigation. He betrays him by claiming he is unaware of the approval of the problematic military materials. Ratan responds with shock and intense rage. He displays double-dealing behavior.

Nevertheless, they inform him that they have adequate proof that he has disposed of the weapons. Ratan sits on a stool in the cramped chamber of the police station and considers the impact when people learn of his cruel actions. His integrity tears between whether or not he should admit or reject the accusations.

The irony of the situation is that Ratan Rathor's dishonest behavior offends the Brigadier, his only friend in the world and to whom he owes a great deal of gratitude. During the conflict, the equipment is a significant reason the Brigadier quits his job. Only Ratan sent those military items for clearance. The courageous and brave Brigadier feels humiliated, and his neurological system malfunctions. He is ill. If Ratan admits his guilt, the police superintendent tells him, he might be able to save his friend. Ratan Rathor is innocent because of how Himmat Singh carried out the agreement. The police the crime exonerated him.

Even though he knows his depravity and failure, he is adamant that he will not confess. He is seeking an opportunity to get out of this predicament. He gets upset with the Brigadier for putting him in that predicament. He does not show his friend any favors. He wants to protect himself. However, Brigadier ends his life. The incident upends Ratan. Utterly he is exasperated and traumatized after his friend's death. Joshi portrays death as a means of self-realization. In his work, Tapan Kumar Ghosh stated:

“The Brigadier’s death served as a catalyst that shocked Ratan out of his moral inertia and initiated the process of inner transformation in him. He is jerked out of his self-complacency, pseudo-security, and illusions and is confronted with the responsibility for his gruesome crime”. (Ghosh Taban Kumar 1996, p.112)

His understanding of Himmat Singh, the Sheikh, urges him to move on as compensation for authorizing the inferior military supplies. Ratan has experienced severe self-doubt and has forgotten his father's advice. He is already dead when he arrives at his house. Ratan is not to fault for his betrayal, the Sheikh claims. He explains to Ratan that his sister's nomadic lifestyle and his mother's prostitution are due to the violent and obstinate society and that he forces to support his sister's immoral behavior. To find tranquility and relief, Ratan stays in the temple. When he recognizes that the exploitation of religion is a reality, he stumbles and meets a priest willing to sacrifice himself to free his son, who was used as substandard construction material and imprisoned. Those mentioned above clearly portray India as a country that stumbled into exploitation from his point of view.

3. Conclusion

Ratan grasps the uselessness and hollowness of his entire life. He has always intended to track the correct path. However, he is habitually side-tracked into the wrong plan—these outlines of existential knowledge figure out the issue of each individual. Ratan wakes to the statement that around is no remedy to the fraudulent ways of the world; one can only transform oneself.

He said to that unknown young man that he was an apprentice. Every morning, Ratan visited the temple and cleaned the shoes of the devotees as a punishment for his work. He raises his hands to his face whenever he feels superior, wealthy, or proud of himself, "and there is the smell of a hundred feet that must at that moment he toiling somewhere" (Joshi Arun 1975, p.143). Ratan has understood the importance of life and its positive approach. Joshi has added value to this novel. The awareness of the new is conceivable only when they have frankness. About this, V. Gopal Reddy writes in the piece *The Apprentice: An Existential Study* "He has lost his self and felt the anguish of loss. His existential decision to recover the lost self through an act of penitence reveals the need to realize and prize one's integrity" (Reddy Gopal .V.1986, p.223).

In this point of view, R.A.Singh admits:

“Ratan Rathor projects the image of an existential character. He shows that in life, no man has the courage to choose wholeheartedly, either right or wrong. He is himself a bundle of self-evasion and vanity, self-condemnation and humility. The fact that he could not bring himself to confession confirms his self-love and cowardice, which he now wishes to cover up by his humility of action" (Singh, R.A. 1991, p.58).

Arun Joshi's depiction of life reveals his firmly held belief in Indian culture and philosophy, yet he also draws inspiration from Western philosophers. Overall, *The Apprentice* is a superb examination of faith in Karma and the development of the spirit that celebrates the universal principles of modesty and self-examination in human life.

Ratan's realization of his nature in *The Apprentice* results from his blatant admission of guilt to the National Cadet. Confession is a crucial step in the self-discovery journey. The central idea of Indian philosophy is this. Self-punishment purifies the individual's soul and provides relief to society. Ratan has chosen to meet the Bhagavad-depiction Gita of Bhakti to purify his soul. Ratan suffers punishment and believes refinement can only occur through regret, not through any good deed or firm belief. He purges the roughness encasing his spirit by shining the worshippers' shoes. Ratan no longer takes an atheistic stance about existence and begins to think that only God can help him. Sitting in front of a temple implies his commitment (Bhakti), in which the devotee can appease his God by humbly requesting him. We reach a point in our evolution when we can do without regulations, yet we still need to exercise extreme restraint. Only a tiny percentage of people are eager to accomplish it because it takes much work to get to that point. There will come a moment when people will once more turn toward the divine and choose to serve God rather than pursue their interests.

On the other hand, the Bhagavad-Gita recommends humility as a devotee's primary necessity. The follower possesses a pearl of purely humble wisdom. In the face of the ideal, he feels completely insignificant. God appreciates modesty and complete self-worship. Ratan decides to accept this unfriendly position at the temple's door. The character in *The Apprentice* extinguishes his ego at the end of the story. Moreover, the depiction of his extensive action is a hindrance prominent in the Gita and other Hindu scriptures. His self-punishment is not physical but a spiritual search.

Ratan is skilled at figuring out what life and all its endeavors "mean." However, he nearly lives his entire life before he can escape the bounds of little urban refinement. This book's primary focus is the collapsed mentality of a peer group that emerged in post-independence India between 1947 and the 1962 Sino-Indian War. According to Ratan, an unsatisfied man lives in a puzzled society. There are not any principles, laws, or objectives in this civilization. In a society where self-interest rules, Ratan Rathor's tale perfectly captures the unfriendliness of modern man and his inevitable effort to acquire some degree of exclusivity. However, Joshi forbids Ratan Rathor in this circumstance.

4. Research Scope

The present study emphasizes a positive approach to Human life. Moreover, this analysis will better explain some of the issues that have puzzled readers in the future. This research guides in a new variety of analyses that will consistently enable the readers of Arun Joshi to view his works through a different but untouched and genuine perspective. It identifies that this paper has opened up a new outlook in the land of research regarding the existential and psychological issues in the novels of Joshi and other modern novelists. There is plenty of scope for further studies on Arun Joshi. The brief analysis of Joshi's fictional works shows that the author, seriously concerned about society's welfare, evaluates the present-day world.

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