

EXISTENTIALISM AND ALIENATION: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF ARUN JOSHI'S SELECT WORKS

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Abstract: This paper investigates the existentialism and alienation in the Arun Joshi's select works. Arun Joshi one of the most prominent Indo-English writers of Post-colonial Era of Indian Literary arena, has bequeathed five novels and a collection of dozen short stories to be embedded with widened thematic and stylistic scopes. Indeed, psychology has been used as a powerful instrument by Joshi to bring out the mental aberration suffered by most of his protagonists, but not more. Though his writings superficially resemble those of Western existentialist writers who harp on the futility and negation of life and existence divine, Joshi is deeply preoccupied with bringing out the essence of Indian ethos whose role is inevitable in all facets of life not only for the ancient ones, but also for the baffled contemporary youngster, whether he be Indian or alien. So, bearing in mind that Existentialism in the modern context is an old wine in a new cup, a new name for an ancient method of Buddhism and Upanishads which insist only on the knowledge of self, this analysis is based on the fact that Man, being a victim of ignorance of his innate tenderness of morality becomes selfish which leads to a sense of blankness over the spirit that makes the world a waste and a vain show.

Keywords: existentialism, alienation, mental aberration, futility, negation

Introduction

Arun Joshi's works are not a product of the imaginative work for the creative writing world. Rather it is something which is close to him in reality and that is true because he has accepted that much of his writing is his autobiographical sketches from his stay in America as a student to the world of unseen mystery in India. The theme and the motive that Arun Joshi gives to the novel are not based on scientific observation merely but on discovering the reality which lies hidden in the actuality of his own life. To understand the novels of Arun Joshi, one need to keep in mind that what he is writing is not the casual effect that he is trying to establish. Rather it is his experimentation with the moments of the acute suffering situations of human life to study the human predicament.

Arun Joshi noticed the collapse of old values resulting in absurd universe. He saw contemporary man in search of a way to lead a meaningful life. He has recorded modern man's traumas and agonies in his novels. This concept echoes in all his novels. His fictional world is revelation of a world where man is confronted by the self and the questions of his existence. He skillfully pen down the man's inner problems like rootlessness, restlessness, existential dilemma, crisis of identity in the present world. Arun Joshi's novels are the revelation of human predicament in an indifferent and inscrutable universe. Along with the problem of meaninglessness the present society is full of exploitations. There is only chaos, confusion anarchy in social life. Men do not realize their duty and responsibility towards others. Arun Joshi was pained to see the chaotic conditions of the society. He therefore took into his hand the task of providing a solution to the society to escape from the vicious circle of rapid industrialization. Thus through the struggles of his protagonists is aims to achieve a good society and happy and joyful individuals. Distrust, treachery, exploitation, etc., dominate the present world.

To understand and analyse the novels of Arun Joshi, it is worthwhile to have a subjective understanding of the novels rather than that of the objective reality that shaped the protagonist. In the succeeding pages the novels of

Arun Joshi in their chronological sequence have been analyzed with special reference to the existential and alienation.

The most significant and straightforward treatment of the theme of alienation can be found in the novels of Arun Joshi. His maiden novel, *The Foreigner* (1968) is a very compelling existential work in which the theme of alienation is treated with great concentration. *The Foreigner* illustrates the influence of technology on modern man. The modernization and industrialization is heading our civilization to a disaster. Human virtues like affinity, love, sympathy, kindness etc. have disappeared altogether. Modern man in contemporary society finds himself lonely, frustrated, dejected, isolated and almost alienated due to his detachment and non-involvement with his fellow-beings. The most penetrating problem man faces today is the problem of meaninglessness. Man today suffers not from war, famine, persecution, famine and ruin but from one's own inner problem. Each of us has got some or other inner problem. Arun Joshi being himself connected with the industries and technology takes up this treatment beautifully and emphatically

The novel is the main story of Sindi Oberoi a student of Mechanical Engineering— a rootless young man, who tells his own story. The narrative includes Babu, an Indian student in America, June, a simple and passionate American girl, Mr. Khemka, a Delhi industrialist. Sindi describes with honesty and sincerity his search for the meaning. Although an Indian by birth, Sindi feels himself to be an outsider, a foreigner, an alien not only because he is obsessed with the impermanence and transience of things. It is apparent that Sindi's alienation lies within him.

