



JOURNEY FROM MATERIALISM TO SPIRITUALISM IN ARUN JOSHI'S *THE APPRENTICE*

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ABSTRACT

*Both materialism and spiritualism are two integral parts of human life that provide happiness. Spirituality seeks happiness within while materialism seeks happiness without. Spiritualism gives a lesson of selfless stance whereas materialism leads towards the selfish insight. The modern approach of spirituality in Christian vision was driven by the Holy Spirit or Angel. In Islam, Sufism is mystic dimension that is very much akin to the path of spiritualism. In Hinduism, following the path of spiritualism leads man towards 'Moksha' or 'awareness of self', liberation, true nature of life, and ultimate truth of life. Arun Joshi presents the spiritual vision of Hinduism through his leading character Ratan Rathor in his third novel *The Apprentice*. The purpose of present paper is to draw Joshi's vision of life which clarifies with the characterization of Ratan's journey from materialism to spiritualism. Through the novel Joshi probably tries to draw the line between materialistic and spiritualistic life. He also tries to suggest following the mid path of materialism and spirituality for the sake of one's existence and survival.*

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages, man has been searching out something beyond material happiness, something beyond reality and truth and something beyond life and death. Today, human being is still involved in searching out his real image and existence in this vast universe that has been going beyond his understanding of life. In this enormous confusion of life, man has always tried to put forward the steps to the tendency of colossally greedy, race of development. With the development of science and technology, man, too, has endeavoured to move forward with its race. Therefore in its indulgence he has lost the perception to conceive

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his instinct and conscience. The abyss of materialism has also engulfed man from his natural instinct that has blocked all the ways from its outcome.

Both materialism and spiritualism are two integral parts of human life that provide happiness. Spirituality seeks happiness within while materialism seeks happiness without. Spiritualism gives a lesson of selfless stance whereas materialism leads towards the selfish insight. When a child takes birth, he remains very much pure but as soon as he grows and comes in contact with the society becomes selfish that leads him towards the materialistic world. As Rousseau says, "Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chain" (WEB) that has however proved having shown the modern world. He becomes very much rational and always starts working on his profit.

For the ages man has been conditioned by nation, class, caste, tradition, religion, language, art, culture, literature, customs and convention that have, in fact, stopped him to take any decision on the basis of his individual aspirations. He is running after hoarding and spending and always tries to move forward in creation of higher status in the society. In other words, being a social creature, man's thought, in actual sense develops on socio-political surface. This is human nature that human being very soon and easily learns the social vices since it has bewitching power therefore in a very easy way he is in its grip.

With the coming of Darwin's *Origin of Species* the question of human existence and his evolution came before the world in consequence man's tendency towards religion, spirituality and belief are shaken from its root. Thus, man's journey from spiritualism to materialism, from faith to reason, from light to the dark shade move forward that led him towards the confrontation of the First World War and the Second World War. The materialistic provision of man by holding the hand of science clarifies its ramification, and nihilistic overlook of man towards his fundamental foundation of social construction. The race of development led man towards the changing scenario of the world in which he or she forgot to recognise the feeling and emotion consequently the general ideology of man pulled down with the decay, dismal, absurdist notion of life.

Wikipedia says, "Spirituality refers to a religious process of re-formation which "aims to recover the original shape of man," oriented at "the image of God" as exemplified by the founder and sacred texts of the religions of the world" (WEB). Spiritualism, in fact, is the sacred dimension of life which leads man towards the deepest value and meaning of life where man is untouched by all the materialistic phenomenon of life. It is also believed that under the shelter of spirituality human beings achieves the real satisfaction, content, meaning, objective, glorification and recognises the voice of his soul. The modern approach of spirituality in Christian vision was driven by the Holy Spirit or Angel. In a broader sense,

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after the Second World War, spirituality became more oriented on subjective experience which had no connection with religion since it led man towards secularism in searching out the peaceful flourished and blooming notions of life. In Islam, Sufism is mystic dimension that is very much akin to the path of spiritualism. In Hinduism, following the path of spiritualism leads man towards 'Moksha' or 'awareness of self', liberation, true nature of life, and ultimate truth of life. Arun Joshi presents the spiritual vision of Hinduism through his leading character Ratan Rathor. Swami Vivekananda writes, "Each soul is a star and all stars are set in the infinite azure, the eternal sky- the Lord. There is the root, the reality, the real individuality, of each and all. Religion began with a search after some of the stars which had passed beyond our horizon, and ended in finding them all in God, with ourselves in the same place" (WEB).

