



Arun Joshi: A Literary Artist of Existential Writing

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Article History	Abstract
Received: 06 June 2023 Revised: 05 Sept 2023 Accepted: 14 Oct 2023	<i>Existentialism, a very important literary movement of the twentieth century, occupies a very important place in the world literature. The major proponents of this theory are Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and others. The key features associated with the existential literature are the depiction of sense of alienation, detachment, loneliness, aloofness, anxiety among the denizens of the modern world. Although, to begin with it was a European phenomenon, it soon spread to other parts of the world and impacted the writers all over the world. India also came under its influence. Many Indian writers exhibited existential traits in their works. Arun Joshi was the most prominent of them. His works, especially all novels, very beautifully incorporates existential elements. The present paper intends to study and exhibit the existential traits in the novels of Arun Joshi.</i>
CC License CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0	Keywords: Surgical procedures, Dentistry, Renal failure, Dental treatments, Patients, Health professionals

1. Introduction

Existentialism originated as a philosophical and literary movement in the works of Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. However, it was Sartre who in his thought-provoking philosophical essays gave a true literary framework of existentialism. Later on Albert Camus clearly influenced by him, worked on the literary framework provided by him and produced probably the greatest novels in the realm of existential literature. He wrote *The Stranger*, *The Fall*, *A Happy Death*, *The Plague*. The publication of his novel *The Stranger* marked a watershed moment in the existential literature. He depicted all the key elements associated with existential literature in his works. Although he wrote originally in French, soon the English translations of his works flooded the bookshops. His novels influenced the writer's world over. He played the most important role in the spread of existential literature in the realm of novels

Indian novelists also were bound to be influenced by this phenomenon. Under the influence of their western counterparts, many Indian novelists started to write existential novels. Among those writers Arun Joshi is the most prominent novelist writing on existential themes. He added a whole new dimension to Indian fiction in English, by inserting existential themes and outlook in his novels. Arun Joshi came under the influence of western writers. But the writer who impacted him most in the realm of novel writing was Albert Camus. All the novels of Arun Joshi showcase a very marked and conspicuous influence of Albert Camus. Albert Camus played the role of literary father of Arun Joshi. Even Arun Joshi in an interview with Bannerji acknowledged this fact:

I did read Camus and Sartre. I liked *The Plague* and *The Stranger*. I might have been influenced by them. Sartre I clearly did not understand clearly or like. As for existential philosophers like Kierkegaard, I have never understood anything except odd statements. (5)

Arun Joshi gave to the world literature five great novels. He wrote *The Foreigner*, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, *The Apprentice*, *The Last Labyrinth*, *The City and the River*. Arun Joshi's literary journey

from novels from *The Foreigner* to *The City and the River* marks a study of alienation, aloofness, anxiety, detachment, loneliness inherent in human psychology and thought process. He was not an imaginary writer, writing based on some imaginary recollection of thoughts. He was a hard realist who wrote based on his close observation of the world and its denizens. He observed that modern man is leading a meaningless, absurd life, floundering here and there without any roots. He is in search of his roots and feels alienated. Joshi has very beautifully incorporated and exhibited these themes in his works. All the novels of Arun Joshi are a study of these existential themes. In his novels Arun Joshi has explored the question that all the modern humans are beset with, the question of human existence.

Arun Joshi's first novel *The Foreigner* is a great novel in the field of existential literature. This novel is a beautiful existential study of a detached, lonely, alienated character named Sindi Oberai. He is a true, most perfect embodiment of an existential hero. This novel very beautifully portrays the existential crisis inherent in human beings. Sindi Oberai a Kenyan born person of Indian ancestry is a globe trotter. He then moves to UK and USA. He has been to the different parts of the world. But his tragedy lies in the fact that he is unable to find himself at home anywhere. He feels alienated, lonely, detached everywhere. He is a rootless person, who is unable to identify himself with any country, place or locale. His rootlessness, alienation is not of geography but of soul. He according to Guruprasad is, "rootless, restless, luckless, in a mad, bad and absurd world" (152). He tries to find meaning in his life through his relationships with June, Anna and Kathy. He is "an uprooted young living in later half of century" (130). His girlfriend June also observes this rootlessness and alienation of his and states:

There is something strange about you, you know something distant. I'd guess that when people are with you, they don't feel like they are with a human being. Maybe it's an Indian characteristic but I have a feeling that you would be a foreigner anywhere. (35)

On his return to Delhi, Sheila, a girl, who is a true embodiment of an Indian girl tells him, "you are still a foreigner, you do not belong here" (149). Sindi feels himself alienated wherever he goes. He himself admitted, "my foreignness lay within me" (65).

He has developed a strong notion of detachment. He enters into a very intense sexual relationship with June, but refuses to get involved in a long-lasting relationship like marriage. When June asks him about his ancestry, roots and from where he is? He gives a very vague and detached answer, "Everybody always asked me the same silly question. Where are you from? As if it really mattered a great deal where I was from" (23). His this strange thought process and wrong notion of detachment leads to the death of two innocent souls, June and his friend Babu. June forced by Sindi's reluctance to marry her, finds solace in the company of Babu. But Babu when comes to know that she is pregnant of Sindi loses his temper and in extreme anger drives himself to death. June too dies while going through abortion. So, Sindi's alienation, detachment, aloofness leads to the death of two innocent and pure souls.

