
Existentialism: A Psychological State in *The Apprentice*

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Abstract:

The novel, "*The Apprentice*" (1974) by Arun Joshi portrays the leading character, Ratan Rathor, detach from his inner self and as a casualty of this closefisted unprincipled fellowship. It is a heart-searching Ratan in his psychological state and responsiveness that he eventually tries to achieve satisfaction via meekness and self-mortification by polishing the shoes of the deities in the temple on the daily basis. The purpose of apprehension appears out of the disorganization widespread in contemporary times examined and are researched on in this research paper. The present paper inspects existential outlook and merits in the novel *The Apprentice* by Arun Joshi. He is a contrasting writer from other Indian English writers because of his foremost attentiveness discrete and the intellectual complications of inner self. Unlike his forerunners, Arun Joshi is not keen in the conventional issues of the present times like communal, money-making troubles but he deals in intellectual existential issues of leading characters. Arun Joshi is constantly seeking truth and keeps his work close to verity that belongs within these circumstances that often are inclined to existentialism. Joshi's search into the intramural shrine of an individual's psyche where he looks for sentiments and stimulation at work, and he registers Mans oneness and solitude indifferent and enigmatic universe. The writer loyally documents modern man's case, afflictions, abuse, and damage. The main leading character tolerates a peculiar disorder from the society in which he resides. He always lives with the feeling of being an outsider in the society.

Keywords: existentialism, confiscation, victimization, intellectual, crisis, damage.

Introduction:

The Apprentice is the third novel of Arun Joshi. It dives deep into the consciousness of a being reflecting the thought process of a human grey matter. The main character of the novel, Ratan Rathod reveals the secret of human existence as his morals pressurize him make up for his sins and being dishonest. He does so by mocking himself. He is to the core an existentialist personality, who felt unworthy and alienated from self and his environment. He is a practical man but is immensely affected by the manipulations existing in the society.

The impulsion of the novel is post-independence discontentment. The other essential theme of the novel is inescapable circumstances from the evil deeds. Despite the disorganized conditions, the choices are made by individuals and a few on purpose choose evil doings. The novel 'The Apprentice' hugely discusses Karma, its principles and influence of Geeta. Ratan becomes a victim to the doings of the contemporary world.

The novel has twelve chapters and is dedicated to the mother of the author. The main lead of this story is named Ratan Rathod who belongs to the family of freedom fighters of Rajasthan and as per story has settled in the foothills of the Himalayas. Ratan is a well-read boy from a village, and he reaches Delhi in pursuit of making a good career for himself. He

joins as a temporary clerk in an Army department store and gradually gets promoted to a position of a special assistant and later serves as an officer for Government of India. This story is all about this boy, his honest intentions, and later turns into a narcissistic. But he feels the pain of it internally, and his vigilant moral sense keeps perforating him and he changes in a way that he is of the use to others. He consummates this aspiration by serving as a shone shiner at the premises of the Delhi temple. The writer describes the excruciating mess of the lead character, Ratan Rathod, who feels baffled and lost in the worldly mayhem, dishonesty, pietism, and ridiculousness. On these circumstances, Tapan Kumar Ghosh expresses:

Crisis is the soul of an individual, who is entangled in the maze of contemporary life with its confusing of values and moral anarchy, and his untiring quest for a remedy lie at the core of Arun Joshi's exploration of human reality in *The Apprentice...* it depicts the anguished attempt of a guilt-stricken individual to retrieve his innocence and honor. It is a story of crime and punishment of dislocation and search (90).

The protagonist, in the novel uses the medium of self-confession to communicate the predicament of existentialism in the civic society. The description comprises of a long acknowledgement speech addressed to the students in the college by Ratan Rathod, a then Government official, who hailed from Punjab. He narrates his story to the students of the duration of three months when he rehearsed for NCC parade on the eve of Republic Day. He discloses how he gradually became small hearted, dishonest, cold human. He is the perfect example of the existential character. The novel also mentions the 1962 Indo-China war. This story set up in an urban class Indian family. The main theme of this novel is aloofness, alienation for a character from other social being with an aim to explore oneself.