In the galaxy of Indian English writing, Arun Joshi shines with his five novels that cover the existential thematic concerns. All his novels are based on internal and external conflicts of men from themselves and with the society especially the Eastern and the Western conflicts. Joshi's third novel, *The Apprentice* reveals the dark crisis of human soul. It unfolds the journey of its protagonist Ratan Rathor that starts from the idealistic vies materialistic to the spiritual world. Joshi depicts the crisis of character in the figure of Ratan who gets all the experiences of life. Regarding the novel, Tapan Kumar Ghosh writes,

In The Apprentice Joshi presents an individual who suffers the agony of the soul not due to his escapism or rebellion but due to his conformity to, and victimization by, a crooked and corrupt society. Indictment of materialism has already occurred in the first two novels. But it is in the third novel that this indictment comes into prominence giving the book a wider social relevance.
(90)

The novel is indeed a revelation of modern man's tendency of mistakes for which one repents throughout the life. The protagonist's life runs on the track of materialism to spiritualism. In his third novel Joshi somewhat moves from his two earlier novels, in depicting the absurdist thoughts of freedom and meaningless things. The novel roams around various shades of life. Joshi presents the crisis of character and suffering of individual soul by confronting the crooked and corrupt society. Joshi's own two phases of business and writing explore how his judgement moulds at certain period of time during his overlook at definite existential notions. The novel depicts that how a person in a situation of trust deceives or break the relationship with others whether knowingly or unknowingly by following the wrong path of life. Joshi adds how a well civilized man turned into a beast by deceiving that one who leaves everything for the sake of someone's betterment of life. Joshi designs the various notions of man's life and also evolves over socio-political concerns of the 1960s war between India and



China. The story of the novel develops from 1940s to 1960s till the end of Indo-China war. *The Apprentice*, Joshi's third novel, is an exploration of individual identity of its protagonist Ratan Rathor. He becomes the victim of modern civilized and corrupted world that he himself builds. The novel, however, is an endeavour to the case study of various aspects of social and individual dimension of common people such as isolation, dread, fear, death, God, innocence, experience, idealism, shame, humiliation, and meaningless life. Almost all the protagonists of Joshi's novels suffer from the individual existence and their survivals and individual existence often become a question.

Arun Joshi's novels are the amalgamation of the Eastern and Western existential philosophy that he apparently delineates in his third novel, *The Apprentice*, that Shankar Kumar cites Thakur Guruprasad's view in his book:

Ratan Rathor, the protagonist of the novel, conforms to the dot to the dictionary definition of "existential": the doctrine that man forms his essence in the course of his life he chooses to lead. He is born a good man, the son of a martyr in the national movement. But when he goes out of his village to graduate in life of the crooked world, honesty does not get him even the lowest job and he makes his essence, as he goes choosing the life he leads. (125)

Arun Joshi's maturity of life appears during the completion of *The Apprentice* that opens the spiritual path of life at the end of the novel. The novel opens with a confessional note of Ratan who narrates the whole story of the novel which is apparently related to his own life. It consists of a long confessional monologue that he addresses to a young college student from Punjab. Joshi presents two fold figures in Ratan's character who himself is a hero and villain of the novel. Joshi shows the journey of Ratan from innocence to experience, from idealism to hollowness, from materialism to spiritualism. In the confessional speech, Ratan tells about his early childhood that he was idealistic and patriotic person who used to walk on the footmarks of his father who was a leader and freedom fighter. Joshi depicts that Ratan lives in dilemma in his early childhood between idealistic notion of his father and pragmatic thinking of his mother. His father's selfless sacrifice left such an indelible impression on his heart and mind that remained throughout his life. It was, in fact, his father's impact that inspired him to think over confession of his guilt. His honourable personality inspired him to be like his father that he recalls, "There was a profession that for a time had thrilled my imagination. To be good! Respected! To be use!" (*The Apprentice* 18). On the contrary, his mother had practical approach; she knew all the necessities of life and its realistic approach to men. She, however, was suffering from Tuberculosis yet her husband was careless about it. While watching the inactive approach of her husband towards her family, she tries to teach Ratan the value of money and its importance in the materialistic world. She suggests him:

