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Existential Dilemma, Urban Anxiety and Postcolonial Musings in the Novels of Arun Joshi

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Abstract

Postcolonial writings in India explored issues of cast, gender, east-west encounter. The history of Indian Independence and postcolonial literature did not bring many opportunities for a dignified living for adivasis. Postcolonial writings do not seem particular about marginal consciousness when the matter comes of Indigenous pathos. In new India, we have an industrial and globalized culture with its popular mall industry on one side and destitute, colorless, poorer and suffering India on another side. Arun Joshi tried to explore the postcolonial impact in his novel writings. This research article tries to depict the impact of the colonial rule on Indian socio-cultural milieu and its impression as reflected in the selected novel writings of Arun Joshi. Mainstream Indian English fiction writing has given much focus on the East-west encounter, cultural clash and hybrid cultural milieu through their novel writings but personal anguish, anxiety and pessimism in life was also an important aspect of postcolonial life which rarely came from the writings of Indian English fiction writings. Arun Joshi tries his best to bring this barren issues of life on the forefront of creative writings. Arun Joshi's postcolonial novel writing shows the mirror to the highly educated society in India that culture and history of the native land is integral part of one's life without which one's life is like a radarless boat. Research articles bring a very good literary debate between colonial and postcolonial life of Indian social, political, cultural, existential and identical issues which imprint after British left the India.

Keywords: Postcolonial hybridity, modernity, existentialism, anxiety, east-west dilemma

Introduction

Arun Joshi's first novel, *The Foreigner* is the story of rootlessness, eccentricity, inconsistency and above all ignorance towards life. The main character, Sindi Oberai, always, finds himself in a confusing state of identity. He finds, cultural clash between Eastern spiritualism and western materialistic values and considers himself as a byproduct of this predicament. Babu and June, the other character in the novel. Sindi considers himself responsible for their death. He is always with a feeling of guilt in his mind. When he returns to India, he works in the industry. Ultimately the other workers face ruin because of the fraudulent boss. Sindi plays a vital role and discovers his humanitarianism in such situation. This unexpected change from the feeling of rootlessness to humanitarianism seems really unconvincing. Regarding this perplex state of mind, M.K. Naik comments, "This sudden transfer matter is unfortunately neither adequately motivated nor prepared for earlier. The ending thus appeared to be botched up a weakness. Joshi's presentation of his hero's alienation is evocative enough" (Naik: 2009: 230) [7].

Arun Joshi's novels are full of spiritual longings and philosophical aspirations. Postcolonial elements can be noticed when he shows East-West culture clash and westernizes mode of living in Independent India. His situation

shows a postcolonial India which has gone through a massive state of change but at the same time, he has depicted the India which has lost a cultural pride because of the adaptation of the policies of the rapid growth of industrialization and westernization. His novel imparts knowledge that in the name of progressive civilization and progressive development, materialistic values, wickedness and corruptions are rapidly creating chaos. Throughout his novels, his viewpoint seems that human rationality and consciousness are praiseworthy but it seems very useless if it fails to give contentment and peace to the human mind and soul. The following line shows the philosophy of the life of Arun Joshi:

I am, of course, talking mainly of the so-called upper classes. I did not really get to know others. I don't think I have ever met a more pompous or more mixed up a lot of people. Artificially, they were dry as dust. They could no better than mechanically mouth ideas that the west abandoned a generation ago. Their Idea of romance was to go and see an American Monitor or to go one of those wretched restaurants and dance with their wives to a thirty years old tune. (Joshi: 1971:128) [3]

Existential Dilemma in the Novels of Arun Joshi

Arun Joshi's novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, presents his complex, sophisticated and intense analytical

habit of mind. Here, his search for realization abruptly ends. Billy, the central character of the novel, looks at modern civilization as a monster who corrupts human co-existence. He observes the modern way of living and looking of objects creates socio-economic disparities. Money minded society and corrupt machinery weaken man's moral fiber. Billy selects for himself, adivasis life in Satpura Hills of Madhya Pradesh and adopts the adivasis lifestyle. It really seems unconvincing that an American returned, a Delhi Professor of Anthropology, sacrifices everything and embraces a forest life far from the madding crowd of industrial worldliness. Postcolonial literature deals with identity crises and craves for nationhood. Cultural hegemony, economic disparity and racial segregation make the foundation of postcolonial writings. Arun Joshi's novel gives an authentic treatment to the issue of self-realization when confronted with the barrenness which is spread by modern sciences. It is the novel that depicts the evil of technological development and opportunism of commerce that has widened the gap between Indian societies. Joshi's primary concern is to show how to westernize blind values corrupts the soul of a moral man and is the theme of the Arun Joshi's critically acclaimed novel, *The Apprentice*. This novel, again slashes modern snobbery, sophisticated manners and false image of a successful life.

