



## THE FICTIONAL ART AND VISION OF ARUN JOSHI WITH REFERENCE TO THE APPRENTICE : A CRITICAL NOTE

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The Apprentice published in 1974 is the third novel of Arun Joshi. It is based on urban middle class Indian background. The novel narrates the life of RatanRator who struggles to establish a career in a corrupt atmosphere prevailing in post-independent India. The narrative form of the novel enables RatanRator to expose his inner self to a silent listener. He narrates about his material rise and moral decline. The novel carries a semi serious tone due to juxtaposing of two kinds of values namely material and moral.

The novel opens with the hero RatanRator smartly dressed up and ready to get into the limousine car waiting for him. However, RatanRator makes it a point to meet a shoe-shiner on the stairway of a Delhi temple. The shoe-shiner is the ardent listener of the tragic tale told by RatanRator. In spite of holding a high govt. Office, Ratan Reduced himself to a zero personality by sharing his tragic experiences with a menial worker. In order to atone for his sins, Ratan wipes the foot wears of the worshippers who visit the temple.

The hero RatanRator is a product of double inheritance. He comes from a poor family. His father is a patriotic but he is outrageous. However, his mother is blessed with worldly wisdom. Since childhood, Ratan has been deeply impressed by his father's active participation in freedom movement, while he was just ten years old, he saw his father giving up his legal practice along with his wealth to take active participation in revolting against the British. He was shot dead by the British while he was leading a procession against them.

The death of his father proves to be a chastening experience for Ratan to break values such as goodness, virtue and humanity. He approaches many for help, but they refuse helping him under one excuse or other. Very often, he is haunted by the memory of his father who passed away while leading a procession. His father used to advise him

To be good! Respected! to be of use" (TA 19)

Ratan's mother accepts money from a rich merchant so as to support her son for his education. However, his studies come to a crying halt due to shortage of money. His mother advises him to earn money as follows.

Don't fool yourself; son-man without money is a man  
Without worth. Many things were great in life, but the  
Greatest of them all was money. it is not patriotism but  
Money – that brought respect and security. money made  
Friends, Money succeeded where all else failed. There were  
Many laws . . . but money were law into itself. (TA 20).

After a great struggle, Ratan is able to find a job as an adhoc clerk in war purchases department. He is helped in getting this job by a stenographer who resides with him. Ratan learns obedience docility, servility and flattery. He gets help from a brigadier who is his childhood friend. Very soon, Ratan gets confirmed in his service and is promoted as an assistant with a dozen clerks working under him. He marries a girl who happens to be the cousin of his office superintendent. As a result, he becomes an officer and his colleagues call him a whore, an upstart. . . etc., he is considered by his colleagues as a person who is shameless and corrupt. On the contrary, Ratan retorts to such comments by saying that it is necessary to go ahead in one's career and values such as truth, honesty, hard labour and character have no value.

He stealthily collects a lumpsum as bribe for supplying substandard materials to the army forces. He does this shameful act with overt and covert understanding with the defence ministry. Of course, he is masterminded by a person named Himmat Singh who is smart enough to do unfair things without any evidence. Due to supply of substandard war equipment, the brigadier gets courtmarshled. This incident makes Ratan become closer to Himmat Singh. Thousands of people die to substandard war materials. In spite of it, the superintendent of police acts unjustly and advises Ratan to confess high guilt so as to save his Brigadier friend. This worries Ratan and he is tossed between making oral and written confession about his guilt. Ratan understands that the Brigadier is on the point of a nervous breakdown. He wants to rescue him. However, he is unable to do it before the Brigadier shoots himself to death. Ratan is sorrow stricken due to the death of his Brigadier friend. Soon his sorrow turns into anger towards Himmat Singh. On the contrary, Himmat Singh blames Ratan for the death of the Brigadier.



Ratan becomes aware of his earlier foibles and experiences very difficult penance for them. He tries to atone for his sins and gropes for light and devotion. He sheds his negative qualities such as falsity, hypocrisy and corruption. He remembers his fathers' advice that if one's action does not affect others adversely and is of use, it is a good and moral action. He decides to make his life more meaningful and purposeful by putting himself to use.

The author Arun Joshi very diligently brings out the agonising predicament of Ratan Rathor. Ratan suffers from confusion and is lost in the world of chaos, corruption, hypocrisy and absurdity. The theme of the *Apprentice* resembles very much to Graham Green's *The Heart of the Matter*. The readers understand the profound struggle undergone by Ratan in a corrupt environment. In short, Joshi depicts through this novel the problems experienced by a contemporary man.

The individual identity problems are shown in different manifestations by several authors, philosophers and psychologists. The predicament of modern man includes deep-rooted anxiety, alienation and absurdity. Due to global employment, human beings have become rootless. One of the manifestations of rootlessness is self-alienation which again is connected to loss of identity and its effort to come out of crisis.

A sort of inner crisis has impelled human beings to alienate from their homes, surroundings and the community. As pointed by R.S. Pathak, alienation is one of the biggest problems confronting the modern man. Its negative impact is felt through problems such as generation gap, the anti-war movement, the hippie phenomenon, the credibility gap, the compartmentalization of our lives, the lacunae in personal development, the conspicuous absence of a sense of meaningful life.

Ratan in "*The Apprentice*" struggles hard to establish a career. He gradually goes up in the economic ladder. On the contrary, he goes down gradually on the moral scale. He succumbs wholeheartedly to the earthly pleasure.

He takes sincere efforts to atone for his mistakes and achieve peace and solitude. He remembers his father's words to him.

"Whatever you do touches someone somewhere and that  
End never justifies means", (TA 149)

He has a dating with reality and learns that it is not possible to play truant with life and there is no possibility of attaining salvation outside of it.

## References

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