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Don't fool yourself; son Man without money was a man without worth. Many things were great in life, but the greatest of them all was money . . . that was the way the world was made . . . if I had everything had no money I would be little better than a beggar's shoes It was not patriotism but money . . . that brought respect and bought security. Money made friends. Money succeeded where all else failed. There were many laws . . . but money was law unto itself." (TA 19)

Ratan's journey of life takes a new shape with his father's death consequently all the hope and certainty of life are destroyed. Later on he is helped by Brigadier's family. Ratan's mother always suggests his to watch the reality of life in his bare eyes but his mentality was already filled father's ideas. His mother knew the theory of 'survival of fittest' of life; one can get the power and reach the height of life only by hoarding money. Making life easier in the modern world, he goes to Delhi in search of a job where he meets many people who were very close friends of his father. He finds all of them very selfish who do not offer him any job. By that time he realises that his father scarification for the country has been useless. He has to suffer a lot in the city like Delhi even he feels very much humiliated at so many places. The beginning and pure life of Ratan, reminds Shakespeare's Hamlet, whose life was full of dreams before the death of his father.

In search of a job, he confronts with the reality of life and somehow manages to live in Delhi in a Sarai with some others who help him in the hour of need. While passing his life in Sarai or inn he thinks that he would create a new world of idealism and goodness, and peaceful atmosphere. Nevertheless, very soon, he realizes that something is perishing all his dreams from its root; his hope is removing by some strange power. He describes it to the boy, "What hopes we start out in! Beggars in princes' garb. Heads bursting with dreams" (TA 23). Ratan's honesty, idealism, and self-respect diminish as soon as he encounters the materialistic world. Sacrifice is replaced by self-interest; courage and honesty are superseded by fraud, cowardice, deceitful, and ideals by deal. His mother's ideas prove a prophetic as soon as he watches the decline of moral values and disruption in goodness, virtues, truth, and rectitude in common persons. Speaking about the ubiquitous moral confusion in the country after the Independence, Tapan Kumar Ghosh cites M.K. Naik's opinion in his book, "The most disturbing phenomenon on the socio-political scene has been steady erosion of the idealism of the days of the freedom struggle, the new gods of self-aggrandizement and affluence having rather too easily dethroned those of selfless service and dedication to a cause" (96). He fails to realize that the modern city life is engulfing his feeling, emotion, imagination, dream, ideas, and a sense of Nihilistic, Kafkaesque, gruesome. The agnostic notion is making a strong place in his heart and mind that he could not realize. In search of job, he wanders so



many places in that metropolitan city but does not get any, since he had not any pull with anyone. He gives an anguished outburst that, “There is nothing in the world as bad as the end of hope. Not even death . . . the slow leakage of hope does other things, thing corrosive and irreversible” (TA 25).

After getting a job at the contract basis, first he loses his father’s idealistic notion and follows the path of materialistic world. His desire leads him to hoard money and get permanent job that he does in the form of deal with the master of his company by marrying his daughter. He becomes over ambitious and brings up an image to get something higher, that he says to the boy, “I was different cut: educated, intelligent, cultured, and it was my right that I should rise in life, to levels higher than the others aspired for” (TA 31). After getting job Ratan’s tendency towards the public life changes into private. At the age of twenty-one his fragile trust of life from his childhood to adolescence seems to be broken. He already knew that the job, he got is not perfect to him. It was his compulsion to set up himself before spending all the money. He could not realize his natural identity which was constructed with the ideology of his father and Mahatma Gandhi. He merely dissolves himself whole heartedly to the encroachment of his career in utter defiance of the basic human values. The materialistic world engulfs him when he leaves the hand of natural vision and innocence of life.

