



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 5.2
IJAR 2017; 3(6): 1396-1399
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 12-05-2017
Accepted: 06-06-2017

Balumuri Venkateswarlu
Guest Faculty, Department of
English, Acharya Nagarguna
University, Nagarjuna Nagar,
Guntur, Andhra Pradesh,
India

Emblematic existentialism in Arun Joshi's Novels

Balumuri Venkateswarlu

Abstract

In this paper, the researcher would like to throw light on Arun Joshi as an emblematic existentialist and how he considers describing human existence. Initially, the research would begin with the term Existentialism: "A philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining its own development through acts of the will" (Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary). In the 19 century, many philosophers debated the meaning of life where the individual must understand and study-self. Existentialists like Jean Paul Sartre, Soren Kierkegaard, Albert Camus, and many began to think of humans more as individuals who are powerless and aimless. In addition to that, some philosophers started exploring the terms like Freedom, Absurdity, Alienation, Authenticity so on. In Indian writing in English existentialism has their root in the works of his. Arun Joshi stands apart from the contemporary great Indian Fiction novelists. The writer reveals his instinctive capability to articulate the emotions, struggles, and feelings of Indians. His novels reveal his psychological insight and characterizing the inner lives of the protagonists. They also reveal the various perceptive of individual lives. The writer's originality as a great Indian English novelist and as a man with critical faculties is highly appreciated. All his novels stand as an emblematic of Existentialism. Joshi's philosophical existentialist view brings a new dimension in Indian English Fiction. All his novels have some kind of implication of the existentialism. From "*The Foreigner*" to "*The city and River*" have pronounced influence of existentialism.

Keywords: Existentialism, freedom, alienation, absurdity, authenticity

Introduction

The present paper focuses on the theme of existentialism and examines his novels as emblematic existentialism. Arun Joshi is a twentieth-century novelist affirms the greatness of Indian form of existentialism derived from the Upanishad and Hinduism that lay emphasis on the correct sway of living. The Upanishad teaching is demonstrated as a central theme of all his novels. Joshi's novels are close to the reality. Rather he brought out much of his personal experiences in his writings. His fictional world is an experiment of a world where man questions of his self-existence and works are characterized by themes of existential predicament, a sense of alienation, disillusionment, and despairs and rootless.

Review of Literature

In his maiden novel "*The Foreigner*" Arun Joshi explores the human psyche to reveal the mystery of human existence. In this novel, he highlights the human's choice and self-introspection. O.P Bhatnagar observes: "A strange feeling of loneliness and aloofness...permeates the entire narrative and provides the necessary texture and structure to the novel" (1973 13-14). Sindi Oberio, the protagonist of the novel had a detached view of life and also a person who has no respect for society and longs to be loved by somebody. His vision of life is "And yet all stores are alien when you do not belong everywhere" (TF 92). The novel is all about human relationships and its multiple aspects. The entire story runs after Sindi Oberio who is surrounded by loneliness and feelings of angst born of his alienation from his true self and tradition. The author portrays the young protagonist who had jubilant life in America returns to India. Sometimes detached and alienated, the hero feels as a stranger in every place he visits like in Kenya where is born, in England and USA where he studied and in India, the place he finally settles. His detachment is born out of cultural dislocation. This propels Oberio from one crisis to another. Even though he involves in too many relationships, alienation lies within him. He learns to practice detachment and no-involvement in human relations.

Corresponding Author:
Balumuri Venkateswarlu
Guest Faculty, Department of
English, Acharya Nagarguna
University, Nagarjuna Nagar,
Guntur, Andhra Pradesh,
India

The hero acknowledges that “One should be able to detach oneself from the object of one’s love”.

His acquaintance with Babu and June in America gives a transient happiness. But he feels miserable with the loss of his beloved June and his friend Babu, his sense of detachment proves fatal. After the death of June and Babu in the novel, Sindi drifts into the uncertainties of life and existence and “the abominable absurdity of the world” (TF 202). In search of mental peace, he wants to leave to India. There he undergoes a fresh crisis after he accepts a job in the firm of Babu Rao’s father Mr. Khemka. It is at this point a humble office boy Muthu becomes instrumental in transforming Sindi’s life. He gives a message that “detachment is nothing but involvement.” Finally, he understands that “loneliness must be resolved from within.” The novel undoubtedly is the quest for existentialism where the individual wants to find meaning in the absurdity of life. Sindi, the protagonist who is representative of modern man, provided with all sorts of technological advancements places himself in a despair and detachment.

