

THE THEME OF ESTRANGEMENT IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF ARUN JOSHI

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ABSTRACT

The Chief concern in this article is to examine the sense of alienation in the select novels of Arun Joshi. How does the Modern human find himself/herself estranged not only from his fellow human but also from himself/herself? It focuses mainly on how the modern man is alienated in various ways. It also analyses today's world which has shrunk in spirit, languishing in confusion, frustration, disintegration, disillusionment, and meaninglessness. The theme 'alienation' is one of the predominant themes in the novels of Arun Joshi. His characters are alienated individuals in environments of crisis and emotional disturbances.

KEYWORDS: *Spirit, Languishing In Confusion, Frustration, Disintegration, Disillusionment, Meaninglessness*

INTRODUCTION

Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is a novel that deals with a wealthy man who was growing discontent in his heart. Billy Biswas, a Doctorate in Anthropology, well educated and employed, happily married, a wealthy person enjoying good social status. Yet he is consumed by an inner current of discontentment. He becomes more and more restless, feels that he is a misfit in the modern world and seeks an opportunity to permanently escape from it. "To attempt, to understand is probably even more futile" (7). The most futile cry of man is his impossible wish to understand and to be understood. Billy stands midway between the flamboyant American culture and the tradition bound Indian culture. The fact that Billy hails from the upper strata of Indian Society also adds to some of his problems. Billy does not sink into existential life overnight. The consolidation of identity is the primary psychological task of adolescence. In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, Arun Joshi is concerned not only with certain social evils that existed in civilized societies, but also with certain complexities new to mankind.

The society is oppressive and individuals like Billy are born to suffer though they have a burning zeal to reform the society. Perhaps death is the real refuge for people like Billy Biswas whose dreams and aspirations are not fulfilled in his lifetime. Arun Joshi's novel *The Stranger* is the story of a young man called Surindar Oberoi who feels like a total stranger in every environment in the society. Born in England he goes to the USA for his studies, he moves to Kenya and finally settles in India. His detachment transcends barriers of geography, nationality, and culture that propels him from one crisis to another, sucking in the wave several other people, including June, an attractive American. Thus in *The Stranger*, Joshi depicts the

alienation of the protagonist Surinder Oberoi. His alienation from the world seems to be similar to that suffered by many existentialist heroes of western literature.

In the *Foreigner*, Joshi makes use of terms and concepts evoking typically Indian philosophical thoughts in one's mind. The past and the future make no difference to the protagonist who is in a reduced state of consciousness for the major part of the novel. For him, the future would be as meaningless as the past. The title of the novel implies that human beings are foreigners wherever they are on the face of the earth. "Every foreign student is an ambassador of his country", the professor was saying (43). All the major characters in this novel suffer from a sense of alienation. Alienation envelops the hero totally in that while others feel alienated once in a way. Like Billy Biswas, Sindi analyses the reasons for the blissful state of common fellow beings. He comes to the conclusion that common people have the benefit of their delusions protecting them from the lonely meaninglessness of life. Again, Sindi's attitude towards love and marriage is based on his sense of total alienation. One can conclude that the novel *The Foreigner* tries to measure the never-ending dilemmas of humankind.

Joshi's novel *The Apprentice* depicts the plight of the contemporary man, who is living in a confused society without norms, without directions, without perhaps even a purpose. This novel seems to be closer to the themes of Absurd Theatre. To the playwrights belonging to the Absurd Drama, this world is full of uncertainties and so everything is absurd and meaningless in life. It is interesting to observe that Arun Joshi's novels have an element of absurdity in them. The novelist has created Ratan Rathor, a unique character, amidst familiar surroundings, to strike home the futility of the race to success. Ratan suffers from discontentment which becomes tiresome in body and spirit. The novel exposes the cowardice and corruption of his own character in a mock-heroic way. Ratan comes to realize that life may be meaningless but it need not be negative. He learns ultimately the lessons of humility and resignation to the will of God, doing what he can without vanity, without expectations and also without cleverness.

In *The Apprentice* Arun Joshi's social criticism is more direct and suggestive and he delves deeper into the modern Indian society and analyses its foibles. The narrator moves from a state of innocence to a state of experience. Ratan says that the world runs on deals and deals alone and so he feels restless, depressed and uncomfortable. The whole nation appears to be dreaming, awaiting its doom. The novelist very successfully makes the transition from integrity to corruption appear smooth and credible.

Arun Joshi ends the book with an optimistic note. Though the future of the country looks bleak, the young "mighty ebb- back the tide" (143), says Ratan to the young listeners. The novelist's optimism is revealed in his hope of the younger generation's willingness to change, to learn and to sacrifice. In *Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, the theme of alienation is kept in the background. But in *The Foreigner*, the novelist repeatedly emphasizes that human is alone and his prime source of inner turmoil is his ruthlessness. *The Apprentice*, Joshi's third novel, takes his search for understanding man's predicament one step further toward the transcendental. Its central figure is a man essentially docile and uncourageous whose life more or less parallels the coming into being of postcolonial India. In *The Apprentice* Joshi's social criticism is directly aimed at the current moral and social environments. Though Joshi exposes the constraints of society on individuals he is unable to come out with a definite solution to wake up men from slumber is caused by their identity crisis. His novels probing into existentialism, along with the ethical choices a man has to make and won him huge critical appreciation in India.

Psychiatry was the basic interest of Arun Joshi. Most of his writings are filled with his personal experiences right from his youth. The works of the writer are focused on the twin aspects of conflict and self-identity, which are interwoven and inseparable. In search of self-identity and to resolve the conflict, Arun Joshi through his characters resolves the problem by redemption in various ways. The conflict in Arun Joshi's novels plays a decisive role. The analysis of conflict requires identification of the conflict as it appears in literature and distinguishing between internal and external conflict, followed by placing the conflict in one of the three subcategories.

In the novel, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is as cathing attack on the materialistic civilized society and an exaltation of the past ancient culture wherein lies the panacea for the ills of the modern society. The first section of the novel establishes the character of Billy and his degraded and sterile surrounding and thereby making his escape convincing. Therefore, Billy's decision to leave the civilized world is not made on the spur of the moment, as some critics make it out to be, but is naturally consequent upon what preceded it. Billy hails "from upper-crust of Indian society" (9) and has "claim so faristocracy" (12). The theme of escapism is another characteristic issue in the twentieth century and this is a general phenomenon in the majority of Arun Joshi's novels.

The plot-construction of the novel dexterously reveals the widespread existence of escapism in our society. Joshi goes beyond cultural, social and traditional boundaries to exemplify his concern about ultimate escapism. In *The Foreigner*, Joshi deals with various questions of escapism simultaneously: escapism as found in common human relationships, between lovers, between friends and people of society. In the end, he evaluates the modern escapism in the light of Bhagavad Gita. The protagonist of the novel himself is having a deep quest regarding his notion of the detachment under whose garb he hides his escapist set of mind. The best example of his dereliction of duty is his explanation for the death of Babu. He runs from his own accountability by saying, "I have no roots. I have no system of morality. What does it mean to me if you call me an immoral man? I have no reason to be one thing or the other" (118)

From the beginning, Sindi shows that he is on the constant journey to know the meaning of life. His concern about society is limited to his primary needs. In general, Arun Joshi's novels deal with the actual dilemma of life, conflicts, failures and illusions and Joshi seems to be influenced by Indian philosophy of life to a certain extent.

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