Urban Anxiety in the Novels of Arun Joshi

The novel *The Apprentice* speaks with the reader in a confessional mode. Ratan Rathod, a representative of much Indian youth and central character in the novel belongs to the middle-class family. Ratan, who is the son of a freedom fighter, wants to live a healthy life but suddenly circumstances change and his life changes too. In spite of being a poet and an athlete, he becomes a clerk and knowingly or unknowingly, he indulged himself in corruption. He shows a real post-independence Indian society, which is full of webs of hypocrisy and corruptions, infected with the decadence of materialism and corruption. He presents a society where elites and cast conscious minds never hesitate to torture and taunt the broken sections of the society. His understandings of the modern humdrum of life can be seen in following lines, "I had become at the age of twenty-one, hypocrite and a liar, in short shame from morning till night, I told more lies than truth. I had become a master taker. An all this had happened within a period of six weeks" (Joshi: 1974: 27)^[5]. The *Apprentice* is a powerful monologue of self-assurance. After indulging in corruption and materialism, the protagonist seeks solace in the company of God. Finally, he confesses that there is no remedy for his endless greed, for his sin. We can notice here that his detachment is different from the detachment of Sindi Oberai of *The Foreigner*. When the self-realization of his wrongdoing admits by him, he takes the penance in the shelter of God. He takes the polishing the shoes of the devotees in the temple on his way to the office. Rathod confesses:

Life might well be a zero, for all I know but it seems to me that it needs not to be negative. And it becomes negative when you take out of it your sense of shame, your honor. I beg forgiveness of a large host; My father, my mother, the brigadier, the unknown dead of the war of whom I harmed, with deliberation and with cunning, of all those who have been the victim of my cleverness, those whom I could have helped and did not. (Joshi: 1968: 143)

Postcolonial Musings in the Writings of Arun Joshi

The adivasis territory is on the prime target of urban

corporates and landlords. Global capitalism, like a sweeping eagle claw, is attacking on adivasis natural resources and on ancient adivasis heritage. Partially it seems that during colonization and in post-global India, adivasis life seems the victim of British imperialism and internal Indian colonization. It was the lebel given by colonial mentality that adivasis were considered as uncivilized and barbaric because they don't know greed and they never surrender before exploitation. There are factful hardships in adivasis culture that in this crowded age of post-globalization many regional writers are writing about adivasis life. Regional writers have done justice with adivasis life. The exploitation of adivasis through the hands of corporates and foreigner multinationals has presented by them. Adivasis revolts were justified by regional writers of India. In this regards, Mr. Samarendra Das, opines: "Post-Independence Indian English fiction is postcolonial Indian English fiction because it continues to evoke colonial legacies in the contemporary society and seeks to complete with English language fiction for International prizes commonwealth fiction prize, The Booker Prize, etc" (Das:2007:172).

In postcolonial Indian English fictions, we frequently read the words like broken identity, deprived section, Adivasi exploitation or Dalit marginalization, but novelist does not give much exploration of internal colonization and internal discrimination in Indian society through their critically acclaimed novels. In the postcolonial period of India, it can be noticed that there is material progress taking place in India along with gender discrimination, Dalit marginalization and disorientation of adivasis farmers. Global capitalism has strengthened the exploited machinery directed by the corporate world. *The Apprentice* is a story of the salvation of a corrupt soul that holds a mirror to the world of materialism. We are shocked when Joshi makes the ending of this novel is very positive notes, seeking solace in spiritual life when his character, Rathod comments:

The crookedness of the world; the crookedness of oneself. How to get rid of it? Revolution of God? The Sheikh had said but what do I know of either of them, my friend? Revolution or of God? I know nothing. That is the long and the short of it. The superintendent's God it nouse. Sure whose God then? The God of Kurukshetra. And who's Revolution? The Russian, The Chinese? The Americans? Coinciding at some point, I get very confused, as you can see. And do not know what to do? Where to begin but time is short and one must begin somewhere...consider me as an apprentice and you will perhaps understand. (Joshi: 1974:142)^[5]

Throughout all the novels of Arun Joshi, we can come to know that he is the champion of the causes of postcolonialism where Eastern spiritualism and Western materialism dashed against one another. His celebrated and Sahitya Academy Award-winning novel *The last Labyrinth* deals with the crannies of his characters sartorial and Jungian struggle for the realistic modes of life. Novel shows that his personality is Labyrinth and so are his life, existence, reality and ambitions. Arun Joshi was deeply influenced by '*Bhakti Movement*'. Again Joshi tries to show through his character, Som Bhaskar, that colonial and elite education has transformed modern man to ninety in cultural values. Som Bhaskar is a successful industrialist craves for more wealth and finds no faith in spirituality. He craves for the quest of both physical and mental fulfillment in life. His modern outlook towards materialistic social comforts takes him nowhere. As Som, is a successful industrialist and his greed for money is incomparable, therefore the reasons for Som's monotonous

and erratic way of life are numerous and varied. In order to crave for salvation, Som finds soothing in the company of Altab, Anuradha, and George. Anuradha helps him to ignite a flame of spiritualism and inspire joy in him. Som noticed her beauty on the day of Janmashtmi,

“She looked like a medieval courtesan around whom war might have been fought. There was a diamond in her nose. Which had not been there before....there was Mehandi, on her hands. All this preparation I knew was of Krishna” (Joshi: 1981: 121)^[6].

