

## THE PORTRAYAL OF HUMAN PREDICAMENT IN POST-COLONIAL WORLD AND QUEST FOR SELF-IDENTITY IN THE NOVELS OF ARUN JOSHI

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### Abstract

Arun Joshi, one of the acclaimed Indian English Writer, exhibits exceptionally psychological and philosophical perspectives of human existence in his novels. The major theme of his novels is an awareness of modern man's alienation, rootlessness, and anxiety in the industrialized, materialistic world and a quest for truth and fulfillment. As a writer, he uses literature as a medium to explore and resolve the human existential crisis. His writing show clear traces of the influenced by Albert Camus and other existentialists. He is also influenced by Indian philosophy and spirituality. The present research paper attempts to have a dip into the portrayal of the human predicament in a materialistic world and the quest for self-identity in the novels of Arun Joshi.

Keywords: *human predicament, the quest for self-identity, alienation, rootlessness, Anxiety, existential predicament, and fulfillment.*

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It also includes works of the writers of the Indian Diaspora. The very definition of the adjective "Indian" here is obscure as many of these writers neither live in India nor are Indian citizens. As a category, 'Indian English Literature' comes under the broader realm of post-colonial literature as it includes the production from previously colonized countries such as India.

Snellgrove in the article "Buddhism" in *Encyclopædia Britannica* observes that the concept of "Self" or "Identity" has been debated for long in the field of philosophy, psychology, sociology, and literature. Philosophy holds that "Self" is Atma. It is complicatedly connected with Parmatma in Hinduism as well as in Buddhist philosophy. In fact, the 40 whole discourses of the Hindu and Buddhist philosophies are about "self" passing through the various transitory

phases of the human life cycle. Both Hinduism and Buddhism hold that 'self' has to pass through suffering and redemption to attain "Moksha". Buddhist philosophy enumerates several causal factors that lead to sufferings of the self. It is also suggested that to be elevated, "Madhayam Marga" (middle path) should be adopted. Mahatma Buddha spent his life in search of the self and the identity of himself, leading to "Enlightenment" at "Nirvana" (enlightenment).

Sigmund Freud has extensively analyzed and written about the "Self" in the field of Psychology. He relates the self to the personality development of individuals from infancy until later stages of life. According to him, the self consists of the Id, Ego, and Superego. These get manifested in the form of Consciousness, , and the Unconsciousness. However, the most important part of his analysis lies in the understanding of the fact that Consciousness, Subconsciousness and the Unconsciousness are placed in the environmental context that is both internal and external. The self does not grow in the vacuum; rather it grows in the materialistic realities. The psychological state of mind is always in conflict with the environment in which one grows. He also holds that the self gets manifested in the form of the 41 personalities which are defined as the Constitute of all the behavioral traits of a man is.

Many Indian novelists have attempted to tract the concept of self and the problem of self-identify in a world where one's existence is under threat in their writings. A prominent writer among the contemporary Indian English Writers who delved in depth in the theme of existentialism is Arun Joshi.

Arun Joshi (1939-1993) was born in Varanasi. He was educated in India and the U.S.A. He obtained a degree in engineering from Kansas University in 1959 and a master's degree in industrial management from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1960. They are *The Foreigner* (1968), *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), *The Apprentice* (1974), *The Last Labyrinth* (1981) which won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award, *The City and The River* (1990) and a collection of short stories titled *The Survivor* (1975).

Arun Joshi has been acclaimed as an exceptionally talented novelist with psychological and philosophical perceptive. The major theme of his works is an awareness of modern man's alienation, rootlessness, and anxiety in the industrialized, materialistic world and a quest for truth and fulfillment. As a writer, he uses literature as a medium to explore and resolve the human existential crisis. His writing shows clear traces of influences from Albert Camus and other existentialists. He is also influenced by Indian philosophy and spirituality.

Arun Joshi's novels are based on the rootlessness of the characters who are always in search of his identity. His novels bear autobiographical elements. His experiences of living abroad are portrayed in his novels in the form of various characters.

His first novel *The Foreigner* (1968) came out as a milestone in the field of Indian Novel Writing. It revolves around the individual character of Sindi Oberoi and his quest for identity. It dealt with Sindi Oberoi's journey from detachment from the world to his involvement in it. In *The Foreigner*, Joshi depicts Sindi's agony to spring forth from his loneliness and his so-called rootlessness. The novel also records Sindi's movement from illusion to reality, from darkness to light and from death's twilight kingdom to the new shores of life. Throughout his quest for self-realization, Sindi experiences pains and finally feels that his soul is purified. He finally realizes the real meaning of the detachment theory as revealed in *The Bhagavad-Gita* that detachment does not mean renunciation but selfless action. Finally, he realizes the purpose of his existence on this earth.

Joshi makes his narrator reveal his intention of writing the novel when he says that as he grows old he realizes that the most futile cry of man is his impossible wish to be understood.