The frightful characteristics of his identity are as vital as the way these details are expressed. The ably handled acknowledgement interlacing his concerns and the worries of the others. Ratan Rathod drafts a sketch that reflects his *The Fall* and Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner*. The novel, *The Apprentice* gives a distinctive vibration a personal to the storyline. The most vital feature of this story is that the protagonist Ratan Rathod is never able to admit his wrong doings ever but does excepts his culpability in front of the young college students as he said to one of the students: "You look like a little like him (Ratan's father), if I may take the liberty of mentioning. Fifty years younger, of course but grave and cleared-eyed. Not awash-out like me" (TA8). His father's self-sacrificing nature left an incredible influence on his soul that those memories keep affecting him throughout his life. In his perspective, he made these confessions which were honest about his degeneration to his beloved father.

Ratan was raised by parents with different perspective of life – His father who was a patriotic and had high values and a mother who was more practical and had immense worldly wisdom to share with him. His father was a lawyer by profession and worked on the values of the Gandhi such as selfless service, simplicity, honesty, and non-violence. His father left his ancestral property to participate in the freedom movement and was unfortunately shot dead while leading the movement. Ratan's mother is suffering from a deadly tubercular. Post his father's death, he was influenced by the money-oriented thoughts of his mother. It was her who makes him experience the bad reality of the materialistic society – "Don't fool yourself, son, she said. Man without money was a man without worth. Many things were great in life, but the greatest of them all was money" (TA19). Per his mother, it was not ideal to follow his father's values if he wanted to survive in the ruthless world. She explains him that it is not patriotism that brought respect and security in life. She tells him, "Money makes friends and helps one succeed wherever failure awaits. Money succeeded where all else failed. There were many laws, she said, but money was law unto itself." (TA19). Ratan was amused to listen to his mother's ideology because he always followed his father's values.

After completing his studies at the college, he was looking for a job and all his efforts to get one went into vain. Nobody valued him for being a son of a freedom fighter who sacrificed his life for the country. He experiences some very bad circumstances while on a look out for a job. His college degree and his intellect does not get him any job. This shocks him:

And what is more shattering than the breakdown of a faith? Nothing that I know of. It is not the facts themselves that hurt, what hurts is the collapse of the faith that they destroy. You believe there is justice in the world. You go about the world for fifty years, this belief sitting in your heart. Then something happens and you go seeking justice. And justice is not there. Or you assume your wife is faithful, your children love you, your boss fair, or that God exists. And then, someday proof comes along that nothing is so. That is what hurts (TA 23).

He wanted to always follow the values of his father but all those gradually faded in the competitive contemporary world. He starts to feel that the martyrs of the country and the values of Gandhi have been taken over by dishonesty, corruption, and hypocrisy. Therefore, he decides to travel to Delhi in search of a job. He was hopeful that someone who knew his father would support him and gradually experienced disappointment from everywhere. His heart broke and his dreams were shattered. After a month in the state with no job, half is money was spent. He was living in a Sarai near a Masjid with five other people. One of them was a stenographer and the other was a turner and two others, who were brothers. He was the most educated out of all of them, yet he was unemployed, and others had jobs. His job-hunting experience was so depressing for him, “examines, interviewed, interrogated and rejected” (TA29) have a crushing effect on him. Ratan mastered the art of faking things. He lied that he earlier had a job. He was always prehensile of his rejections.

What got me down, wiped the laughter off my face, so to speak, was that they worked, eared, spent, and I had no job. I, who was the most educated of them all, would soon be on the streets, a failure, and incompetent penniless fool (TA25).