“*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*” second novel of Arun Joshi in which we can find deeper roots of existentialism. In this novel, the author discussed the crisis of self, problems of identity and pursuit for fulfilment at great length. The theme of anxiety and alienation may be same but develops them more effectively than his first novel *The Foreigner*. Billy’s feelings of rootless and loneliness seem to be strong enough than Sindi. As K.R.S. Iyengar aptly points out: “*In The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, novelist has carried his exploration of consciousness of hapless and rootless people a stage further, and has revealed to our gaze new gas-chambers of self-forges misery.”

The story revolves around the protagonist of the novel Bilmal Biswas, well known as Billy Biswas who suffers from a sense of estrangement and alienated from the modern civilized society.

The relationship of Billy and his wife Meena gets “stranger and stranger every day” (*The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, page: 75).

He seeks to get relaxation by moving into the primitive world. Though Billy is born with a rich background but shows his present for an organized life. He feels alienated in the bourgeois society. He finds solace in the company of Tuula Lindgren the Swedish psychologist who understands him and knows better what is going on “in the dark, inscrutable, unsmiling eyes of Billy Biswas” (TSCBB 16). He escapes into the tribal world from civilized façade of modern life to find his fulfilment. O.P. Bhatnagar rightly points out that Billy “renounced this materialistic society and civilization not to be an ascetic but to fulfil all the demands of his self to the perfection of participated joy” (*The Art and Vision of Arun Joshi*, page: 144).

Billy’s encounter with Bilasia a tribal woman in Maikala forest overtakes a great change. Unlike Meena and Rima, She is a tribal culture who can satisfy his soul.

He feels “Something had gone wrong with my life. This is where I belong; this is what I have always dreamt of.”

The portrayal of the tribe rituals, the ancient ruins the folklores and the tribal life by is a mystical touch given by the author. The novel stands for a fictional discourse which symbolizes man’s longing for primitive ways of living against the artificial atmosphere of the big cities. He is successful in presenting Billy’s complex character dramatically in the first part of the novel where he finds

himself isolated and alienated from individuals and society. The conclusive part is not having any other option rather than living with the tribals where he finds solace. His effective exploration of rootless and helpless people is carried on to the deeper level of the individual inner consciousness.

The novel ends with Billy’s transformation: “He stood on a rock and saw in the night sky a reality that blinded him with its elemental ferocity. It was as though his life had been reduced to those elements with which we all begin when we are born.”

Arun Joshi’s third novel “*The Apprentice*” published in 1974 predominately deals with money, power, politics, and corruption. The basic theme of the novel is to highlight the ‘New Slavery’ that came into existence in post-independent India with new masters: Politicians, Officials, and the Rich. Joshi in this novel directly exposes social degradation and political corruption that came into light after independence. The narration of the story creates the middle-class as a class of emaciated men.

The main character of the novel is Ratan Rathor who finds India’s two Shades: the colonial India under the rule of British Raj, and India after independence with fervent patriotism and Gandhian moral values. The protagonist finds himself confronted with two contrasting ideas: one, his father’s antithetical philosophies of life with Gandhian values and the other his mother’s pragmatic approach towards life and money. Ratan Rathor is embroiled in the confusion of values and moral anarchy. Being a child of double inheritance, he becomes an “apprentice” to the corrupted modern civilization. His analysis of Ratan Rathor who is born in a bourgeois class can’t survive in this phony and materialist world without money reveals his psychological conflict.

Ratan remarks: “I embarked upon the solemn and relentless pursuit of a career. Bourgeois filth caters and bourgeois filth—And to live. One had to make a living. And was living to be made except through careers” (*The Apprentice*, page: 39).