Joshi exhibits the agony of loneliness in uncovering the psychological conflict in the character of Sindi Oberoi in his quest for meaning through a series of relationships. Sindi feels himself a foreigner, an outsider, a stranger, not just because he is a Kenya-born Indian living in the United States and later in India without home or family but because he is obsessed by the impermanence of things. He is a lover, a spectator who wants to stand cut of the maze of action dreading involvement. He is an existentialist character- "rootless, restless and luckless in a mad, bad and absurd world."² His rootlessness is rooted in his soul which precipitates one crisis after another. He too acknowledges "I have no roots" (p.143) His loneliness is exaggerated by his withdrawal from society. Living in Kenya, London and Boston, he undergoes various changes through personal experiences. While in Kenya, he contemplates suicide, and when he comes to London, the same despair remains with him. A girl, Anna, seeks to rediscover her lost youth, and lives for him, but in response he gives her nothing and shows his liking for Kathy. Eventually Kathy abandons him. Sindi's life in various places at various levels taught him something or the other. While studying in London he got a job of dishwashing at a night club in Soho. There are two lasting impressions of his life. His escapade with Anna, a minor artist separated from her husband who was not yearning for him or anybody and Kathy, who left him after carrying on with him, for a few weeks and went back to her husband because she thought "marriage was sacred and had to be maintained at all cost", (168) these relations taught him to practice detachment and non-involvement in human emotions. The broken relationship disturbs him, and in America he is "afraid of getting involved" (53) with June, an American girl, in spite of his determination not to get involved. Sindi believes that possession generates pain as it implies involvement. Sindi as a student of Engineering at Boston meets June at a foreign student's gathering. She likes him but he fights hard with himself to escape another affair. Sindi's sense of detachment and rootlessness is evident June asks him where he was from. Sindi's reaction to the question provides a clue to his alienation: "Everybody always asked me the same silly question. 'Where are you from?' as it really mattered a great deal where I was from." (p. 23) Sindi has misconstrued the term detachment for himself. It's just a way of avoiding commitment which drives Babu and June towards death. Sindi confesses "All along I had acted out of lust and greed and selfishness and they had applauded my wisdom. When I had only sought a detachment I had only driven a man to his death." (p. 6) He realizes his mistake of rejecting June's love, could have proved last emotional anchor for him. His unconcern born of sense of detachment proves fatal and he fails to meet June before her death. The tragedy upset Sindi. He feels miserable because he holds himself indirectly responsible for the death of his beloved June and his friend Babu. He is upset at the death of Babu. His sense of alienation becomes finely tuned. He wants to move away from America in search of mental peace. Being isolated he had seen the consequences of practising detachment in America. Sindi decides to leave the country and go to India. This he decides with a flip of coin which goes in favour of his ancestor's land. "Like many of my breeds I believed erroneously that I could escape from a part of myself by hopping from one land mass to another" (176) for in another development, on reaching New Delhi while making a casual courtesy call he accepts a job in the firm of Babu Rao Khemka's father. He gets a last chance of redemption when he comes to India and takes over Mr. Khemka's business. However first he is unwilling to join the business but all his hesitation dissolve when he visits Muthu who tells to him "But it is involvement, sir. Sometimes detachment is in actually getting involved." (239) He ultimately believes that right meaning of detachment. Finally Sindi accepts Muthu's suggestion to take charge of the factory. This sheds light on the "message" of disinterested involvement. 'a line of reasoning that led to the inevitable conclusion that for me, detachment consisted in getting involved with the world.' (226).

The above account shows that Sindi is an existential everyman of our time. It is about things that Sindi wants - the courage to be and the capacity to love. His alienation is of the soul and not of geography. At one place he confesses that his 'foreignness' lies 'within' himself and it drives him from crisis making it difficult for him to leave 'himself' behind wherever he goes. (61) Right from the starting he is eager to find "the meaning of life". He himself wants "to do something meaningful." (41)

Arun Joshi's novels express the anguish of sensitive individuals continually tortured by their spiritual uprootedness, clash & confusion of values generated by the sherry materialistic, self-centered & corrupt society. Almost all his novels deal with the issues of existential anguish, alienation and dispossession. He is mainly concerned with the dimensions of individual & social existence.

Arun Joshi gives the impression of a rebel who fights against the greed, violence, shams, and hypocrisy of the people and in the process alienates himself and his art from his fellow creatures. Joshi also gives the impression that his art is not social minded as he does not give any suggestions for the individual's integration with society. To counter this change one can say that the very fact that Joshi portrays such a society is an example of his concern with the evils of society and hence an unmistakable evidence of his social consciousness. The inner conflict of an individual is really his inner relations to the outward conflicts. An artist is not at all a preacher and it is not his task, like a physician to prescribe remedies. The image of alienation is used by Arun Joshi, as a myth and the protagonists act as alien either to the civilization or to themselves. The central characters are alien because they are exposed by their either sensitivity or lack of identification with the world.

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