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The Theme of Restlessness in the Novels of Arun Joshi



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Abstract

The eighteenth century in the west and twentieth century in the Middle East changed the entire scenario of the world both within and without. The upsurging scientific advancement changed the face of the world by the introduction of industries, invention of luxurious things that even middle class can afford and the dispersion of the society into the innumerable groups with mixed creed and culture arose. It brought the so-called luxury to a small group of people but at the same time it brought infinite restlessness in the life of many people all over especially a class who believes in the supremacy of natural life. Many native and British and American writers wrote on this aspect of the modern world. As far as Indian literary world is concerned the writers in the seventies gave voice to this cry. Arun Joshi is one of them. This endeavour attempts to discuss the novels of Arun Joshi from this perspective with special reference to '*The Foreigner*', '*The Apprentice*' and '*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*'.

Keywords

Arun Joshi, identity, trauma, loneliness, nostalgia

Research Paper

Arun Joshi's novels represent the traumas and tensions. They explore the dilemmas that the middle class man has to face and which makes him isolated from the self as well as the society. The characters seem forlorn having been fallen in the valley of restlessness. They are so much involved in the mundane evils of life that they fail to decide the aim of their life. They discover the meaning of life through self-exploration. Joshi explores the self of his characters through perception of the past and isolated experiences of the present. This loneliness sometimes leads to the search of identity. Joshi is a writer of psychological insight and develops into human psyche to unfold the hidden motives and impulses behind the psychological motives. He writes, 'My novels are essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and myself...'. His novels discuss the alienation of self from the contemporary socio-psychic forces.

'*The Foreigner*', a nostalgic novel probes the existential predicament of the protagonist Surrender Oberoi. O. P. Bhatnagar observes that 'a strange feeling of aloneness and aloofness permeates the entire narrative and provides the necessary texture and structure to the novel'. Meenakshi Mukherjee describes Sindi as 'a perennial outsider'. Sindi, an isolated victim of the modern world is isolated and so falls prey to inaction and indecision. Having lost his parents at the age of four, Sindi is brought up by his uncle settled in Kenya. Though becomes engineer, he is alien due to multicultural milieu. The temperament of loneliness grows in him and hence he occasionally runs into the crowd of loneliness. He grows aloof so much that he sees the distorted faces in a cheap mirror behind a bar. Even the crowded room does not give him any sense of belongingness. 'I drank and watched the crowd bob up and down in the huge mirror behind the bar. All those faces distorted in the cheap mirror made me feel even more like an alien' he admits. Being brought in a loveless world, he harbours in him a deep sense of insecurity and unreality. Things seem to have an ephemeral existence for him as he tells June: 'Nothing ever seems real to me, leave alone permanent. Nothing seems very important'. His insecure life represents the restlessness of the modern man. He remembers the words of his uncle about love which make him aloof: 'To love is to invite others to break your heart'. It seems that the feeling of being temporized is imbibed on his mind since his early childhood.

Sindi has the desire to be a saint but he believes that 'it is difficult to be a saint. He is a broken mirror who broods over the ions of his detachment, their gains and losses. Throughout the novel, he passes through variegated moods and attitudes. Even he is afraid of

marriage and all familial ties: 'I was only aware of a dull fear. I was afraid of possessing anybody and I was afraid of being possessed, any marriage meant both', he says. Due to the fear, he remains an outsider everywhere. He belongs to no land. His estranged plight symbolizes the suffering of the modern man, his malaise and incarceration. A man of no land and no cultures, he leads a bohemian life. His escape from one country to another is just a change of scenes. His quest for identity is the symbol of the hollowness of modern culture. He is stranger to himself than to the society. Throughout the novel, we find him indulging in an interminable and ransacking dialogue with his self to resolve the existential tangles and ties of life.

Ratan Rathor, the hero of Joshi's '*The Apprentice*' is again the representative of the frustrated rich world who falls in morals in the sight of himself and that the society. He is a product and victim of the decadent social values that gave a fillip to his ambition and rendered him deaf to the voice of his conscience. Due to his double inheritance and misguided philosophy of life, he becomes a nervous wreck under the strain of so-called self-respect. His regret was that his whole life had been a total waste, a great mistake without purpose, without results. This is reflected in his comments to the students: 'There are many sorrows in the world, but there is nothing in the three worlds to match the sorrow of a wasted life'. One of the phases of life, Ratan's phase of disillusionment and guilt and finally the phase of repentance and atonement covers the largest portion of the novel. He at one point wishes to be courageous and join the army as his father did but at the same time fears of martyrdom. He weeps in humiliation, ashamed of his own cowardice. The plot takes serious turn when we find Ratan dying of starvation but his roommates rescue him and give him job in the department of war purchases. We are astonished to see Ratan's progress of reaching the high point of his career. But his prosperity comes out of cowardice and corruption which mixes its tune with the decadent society around him, 'a society without norms, without direction, without even, perhaps, a purpose'. He receives an unexpected shock when the contractor's son tries to buy his support with a bribe and the superintendent offers officership as a reward for marrying his niece. This shows the degradation of marriage system to the level of deal.

By the time, Ratan comes out of his illusion to the fact that in the process of adjustment unacceptable to the higher self, something valuable in his soul was destroyed and he is accompanied by his own fury. The death of Brigadier caused due to defective weapon again makes him 'sleepless, and exhausted, in a snowbound trench, hemmed in by machine guns'. Again, we witness the complexity in the life of Ratan when it is shown that Brigadier shot himself dead, Ratan becomes furious and goes to kill Himmat Singh. Again, we find Himmat

Singh telling Ratan his childhood and accuses Ratan of 'botching up his inheritance'. Ratan tries to do penance for his misdeeds by going to the temple every morning and wiping the shoes left near by the devotees. His failing is a part of the cleansing process, the real goal of confession. But the poojari's trying to buy his cooperation in settling the charges against his son, the contractor, caused such revulsion in Ratan that he made it point never to enter a temple again. This all shows the restlessness and loneliness imposed by the society.

'*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*' deals with the contrast between the barren and imperfect modern civilized society and the fertile and perfect primitive society. Billy, the protagonist has yearning for primitive life and lives in the slums when he is in New York. He learns Anthropology from the Swedish girl and settles down in India as a teacher of Anthropology. He marries Meena, a beautiful and bold lady but gets fascinated by the primeval beauty of the Satpura Hills and reaches there. Very soon, he becomes 'Mahaprasad' there and marries Bilasia, a tribal beauty. This is known to Romi, a collector friend of Billy. But Situ, the collector's wife, gets cured by Billy, Billy's wife and father came to know that Billy is alive. Billy's intense aversion of the modern world and its existential despair and frustration is clear. He believes in the 'Maya' and writes to Tuula:

'It seems, my dear Tuula, that we are swiftly losing what is known as one's grip on life. Why else this constant blurring of reality? Who am I? Who are my parents? My wife? My child?'

He feels a lot of unrest in him. He is of the view that the sophisticated life is not original. He fears of his family members. This is proven when Roni causes the death of Billy. The sense of disaffection lingers in the novel all through.

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