Today the adivasis life is caught in the dangers of violence and fear. Caste system in India is also a danger which has not uprooted yet. There is the uncertainty of life among the adivasis community because of the corrupt policies of bureaucracy and corporate tycoons. Now the voices of protest of adivasis and Dalits have taken place in mainstream regional literature. Indian English fictional writings do not have taken these writing seriously, but these voices have created the new discourse of *Resistance Literature*. Mainstream literature of Indian English is away from this *Protest Literature*. As Som is befriended with Anuradha, he feels an intense feeling of rootlessness, inadequacy, a sharp feeling of the rudderless boat which is missed and tossed on turbulent waves. The novel gives some spiritual, religious examples to find salvation and so Som Bhaskar ultimately starts believing in God, spiritualism and in religion. Like the other themes of novels, Som Bhaskar also goes on-mountain in search of salvation and purification. It is a journey towards the mountain in search of Krishna, symbolizes, his journey towards the knowledge of his soul:

Its perfect stillness. I had heard of peoples who staring into such flames had enjoyed the eternal bliss. Others had discovered their oneness.....with Bramha, A man I once traveled with one of the most sophisticated I have ever met-claimed he had seen in such a flame his previous incarnations. This title flame of mine, however, yielded nothing beyond an ounce of tranquility which of course was not to be laughed at. (Joshi: 1981:194)^[6]

Arun Joshi, a writer of magnetic writing skill, dealt with the themes of the traumatic postmodern world, sense of detachment, utilitarianism and craves for salvation in his entire writings. His novel justifies the post-colonial way of writings which is actually a mean of the transformation of different cultures. The themes of his novel deals with spiritualism and eastern religious ideologies which are still rooted in Indian society, therefore these values and system play a vital role in cultural decolonization. He addressed that westernization and materialism corrode our soul and ideology but native culture and tradition deeply lie in the subconscious mind and inspire us for the fulfillment of life. Spiritualism seems the only way to redemption for his characters. M. K. Naik opines, “Joshi is a novelist seriously interested in existential dilemmas and equally acutely aware of both the problems of post-Independence Indian society and the implications of the East-West encounter. He is a skilled narrator and can even make an entire novel a long monologue without losing his hold over the reader’s attention” (Naik: 2009: 271)^[7].

Conclusion

The continuous series of Arun Joshi’s novel shows the changing human values, growing materialism, barren urbanity, the rootlessness of postcolonial world where everyone seeks his destinations to gain material progress, wealth and reputation. Having all the amenities of life, his

characters like Sindi Oberai, Ratan Rathod and Billy Biswas, feels alienation about this modern money-minded world where human compassions and spirituality hardly matters. *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is a good example of postcolonial Indian sensitivities of generous heart which focuses only on intellectual doubts, erosion of values, and the crisis of faith. The novel is a satire on follies of modern and sophisticated values where everybody wants to seek the meaning of life but fails to find tranquility and spiritual regeneration. Regional writings in India put the adivasis at the center of debates and represent the fact of Adivasi struggle. Indian English fiction writers seem to project themselves as secular as they can show. In their writings about nationalism, freedom struggle, gender treatment, agrarian life and feminist studies, we have never found their contemporary approaches about strengthening the marginal voices of Adivasis. It seems that there is a competition between the religious orthodox forces and nationalist well-wishers for who will bargain better of adivasis territory and natural resources with multinationals. Surely, the language of the postcolonial text is different from the language of power and cultural dominance. In postcolonial language, the novelist finally makes himself free to convey his expression in a proper manner. When we go through the novel of *The Foreigner*, *The Last Labyrinth* and *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, we are assured that Arun Joshi has decolonized the English language and presented the alienation and his monotonous life in a postcolonial way, when he says, “If life’s meaning lies not in the glossy surface of our pretensions but in those dark mossy Labyrinth of the soul that languish forever hidden from the dazzling light of the sun, then I do not know of any man who sought it more doggedly and, having received a signal, abandoned himself so recklessly to its cell”(Joshi: 1971:08)^[3]. Arun Joshi’s novel also shows class consciousness and oriental elements of Indian society where the hero of the novels finds themselves engaged with cynicism, corruption, frustration and cultural dilemma. Arun Joshi has given a new meaning to the novel-writing of Indian English during the early Post Independence period. His finest contribution to the Indian English novel is his art of characterization. K. A. Iyengar gives his valuable remark about his contribution for strengthening the postcolonial base of Indian English writings when he opines: The issue between detachment and involvement, differences and commitment, going it alone and communion, is posed prominently enough but not properly consumed in the action or the characterization. There is a colorless cosmopolitan quality about the novel that is somewhat disconcerting; or rather, the novel fuels to evoke convincingly a sense of place. These are rootless people tossed about by the wind of chance and the uninvolved and blindly involved alike find themselves prisoners of one or another kind. (Iyengar: 2007: 504)

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