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## REVIEW ARTICLE

### SPIRITUAL AGONY AND HUNGER IN THE PROTAGONIST IN THE LAST LABYRINTH BY ARUN JOSHI

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# Spiritual Agony and Hunger in the Protagonist in the Last Labyrinth by Arun Joshi

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Arun Joshi's fourth and Sahitya Academy Winner novel *The Last Labyrinth* (1981) is of god size and is dedicated to the three children of Joshi. Here, the central figure is Som Bhaskar, a multimillionaire married to a woman of his choice, Geeta, who has borne him two children. But Bhaskar is an ever dissatisfied, restless person, who is relentlessly driven by undefined hungers of possession – of an object, a business-enterprise and a woman. Searching for a meaning of life and death, Som confronts with the dilemmas and contradictions.

Som is a wealthy industrialist whose primary goal is to acquire failing industries to enlarge his own business domain. Despite his personal affluence and ever-increasing greed, he claims knowing "that money was dirt, a whore. So were houses, cars, carpets"<sup>1</sup>. He is "married to an extraordinary woman"<sup>2</sup>, completely loving and trusting, but he restlessly hungers after other women for sexual gratification, for control and power.

In fact, the spiritual agony in Som explores the turbulent inner world of this wealthy young Indian guy. Born of rich parents, educated at the world's finest universities and spending a quarter of a million on his education, he has resources enough for the joy of physical living. But quite strangely, he is constantly driven by undefined hungers:

Through the light of my days and the blackness of my nights and the disquiet of those sleepless hours beside my wife, within reach of the tranquillizers, I had sung the same strident song: I want. I want. I want. I want<sup>3</sup>.

Even at thirty-five, he is "a worn-out weary man incapable of spontaneous feeling"<sup>4</sup>. The voids within and without keep him restless all the while:

It is the voids of the world, more than its objects, that bother me. The voids and the empty spaces, within

and without. Voids of caves and voids of the sky; the terrible vacancies of *lokalok*<sup>5</sup>.

Som suffers from the 'hunger of the body' as well as the 'hunger of the soul'<sup>6</sup>, and he wants to satisfy both without sacrificing anything, without making an effort to achieve a balance. He wants to meet someone who can resolve the confusion of his life, his inner disharmony, without being personally involved in what Jung calls "the process of individuation"<sup>7</sup> which is a "process of maturation or unfolding"<sup>8</sup>:

May-be in the arms of my lovers I found a brief respite. But, then, why didn't I go back to them? They were presumably still warm and I still had the nagging fear of cold, cold death<sup>9</sup>.

Som has the means to possess almost anything he wants, but he suffers from "a terrible sense of emptiness"<sup>10</sup>; he experiences meaninglessness and the 'voids within and voids without'<sup>11</sup>. He seems to have everything, yet the "orchestras of discontent"<sup>12</sup> control him.

Knowing not what it is he desires, he is in some ways a facsimile of Saul Bellow's Henderson. But his search does not take him to a merely old Africa but to an infinitely mysterious Banaras. He gets fascinated by an obsolete world, decaying yet urbane – the world of Anuradha and Aftab – and by the labyrinth of the *haveli* they inhabit.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. P.47

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. P.11

<sup>7</sup> See M.L.Von Frans, "The Process of Individuation", *Man and His Symbols*, edited, with an introduction by Carl G. Jung. (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc. 1964) pp.157-254

<sup>8</sup> Jolande Jacobi, *The Psychology of C.G. Jung* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975 [1943]), p.107. Also see Jolande Jacobi, *The Way of Individuation* (New York: New American Library, 1967 [1965]) trans. R.F.C. Hall

<sup>9</sup> Arun Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth*, p.74

<sup>10</sup> R.K. Dhawan, ed. *The Fictional World of Arun Joshi*, New Delhi: Classical Publishing Co., (1968) p.44

<sup>11</sup> Arun Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth*, p.147

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.12

<sup>1</sup> Arun Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth*, New Delhi, Orient Paperbacks, 1981, p.11

<sup>2</sup> Idem

<sup>3</sup> Arun Joshi, *The Last Labyrinth*, p.11

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. P.14

In fact, through Som Bhaskar, Joshi explores the possibility of an equation between two cultures and self-realization. In between, the cultures of the two worlds Som Bhaskar suffers. He reveals that Western values do not provide peace, sublimity and self-fulfillment. Traditional Indian culture and values give us enlightenment and greater force.

A close examination of the personality Som Bhaskar, the protagonist of the novel, reveals spiritual agony, insecurity, inadequacy, hollowness, restlessness and hunger but he does not feel the need for commercial and money conscious civilization. He has no problem with the society; but the contradictory impulses of reason and intuition, doubt and faith, resistance and submission create attention in him. His contradictions make him rootless and give him a feeling of confession.

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