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REVIEW ARTICLE

IMPACT OF REALITY IN THE WORKS OF ARUN JOSHI

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Impact of Reality in the Works of Arun Joshi

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Arun Joshi, winner of the Sahitya Academy Award in 1983, is one of the distinguished Indian English novelists. His fiction delineates the modernity of human condition and explores some fundamental problems of human existence. His fictional world marks a serious attempt at disentangling the convoluted maze, Joshi's metaphor for life with its complexity and inexplicable mystery. In fact, he is a writer by choice and a management expert by training and profession.

Joshi recognizes a reality beyond the mere phenomenal world, a reality that the artist could imagine and capture by giving a consistent form to the shapeless facts of human existence. The themes in most of Joshi's novels are based upon his own actual experiences. However, he is the artist who is not content merely to restate experience in a coldly scientific manner. He feels a need to shape it, a need to discover the reality, which lies hidden in the actuality of his own life.

Most of Joshi's novels are based on real life rather than on a utopian wishful thinking. The author lets the themes develop naturally and does not attempt to warp and distort them. The characters unquestionably suffer from a deep sense of depression and frustration, but eventually emerge heroic and triumphant. The death of Biswas should not be taken as the death of an isolationist but as the triumph of his ideals and principles.

Actually, Joshi's works are about modern man's struggle to find a meaning in life. His 'conscience-torn'¹ characters, as a critic calls them, are almost always trapped in the human predicament. Structurally, his novels follow the quest-motifs and are linear in design, except *The Last Labyrinth* and *The City and the River*, which are circular in design.

Arun Joshi writes for expounding his ideas vis-à-vis understanding his own true self; for he "essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and of (himself)"². His statement echoes the

influence of Albert Camus, Sartre and Kierkegaard. He himself admits this fact indirectly when he says, "I liked *The Plague* and read *The Outsider*"³.

In an interview with Sujata Mathai⁴, Arun Joshi reveals that he was influenced both by Camus and other existential writers on one hand and by Gandhi and the *Bhagvadgita* on the other. Besides these influences, the influence of evolutionary philosophers can also be traced in his writings. It is only the attributes of different philosophies that represent an undercurrent in Joshi's fiction but the characters too sometimes discuss various philosophies and philosophers. For example, the protagonist in *The Foreigner* quotes certain verses from the *Bhagvadgita* and tries to practice the principle of detachment preached therein. Similarly, the characters in *The Last Labyrinth* discuss many philosophers including evolutionists like Darwin and Lord Krishna: "May be Krishan begins where Darwin left off."⁵

Through the personal tragedy of a hero, who embodies most but not all of his culture's values, the author projects the tragedy of dehumanization and degradation and its corroding effect on the individual psyche, which leads each of his male characters toward an existential quest. Be it Sindi Oberoi, Ratan Rathore, Billy Biswas or Som Bhaskar, each is disillusioned ultimately by materialism and seeks to grapple with spiritual realities.

What is most exciting about him is the truth that he attempts a serious probe into the existential problems of mankind by fixing the lens of his focus on certain individualistic characters. In most cases, these characters are the protagonists of the novels – Sindi Oberoi, Billy Biswas, and Ratan Rathore and Som Bhaskar – but the minor ones are also not ignored, e.g., Bilasia, Mr. Khemka, Meena Chatterji. Joshi's

¹ C.N. Srinath, "The Fiction of Arun Joshi". *The Literary Criterion*, XII, 2-3 (1976), p.127

² Arun Joshi's reply to M.R. Dua, dt., September 3, 1971

³ "A Winner's Secrets: An Interview with Purbi Bannerji". *The Sunday Statesman*, February 27, 1983, p.4

⁴ Sujata Mathai, "I'm a Stranger to My Books", *The Times of India*, July 7, 1983, p.8

⁵ Arun Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth* (New Delhi: Vision Books, 1981) p.132

inner but real explorations resemble those of Anita Desai and Chaman Nahal to some extent.

In fact, for Joshi, the fiction is neither a source of entertainment nor an instrument of publicizing some sets of idea. Rather, he grapples with the moments of acute trying real situations in human life. He experiments with the medium of literature for studying man's predicament, particularly in the light of motives responsible for his action and the reaction of his action on his psyche. He says, "My novels are essentially attempts towards 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 exploration"⁶.

Thus the novels of Joshi about the individual struggle in real life become a saga of twentieth-century man's efforts to heave himself out of a nullity thrust upon him by a materialistic culture. In fictionalizing this reality, Joshi achieves two things: first, he offers us a critique of modern society by exposing its ills; and second, he reveals the primitive urges in man lying hidden underneath the 'glossy surfaces'⁷ which he terms as the 'mysterious underworld'⁸, of the human soul.

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⁶ Reply to M.R. Dua, dated September 3, 1971

⁷ Quoted in Sujata Mathai's 'I'm a Stranger to My Books', *The Times of India*, 7 July 1983, p.8

⁸ Sujata Mathai, p.8