Arun Joshi's second novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is a great existential novel. The key existential elements like alienation, detachment, loneliness, aloofness is very beautifully exhibited in this novel. Billy Biswas the hero of this novel belongs to a very upper-class family. Belonging to an upper-class family leads him to have a look at upper class society from very close quarters. He being a noble soul is totally dissatisfied with the vague, artificial life led by the people belonging to upper society. He feels detached, alienated and lonely in their company. His soul yearns for the meaning of life and seeks the life of a primitive in the company of nature. His interest in anthropology for his higher studies established this belief. He is an excellent example of a primitive human who finds himself at loss in the modern artificial, upper class society. The narrator of this novel is Romi, a very close friend of Billy, who knows him inside out. But still even he is sometimes bewildered and fascinated by this unbounded love for mysterious, unprivileged way of life. Billy Biswas is a very noble soul who wants a world which is not selfish and gives respect to all the classes. After attaining his education, despite all the privileges that he had, owing to his rich parentage, he feels restless, isolated in the modern artificial society. Billy's existential yearning is very beautifully described by his friend Romy in the following lines:

. . . it is not so much because I claim to have understood him as it is on account of a deep and unrelieved sense of wonder that in the middle of the twentieth century, in the heart of Delhi's smart society, there should have lived a man of such extraordinary obsessions. (7)

His interest for finding answers to the questions Who am I? Where I have come from? What is the purpose of my existence? Always kept him restless. His marriage with a beautiful, cultured girl Meena is unable to soothe his restless spirit. The tribal girl Bilasia for him is lady, in whose arms he finds solace. He like a true existential hero chooses his own path and leaves his family and his sophisticated life and chooses to live in the hills with the tribal people and his true love Bilasia. There he finds his true happiness and leads the life of a tribal, indulging in merry making, drinking, eating and dancing. But modern society's denizens in his pursuit reach there and in the firing that ensues, a bullet hits him and he dies. So, a noble existential soul like Billy, who wishes to live his life on his own terms, in confrontation with the artificial society, dies in the pursuit of true happiness.

Arun Joshi's novel *The Apprentice* is in the form of a monologue. It is the story of Ratan, who faced with the realities of life, finding himself alienated and detached, becomes an apprentice to the corrupt way of society. Ratan though like a true existential character chooses his own destiny, but he also realizes that he can't escape the consequences of his actions. He belongs to a family, where his father an idealist, a Gandhian believed in the high moral values. But his mother a pragmatic lady fed up by his father's idealism teaches him to be worldly. After his father's death, the whole responsibility of nurturing his family fell upon his shoulders. He leaves for city and with great difficulty gets a temporary job in war purchases department as a clerk. There he realizes that he can progress only through compromises. He chooses a path for himself and starts to indulge in the corrupt practices. He earned a lot of money by becoming party to the unscrupulous and corrupt dealings. One of such corrupt deals lead to purchase of substandard war equipment, that leads to heavy losses to the army and nation in the war. Ironically it led to the court martial of his dearest friend Brigadier from army and his subsequent suicide in utter agony. Ratan realizes the folly of his past actions and decides to undertake repentance. It also brings to fore a key existential feature that no human action can be performed in isolation. One has to bear the consequences of one's actions and one cannot shy away from the responsibility of his actions.

Arun Joshi's next novel *The Last Labyrinth* is a story of millionaire businessman, Som Bhaskar who despite having access to all the luxuries of the world is not happy and satisfied with his life. Arun Joshi has very beautifully illustrated the theme of alienation through the character of Som Bhaskar. Som is spiritually alienated and feels a sense of loss, detachment and restlessness. Som Bhaskar is an excellent representative of the modern man leading a confused, isolated and alienated life. He is struggling between existence and reality. The novel is an excellent existential study in quest to find the meaning of life. Despite having access to all the luxuries that world can offer, a beautiful wife who has given birth to two beautiful children, he is still yearning for more and finds the world meaningless. He deeply falls in love with a lady named Anuradha and wants to possess her at all costs. Som's crisis of soul can be summed up in the following lines of the novel, "I want, I want" (60). This craving for more and more remains with him throughout his life. So, he turns out to be an excellent existential character.

Arun Joshi's last novel *The City and the River* is an excellent existential novel. But this novel is different from the other existential novels of Arun Joshi in terms of treatment of theme, plot and structure. This novel deals with the whole city suffering from existential crisis of identity and survival in the face of a hostile enemy. In other novels of Arun Joshi an individual is shown as suffering from existential crisis. The existential themes dealt with in this novel are alienation, detachment, anxiety, loneliness, aloofness.

4. Conclusion

So, from the above discussion we can arrive at the conclusion that Arun Joshi occupied a very prominent place in the existential literature. Influenced by the western novelists in general and Albert Camus in specific he gave to the world literature some excellent existential novels.

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