Ironically, his mother convinced him more about the value of money that has seen her husband’s death for the sake of falsetto idealism. So, the moral ambivalence of the hero succumbs to the temptation of bribe where he sacrifices his innocence and honour. Here Joshi portrays the contemporary man “sailing about in confused society without norms, without directions, without even, perhaps, a purpose” (*The Apprentice* 74). Ratan’s mother’s words make him self-centred and clash of ideas and values. Consequently, gives away to the modern world leading to declining of individuals. The humiliation, starvation and the physical trauma brought him to despair and to the verge of collapse. Ratan’s guilty of accepting bribe and fraud threatened his honour. Rathor was obsessed more by his honour than by magnitude of his crime.

“What had I done what had I done which I should not have done? What was right? What was wrong? What was the measure of doing things or not doing them? Where were the dividing 154 lines between success and failure, loyalty and betrayal, love and hate?” (TA, page: 72-73). Joshi beautifully displays the inner discord that leads existentialist stance to the protagonist’s personality.

He did not determine either to take revenge or to opt for death like his friend Brigadier. But he has chosen Gandhian way to expiate his guilt by polishing the shoe in front of the

Krishna temple. The novel shows that people adopt favourable ends irrespective of any kind of means that may help them towards the goals. The offense committed by the people in the modern society is surely more intense which is shown aptly by the writer in form of Ratan Rathor.

The Apprentice is narrated in a confessional tone. Rathor uses this mode to express his dilemma and the social reality. In a retrospective style, he narrates his journey from innocence to experience. He, very passionately, pictures every minor and major incident that brought his downfall. The hero makes an honest confession, without hiding or manoeuvring any detail that would reflect his hypocrisy, treachery, debauchery and finally degeneration. Rathor narrates his life-story to a young college student from the hilly areas of Punjab. Ratan hadn't confessed his guilt to anybody else earlier, but he feels an inclination to narrate everything to this boy. He says that the young boy reminds him of his father who was similarly "grave and clear-eyed" (Joshi, 7). Sacrifice of Ratan's father had made an indelible impression on Ratan's psyche. So it seems that he is making his honest confession, actually, to his father's image; his father being the only epitome of sincerity and selflessness, in his life (Sharma 58-59).

"*The Last Labyrinth*" (1981) prize-winning novel of him seems to have men and women involved in a vortex of emotions. In this novel, Joshi explores the meaning of desire and resignation, illusion and reality and life and death. The writer has come up with an eternally contemporary theme with all its complexities like spiritual and sensuous dimensions with great subtlety. The novel deals with longings of essentials of life of the narrator-hero Som Bhaskar. The protagonist is educated at the world's finest universities, a millionaire-industrialist; a married to a beautiful and sensible wife who has borne him adorable children, millions in the bank yet hankers for more.

An insatiable hunger drives him. "Hunger of the body, Hunger of the spirit, you suffer from one or the other or both" (*The Last Labyrinth*, page: 11).

His great desire always haunts him crying "I want, I want, I want." (TLL 11) all his life. He tries to satiate his restless desires by running after different women inconsistently. "I am dislocated. My mind is out of focus" (TLL 107) and he finds his troubles multiplied as "the terrible loneliness" of his heart" (TLL.23). And then Som meets Anuradha wife of business-man Aftab Rai, irresistibly drawn towards her. Here the novelist brings the utmost desire of the hero to accomplish happiness, satisfaction; peace in his life. Som feels that a strange attraction drags him towards her which he can't overcome. Anuradha becomes an obsession which leads to his marriage collapse, his business suffering losses and finally his wealth and health. The writer portrays Anuradha as a woman of obscure origin. Her past is a saga of sufferings and tortures of her insane mother.

"Illegitimate child, insane mother, no home, molested as a child witness to murders, suicides, every conceivable evil of the world. Can you imagine what a child she must have had?" (TLL, page: 190). Soon Anuradha departs from Som Bhaskar transforming Som's hunger body into hunger of spirituality.

Then he realizes that eternal joy and happiness can be achieved through spiritual enlightenment "that core of loneliness around which all of us are built" (TLL 54). The story is all about lost soul searching for the meaning of life. Finally, Som is able to retrieve his conviction in God in the

process of spiritual awakening. "Nothing has interested me more than the secrets of the universe" (TLL, page: 129).