Its central figure is a man essentially unassuming and uncourageous whose life more or less parallels the coming into being of postcolonial India. The protagonist, who eventually gains a post in the civil service, ends his life, as many real-life civil servants did, by taking a huge bribe. The final pages of the novel present the corrupt protagonist to turn a new page in his life by cleaning shoes at a temple. The novel ends with a ray of hope.

In *The Last Labyrinth*, Som Bhaskar, the protagonist is a rich and Western-educated man. He is completely absorbed in acquiring other people's wealth, and in this, he neglects his own family and health. His search takes him, however, to infinitely old Benares, a city seen as altogether intangible, at once holy and repellent, and to an end lost in a cloud of non-understanding. The novel is about those who have lost their spiritual and cultural heritage and are wandering for worldly pleasures. Joshi suggests that Westernization can never give happiness rather the happiness lies in one's culture and traditions.

*The City and the River* is the last novel written by Arun Joshi. It adopts the form of a parable to convey political satire. It powerfully comments on the political scenario of the 1970s. It is different from his other novels because it focuses on the predicament and quest of not one individual but that of the entire country. It is a mixture of fantasy and prophecy.

*The City and the River* deal with the rule of the Grand Master, his becoming King, the reign of terror, people's rebellion, the declaration of an Era of Ultimate Greatness, the repressive measures adopted by the king and finally the destruction of the city. The Era of Ultimate Greatness has the same effect as the rule of Emergency. The novel revolves around the story of

the City by the river. The narrative framework of the novel is mythical and the story is told by an old wise teacher, a Guru to his disciple preparing him to enter a new world after the complete destruction of an old city. The Guru is the Great Yogeshwara and the disciple is the Nameless-one, who is to be sent to another similar world, a new city, which springs on the ruins of the old. The Great Yogeshwara wants to tell his disciple about the past city and the cause of its end before the Nameless-one enters the new world. ([http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/7784/12/12\\_chapter%206.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/7784/12/12_chapter%206.pdf))

The characters in *The City and the River* carry a sense of alienation, loneliness, absurdity, and pessimism with them.

The novel describes the conflict between the Grand Master and the Boatmen. The Grand Master, who rules the City by the river, is determined to become its unchallenged king.

The novels of Arun Joshi probe deep into the dark and innermost issues of the human mind illuminate the hidden corners of the physical and mental make-up of the characters. problems are so pervasive that they threaten to eat into every sphere of human activity. His fiction explores self and brings to a central focus the way in which the self tries to assess its involvement in the alienation from the family and society.

Joshi's characters are mentally disturbed and filled with despair, self-hatred, and self-pity, for they regard themselves as strangers in the physical world, isolated from the self as well as the society and family. The struggle of the protagonist against social conventions and inner conflicts between what he really is and what society expects him to find a pivotal place in Joshi's novels.

For Joshi's protagonists, the society of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has lost its meaning. They have no sense of belonging to the society in which they live. The life in their own world, thinking their thoughts, speaking to their own selves disappointed and depressed.

Arun Joshi is concerned with the predicament of modern man and is sensitively alive to the various dimensions of pressures exerted by the complex character and demands of the society in which contemporary man is intended to live. The protagonists of his novels are abject outsiders and stark strangers. The awareness of man's rootlessness and strangeness and the consequential quest for a meaningful self is the keynote of Joshi's novels. It is the inner crisis of the modern man that has occupied Arun Joshi's primary interest in his novels that are built around the dark and dismal experiences of the soul.

Modern man finds himself alienated not only from his fellow men but also from himself, having nothing to fall back upon in moments of crisis. He suffers from a gnawing sense of void and meaninglessness. In discussing the theme of alienation in Arun Joshi's novels, are mainly

concerned first with man's alienation from a society which is the most prevalent kind of alienation and secondly his alienation from his own self. Arun Joshi's recurrent theme is alienation in different aspects and his heroes are self-centered persons prone to self-pity and escapism. In spite of their weaknesses, they are, however, genuine seekers who strive to grope towards the purpose in life and self-fulfillment. In his novels, Joshi attempts to deal with the various facets of the theme of alienation in relation to self, the society around and humanity at large. Arun Joshi's fiction is filled with the people who are alienated from themselves, from God and society.

Joshi adopts the first person narrative technique in *The Foreigner*, *The Apprentice*, and *The Last Labyrinth*. *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, like Conrad's *Lord Jim*, is narrated from the witness-narrator's point of view. Another novel fictional technique that Arun Joshi resorts to is the dramatic monologue. His novels are rather rich in imagery. He is very good at similes and metaphors as well.

One of the most powerful fictional techniques employed by Joshi is the technique of flashback or reminiscence. He was also fond of the use of archetypes in his novels. Apart from using the image of labyrinth and void, he explores the existential agony with the help of the language of the dreams. The dreams function as a mirror which reflects the intricate workings of the inner mind of the characters. These narrative devices and fictional techniques smoothly blend with his unique handling of the subject of the problems of the self.

Joshi's Characters are true representatives of modern man who are engaged in the quest for the self and search for meaning life.

Arun Joshi's *The City and The River* is a fable of the Indian nation-state.

It is a parable of the age-old battle between the victimized citizens and the corrupt rulers.

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