With the passage of the time, Ratan climbs the ladder of triumph and by and by, and becomes senior officer. He becomes a materialistic person and started living selfish life. He becomes immoral insensitive and hypocrite even nothing seems him meaningful and eternal. An exhausted look appears on his face all the time whether in morning, noon, evening, or in night. Almost all his colleagues consider him a branded whore since he has become a shameless person. He always tries to take the advantage of time in which he finds success. Slowly and slowly, he becomes a corrupted person and starts taking bribe, meeting contractors and illegal works only to hoard money. He has lots of desire to get but in fact he did not know that one day this will lead him towards the world of destruction. As Shri Aurobindo writes the desire, “Desire brings always confusion of mind and limitation of the will, an egoistic and distorted view of things, a failure and clouding of knowledge. Desire and its preferences and violences are the first strong root of sin and error. . . desire is the perversion of the spirit- no firm foundation for right thought, action and feeling” (582).

Joshi also focuses the idea of belief and disbelief in God in the novel. Although Ratan had not belief in God, yet he was afraid of Him during greasing his palm. Once taking ten thousand rupees as a bribe from a bankrupt, he looks puzzled and upset even if his consciousness does not allow him to do so. He thinks God, who is omnipresent, is watching us, which refers that we are under surveillance. Even a single work cannot be concealed from Him. Therefore, Ratan goes to the superintendent for consulting it, who says, “You know, Ratan, nothing but



exists. You can be certain only of Him...there was no point in looking for truths aside from the truth of God. Money in this always changed hands; God was only concerned with what one did with the money. Did a man for example, use it for good purpose?" (TA 42-43). In the corrupted and materialistic world he loses his own real identity that generates a kind of fear in him. After indulging himself into materialistic world he sometimes feels all alone since, already he had left the idealistic path of his father. His loneliness converts into fear and dread after watching terrible death of soldiers as well as his close friend Brigadier. Regarding fear J. Krishnamurti writes, "If you do not follow somebody, you feel very lonely. Be lonely then. Why are you frightened of being alone? Because you are faced with yourself, as you are, and you find that you are empathy dull, stupid, ugly and anxious- a petty, Soddy second hand entity face the fact look at it; do not run away from it. The moment you run away fear begins" (23-24).

Today the world is facing the serious crisis of understanding self and following the selfless work. Swami Vivekananda appeals the people around the world to change their thinking and arise and awake towards their spiritual quest. He says, "That society is the greatest where highest truths become practical. That is my opinion. And if the society is not fit for highest truths, make it so- and the sooner, the better. Stand up, men and women, in this spirit, dare to believe in truth, dare to practice the truth!" (WEB). It is said that the climax of materialism is beginning of spiritualism that apparently appears in the novel with Ratan's changing attitude. This occurs when he comes to know about the condition of his close friend Brigadier who was suffering from neurotic problem. Since Indian army had been defeated and more than hundreds of soldiers were died due to the blast of their own bomb whose chief was his friend Brigadier. Therefore Brigadier comes in trouble. Through the close investigation, it is searched out that Ratan is the responsible of all these incidents whose selfish notion and deal of damaged materials for the war led such a dangerous incident. S.P. of the city calls Ratan the police station to confess his mistake but his dilemma and reputation in the society do not allow. When S.P. tells him that if he does not confess his guilt his own friend Brigadier will be court martialised or he could end his life. This sentence of S.P. shakes Ratan's heart and mind. Thus his materialistic approach of life leads him towards world of destruction. Ratan is a very selfish person who always thinks about himself. His delay to confess his wrong deeds leads his friend Brigadier to commit suicide. In fact he does not want to face the reality and frightens to be alone. J. Krishnamurti writes:

If you do not follow somebody, you feel very lonely. Be lonely then. Why are you frightened of being alone? Because you are faced with yourself as you are, and you find that you are empty, dull, stupid, ugly, guilty, and anxious- a petty, shoddy, second-hand entity from it. Face and fact, look at it; the moment you run away fear begins (24).