The novelist through this novel emphasizes the importance of human values for the peaceful existence of the human beings in the modern society. In the conclusion part, Som's self-realization and search for peace and true relations show Joshi's intuitive understanding of human psychology.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

"*The Last Labyrinth* is considered as an outstanding contribution to Indian English literature for its restless search for a meaning in human existence, its treatment of the multiple levels of reality, challenging narrative technique and an evocative use of language." — Sahitya Akademi Award Citation

"*The City and The River*" (1990) is the fifth novel of the writer which takes place in an imaginary land. He as a writer equipped with the means to make the everyday credible and sharply present to venture into such territory of the fictional world. This novel is not a philosophical tract mounting the utterances of its characters. It is completely a political fable. The Writer uses a mixture of fantasy, startling real vision of everyday politics and also skillfully handles plotted by intrigue and corruption in high places. He also highlights the distressed caused by confusion of values generated by materialistic and corrupt society. In his last novel, the prominent characters carry with them a sense of alienation, pessimism, and loneliness. The author shows the existential dilemma of its characters in the hostile world but this predicament has been replaced by the socio-political crisis of the city representing the whole community itself. The main plot of the novel revolves around the power struggle. The unchallenged king is the Grand Master who rules the city by the river face a stiff resistance from the boatmen who refuse to fall in the line with the Seven Hills. Things run smoothly in the city, till a strange prophecy is made by the palace astrologer. He announces the crowning of a new king in place of the Grand Master. Then it becomes an impediment to creative work, destroying good relationships and transforming trust into mistrust. The novel lashes out at corruption in public life, selfishness of the rules and the political crisis. The story moves after the Great Master of the city who resolves to strengthen his authority supported by a group of ambitious ministers.

Sometimes the Grand Master expresses his distress "so old and lonely and useless" (*The city and the River*, page: 150).

The poor who represent the other pole of the city live a traditional life by the river, to them, the river is "a symbol of the divine mother, of God himself" (*The City and the River*, page: 22). They regard themselves as "children of the great river" (*The City and the River*, Page: 19) Joshi uses his narrative technique especially exhibiting identity crisis. For example, the Master of Rallies, a child of the boatman, is an unhappy man due to lack of identity which forces him into rootlessness. He remarks: "I have no family, no wish to get rich, I do not wish to become famous; I have no friends to lose. Am I afraid of going to prison? In fact, I (am, but why?). There is no one to mourn me, nor do I have commitments that I would suffer" (*The City and the River* page: 75). The other character in the novel Bhumiputra, a teacher of Mathematics and disciple of professor, "felt very alone" (*The City and* — 157). So, this novel consistently reflects the reality of the human life and proves the identity crisis is inevitable.

Conclusion

All the above novels clearly reveal Joshi's fascination for the theme of the crisis of identity affecting the life of the fictional characters engrossed in the different fictional worlds created by him. The theme of Alienation, loneliness, rootless is some of the chief problems in the novels of Arun Joshi. The crisis of the character gives birth to the generation gap which has been treated by the writer skilfully. Joshi is an excellent craftsman in fictional writing who knows well how to create an atmosphere of suspense and mystery. Moreover, he is considered as one of India's foremost writers who has convinced the readers with his mastery skills in dealing various problems of modern society. Arun Joshi is always stimulating, illuminating and entertaining besides being informative and illustrative of psycho-emotional desires to overcome the terrible fear of separateness, of powerlessness and of listlessness.

He himself observes

"My novels are essentially attempted forward a better understanding of the world and of myself....If I did not write, I imagine I would use some other medium to carry on my exploitation."

References

1. Dhawan RK. (ed.). The Fictional World of Arun Joshi, New Delhi, Classical Publishing Company, 1986, P. 18.
2. Pathak RS. Indian Fiction of Nineties, Delhi: Creative Books, 1997.
3. Joshi Arun. The City and the River, New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks. All the page references in parentheses are to this edition only, 1994.
4. Bhavnagar MK. (ed.): The Novels of Arun Joshi: A Critical Study, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2001.
5. Arun Joshi. The Last Labyrinth, New Delhi, Orient Paperbacks. All subsequent references have been taken from the same edition, 2010, (11).
6. Shankar Kumar. The Novels of Arun Joshi: A Critical Study, New Delhi. Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2001 The City and the River, New Delhi, Vision, 1990.