He was never fond of his roommates and had to lie to things in several circumstances. Ratan fell seriously ill, and his roommates helped him recover and then found out that he was unemployed. His stenographer roommates help him secure a temporary clerk job in the department of War purchase. Once he gets this job, he ignores his roommates who helped him in his bad times and moved to the city. By then there were remarkable changes that had come in Ratan’s outlook. He gradually gave up the values of his father, he was no more a faithful character, and he was slowly becoming the part of the materialistic world that his father never approved off.

Out of fifty temporary workers, h got selected as a permanent employee. This selection had nothing to do with his talent, efficiency, and diligence. He got it because of his obedience, compliance, subservience and shameless ‘sucking up to the bosses’, He is braded, a whore, an upstart’ by his colleagues, but this does not affect him as he has turned shameless. He tells the young students: “I am a thick-skin now. A thick skin and a wash out but, believe me, my friend; I too have had thoughts such as these. But what was to be done? One had to go live. And, to live one had to make a living. And how was a living to be made except through careers” (TA39).

Though Ratan was settled in life, he never felt content as he had given up on the values of his father that he held so close to his heart. He had accomplished all materialistic needs, yet he felt also unsatisfied add finds him deeply involved and influenced by the corrupt society. To get a promotion, he marries a girl who was related to the Superintendent, even when he did not like her. He loses his identity, and his life begins to run of worldly deals and his marriage is one of those deals:

If men forget how to make deals the world would come to a stop. It would lose its propelling power. Men would not know what to do with themselves. They would lose interest. It is not the atom or the sun or God or sex that lies at the heart of the universe; it is DEALS, DEALS (TA48).

Ratan feels strongly connected to his motherland while the Indo-China war broke out. His emotions were reflected in his conduct. He gave donations to support his country and wrote several letters to different newspapers expressing his disconnection by the betrayal of the enemy. He began to update people about the war situation. He wrote an article, *The Crisis of Character* that he wanted a newspaper to publish and when it was rejected, he circulated it among his friends. He explains that war is not an outcome of the deeds of military or politicians or enemy but the “Indian Character” (TA55). He said we are facing a crisis of character. He was so corrupted by them and was considered a hypocrite as his noble sentiments did not match his corrupted deeds like him taking a bribe to sanction the purchase of not so good military equipment’s just before the war broke out.

During the times of war, Ratan meets a man named Himmat Singh who offers him a bribe to supply defective war materials to the army. He tried to convince Ratan that the deals made can never be proved as he destroys all the documents put in place while making the deal. He tells Ratan that only the hypocrites that are getting killed and states that the rulers of the country are “phony people who knew only how to make speeches” and that “the ruled were brainless” (TA80). He watches with amusement the many individuals who have initialised hoarding supplies like baby food and antibiotics to sell them for higher profits during the uncalled war times. All this ideology of Himmat Singh convinced him to make the deal and because of purchase of defected supply. Ratan loses his friend, the Brigadier to death. This leads him to self-realization: “what happened to me during that time and this? That is what I ask myself time and again, without getting an answer” (TA59) and “how could men who had burnt away twenty years of their lives for a cause do things that would so surely make wreck of it? How could they possibly change so suddenly?” (TA60). He ultimately puts all the blame on the existing circumstances and called the reason of his change to survive in the corrupted society. He justifies his action:

If I had taken a bribe, I belonged rather to the rule than the exception. Peons were frequently taking bribes. So were Government officials and traffic policemen and railway conductors. A bribe gets you a bed in the hospital, a place to burn your dead... Bribery was accepted by... all those who acted in the public interest. Men took the bribes to facilitate the seduction of their wives’ women for seduction of other women. All this I knew and had known for twenty years. And now if I had happened to have accidentally indulged in a little slip-up, the sky was not going to fall (TA 108-109).

The bribes received by Ratan later in life reflect how corruption had empowered him. He is the same man who had refused bribe while he worked as temporary clerk and was in dire need of money. Now he did not hesitate to take a bribe even if it made him compromise with the security of his motherland. This shows how far he had deviated from the ideology of his father.