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Brigadier's death shakes the root of Ratan's conscience. Everything seems him absurd, as if life has stopped at a wasteland where there are no rays of hope and light in his life. With Brigadier's death, a feeling of loneliness and rootlessness, alienation and nothingness take place in him. He becomes like a stone where nothing seems him alive as if he is living on the piles of death. The ultimate realization of spiritual unity of human beings begins with him. Although one may not able to change whole world, but one can change himself since it depends on one's perception. He believes that one can change one's destiny, one's knowledge, awareness of true self only by selfless work and spiritual humanism. He fails to control his mind and starts mourn over Brigadier's death. Brigadier's death somewhat opens the gate of salvation and spiritual vision of life for Ratan. He thinks over to repent over his deed. He confesses to the young boy, "So you see, my friend, here I am, a man without honour; a man without shame . . . Anyway, here I am, middle tagged man without shame or honour. Soon I shall be an old man and then of course, I shall be dead To die, at best, is difficult. Death, in the knowledge of one's shame, in the knowledge that are has made a hash of life's purposes, is unbearable" (TA 141-42).

The present novel also could not remain affected from the philosophy of Buddhism. Joshi adds the concept of 'Shunyata' or 'zero' at the end of the novel, as Ratan believes,

Life is zero, he would say, and he would add, you can take nothing away from zero. . . . You see, you can take things out of zero! You can make it negative. And if my colleague were alive today I should ask him this: would he prefer a negative to a zero. Life might well be a zero, for all know, but it seems to me that if it need not be negative. And it becomes negative when you take out of it your sense of shame, your honour. (TA142)

At the last stage, Ratan follows the path of realization and expiation, his conscience calls him, "Be good, I tell myself. Be good. Be decent. Be of use. They I beg forgiveness" (TA 143). By that time, the images of his father, mother, and Brigadier flash before him, and he opts the way of expiation and salvation so that he could purge his heart and consciousness. He adopts the selfless service of Mahatma Gandhi, moreover, he regards it the greatest religion of man. While confessing his crime he tells the boy that he comes here at the temple and shines shoes of the devotees with the aim of that reducing his sin and finding the path of salvation. He tells the boy that he is really an innocent apprentice who is still learning the meaning of life. As he tells to the boy, "I am learning to be of use. I know it is late in the day. But one must try and not lose heart, not yield, at any cost, to despair" (TA 143). His spiritual penance opens the path of salvation. His expiation sometimes leads the reader towards Indian Philosophy of Bhagavad-Gita, where lord Krishna preaches Arjun about the sacrifice, is means to mental



control and discipline, where one strives to make knowledge penetrate one's whole being. He preaches:

*Sarvanindriyakarmani, pranakarmani capare
Atmasamayasmayogagnau, juhvati jnanadipite.*

*Some again after all the works of their senses and the works of the vital force
into the fire of the yoga of self-control, kindled by knowledge.
(Radhakrishnan194 Chapt. 4, 27)*

Vivekananda also propagates spiritual humanism exclusively refers to loving service to the Divine instead of doing well for others. It includes the whole humanity, regardless of race, country, culture, social affiliation and religion. He further tells,

*“ . . . spiritual freedom insures individuality, critical inquiry, honest doubt,
free choice of the path, and verification of the truth through personal
experience” (WEB).*

Thus, Ratan's devastated materialistic life is revamp through suffering and penance which is probably the vision of the philosophy of whole world. In a sense, the novel portrays the modern man's crisis of faith in arranged universe and in God, where there is no perfection in human beings. As a tormented and confused hero, he does not confess his guilt before S.P. that formulates the novel very tragic. His confession remarks, a sense of recreation of his fall from the zenith of innocence and glory to the nadir of degradation and shame. Therefore, H.M. Prasad remarks that the novel is a sort of the threnody of a tormented soul. Whereas Tapan Kumar Ghosh cites Srinath's opinion regarding the novel, “*The Apprentice* shows a remarkable self-awareness in ruthlessly exposing his over-subtleties; fads, self-deceptions, preoccupations, ego and boredom of the dark phase of his life. it is this along with his present strength to laugh at his meaningless past that gives a kind of complexity to the character of Ratan” (97-98). The characterization of Ratan's journey from materialism to spiritualism explores Joshi's vision of life. Thus, through the novel Joshi probably tries to draw the line between materialistic and spiritualistic life. He also tries to suggest following the mid path of materialism and spirituality for the sake of one's existence and survival.



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