Ratan travels to Bombay to make a deal with Sheikh. He lived in a fear all the time of being nabbed and those created many questions in his mind that he put across to Sheikh before sealing the deal. Per Sheikh there was no book of rules and instructions from God to follow it. According to him, everybody in society opts for any and every mean way to earn money. Ratan also gets drawn to drinking wine and pleasure making with the women during his stay in Bombay. He makes visits to prostitutes and later expresses – “I was in fact, at the

peak of dung heap that I had been climbing all my life” (TA82). He confesses of every mean thing he did in life that made him a corrupted soul to the core.

The war had ended and his close friend, the Brigadier had returned from the war. After some days, he learns that his dear friend is admitted to military hospital due to nervous breakdown. It is heart-wrenching for him to see his friend in the state – “it was the second time in my life that I had felt the pain of another as my own, the first being the time when my father was shot” (TA100). Ratan somewhere is responsible for the critical condition of the Brigadier. He was called to the police station for interrogation of the deal made. It was his time he visited a police station. He compares it to the first time when he was arrested for his father’s pickets while he participated in the movement for freedom. Ratan received a summon from superintendent of the police for the reason of interrogation regarding the supply of sub graded war material that costed India with loss of lives of many soldiers. Before appearing for interrogation, he internally interrogated himself and fools himself by explaining to himself that he has no information of the clearance given to defected war-materials. He acts as a hypocrite in front of the police, but the police inform him that they had many evidence to prove his crime. He is sitting on a stool in a small room in the police station analysing the after impact when people around him get to know of his deeds. And he faces a conflict within to accept or deny the allegations pressed against him. He tries to convince himself of all those who were set free of the allegation charges made recently in several other scandals.

I thought with satisfaction of a recent fraud executed by the scion of one of the country’s first families; the arrest of an Inspector-General of Police for accepting bribe from a racketeer, recall of an ambassador who had exchanged his country’s secrets for a mistress... what had they been able to do to any of them? (TA112)

The saddest part of this unfair deal was that it impacted his only friend in the world, the Brigadier. The Brigadier is court-martialled as he deserted his post during the war because the ammunition that he had did not work. A brave officer is court-martialled for no fault of his and has a nervous breakdown. The Superintendent tries to explain Ratan that if he confesses his crime, it might save his friend and help him earn his lost respect. Himmat Singh has finalised a deal in such a way that the police had no evidence to prove the crime. While the police officer tries to convince him for the sake of his friend, he for some time decided to confess of his crime but he is unable to stay on his decision of confession for long. He states, “For twenty years I had lived in this city and for twenty years, it seemed too me, there had been nothing but darkness. You might have contributed to its downfall. But what had happened has happened. What good is it now to whimper, to confess?” (TA116). In some days, his friend, the Brigadier commits suicide and Ratan is shattered to the core: “Oh. How I have hated THEM at times. And hated myself” (TA71).

Arun Joshi in this novel expresses death as symbol of self-realization. Per Tapan Kumar Ghosh: 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 was jerked out of his self-complacency, pseudo-security and illusions and was confronted with the responsibility of his gruesome crime (112).

Ratan decides to take a revenge for the fate his dear friend met and plans to kill Himmat Singh and Sheikh. When he arrives at his home, he finds out that he is already on the death bed. Sheikh tells him that he is not responsible for all the consequences and the Minister and Secretary are the real mastermind of the deal and that Ratan was mere a scapegoat because he is “a spineless flunky” (TA136).

Sheikh gives Ratan a feeling of self-realization and while reflecting at his past, he finds himself a waste and comprehends the meaninglessness of his mere existence and reflects on his situation: “... that I saw more of myself that in had seen before. I did not yet

know what happened to me, but one thing was clear; my life had been a great waste” (TA135). In search of solace, Ratan visits temple and realises that corruption had also empowered the religious beliefs and people. The priest of the temple is trying to save his corrupted son who is serving jail for using bad construction material at his work. This incident reflects how a large nation like India got in clause of corruption. The death of his friend, the Brigadier haunts him all the time. He realises all the misdeeds and how it impacted himself and people around him. Gradually, he feels disconnected from the corrupted society:

Twenty years and nothing gained. An empty lifetime. What had I learned? Pushing files? Manoeuvring? At forty-five all that I knew was to manoeuvre. A trickster, that was what I had left life make of me. Did I know the meaning of honour, friendship? Did I ever know it? Would I ever know it again? (TA133).

He is ashamed for how corrupted he had become and how deviated he was from the ideology of his father. This self- realization makes him comprehend how wasteless he has been to the society and that he must uplift his spirits to begin to be of use to the society: “Whatever you do touches someone somewhere” (TA143). He starts to visit temple every morning before reaching his office. He does not ever enter the temple but sits on the steps of the temple to clean the shoes of the devotees that have visited the temple and seeks for forgiveness. He shares with a young boy:

Consider me an apprentice and you will perhaps understand. Each morning, before I go to work, I come here. I sit on the steps of the temples and while they pray, I wipe the shoes of the congregation. Then when they are gone... I stand at the doorstep and gold my hands smelling of leather and I say things. Be good, I tell myself. Be good. Be of use. Then I beg forgiveness for a large host; my father, my mother the Brigadier, the unknown dead of the war, of those whom I harmed... (TA,142-143).

Whenever during the day, Ratan found himself indifferent, he pulls his hands to his face “and is the smell of hundred feet that must at the moment he is toiling somewhere” (TA143). He realises the need to have a positive attitude. He has affirmations like “There is hope as long as there are young men willing to learn from the follies of their elders. Willing to learn and ready to sacrifice. Willing to pay the price” (TA144). V. Gopal Reddy in his article *The Apprentice: An Existential Study* says, “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 realise and rise integrity” (R.K. Dhawan 223).

R.A. Singh admits: Ratan Rathor projects the image of an existential character. He shows that in life no man has courage to choose whole-heartedly 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” (58). The novel depicts how strongly the Indian philosophy was rooted in Arun Joshi's outlook of life. This novel is all about believing in karma and a journey of a soul. The confession of Ratan in front of young national cadet is a symbol of self-realization. In the Indian philosophy, self-realization and self-confession is a vital part of a soul's spiritual journey. Ratan's desire of worldly pleasure gradually fades away and he seeks forgiveness from God and realises that only god can help him now. His visiting temple to clean the shoes of devotees signifies his devotion towards God as Joshi states:

A stage comes in your evolution when you can do without rules, but you must have a tremendous self-control... there is a long journey before you can reach that stage so that only few people are inclined to do that. There will be a time again when people will turn towards the divine and want to become instrument of God, rather than living for themselves (Piciucco 93).

As per the lesson from Bhagavad Gita, humility is the first step towards spirituality and so Ratan is drawn towards it. Ratan is reminded of his father's words, "Whatever you do touches someone somewhere". So much importance his father laid on "karma". Now he begins to follow the ideology of his father and values of Mahatma Gandhi. Ratan confesses, "I know it is too late in the day. But one must try and not lose heart, not yield, at any cost, to despair" (TA143). According to Arun Joshi's thought process our karma's have a deep impact of Geeta on us. Mathai interviews Arun Joshi to understand his religious outlook, "There is no intervening agent between you and God. What you sow you reap (Prasad and Mallik 202). At the end of the novel, the main lead Ratan makes his confession in front of the young student despite the Superintendent of police or the army men because he believes that the young boy is the best innocent receiver of his confession, who is not yet touched by the corrupted ways of living life. Rattan narrates that there are no norms, direction, even perhaps, a purpose in the society and one has to find his own path. His expression is a saga of the contemporary man struggling to make his ends meet.

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