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The Problem of Alienation and The Quest for Identity in Joshi's Fiction

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Abstract:

The nineteenth century prose literature is very meager and it would be futile to research the traces of crisis of identity in the characters present in those works. Even the big three of the Indian English novelists, such as Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao, created no major characters suffering from the crisis of identity of some sort or the other. Sometimes these points emerge in R. K. Narayan when he deals with the discrepancies arising out of the cultural chasm and the generation gap. Manohar Malgaonkar, Kamala Markandeya, Balchandra Rajan, Chaman Nahal, Ruth Prewar Jhabwala, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Salman Rushdie are prominent of the novelists creating characters faced with the problem of alienation and the crisis of identity. The works of these novelist have been referred to in a sort of sweeping survey after which an attempt has been made to concentrate upon Arun Joshi's fictional creation,

The fictional world of Arun Joshi postulates the clash between alienated self and the socio-cultural forces. The protagonists of his novel are subjected to extreme social, cultural and psychological pressures. The inter-generational tensions engendered with the changing ethos make increasing demands on the individual and contribute in creating a void which is nothing but chaotic feeling of rootlessness in life, incessantly haunting their psyche and corroding every sphere of their life. This awareness of rootlessness and consequential anxiety is the keynote of Joshi's existential vision of the plight of modern men. The protagonists discover the meaning and value of life probing through the dark mossy labyrinths of the soul. This search for identity is the leitmotif of Arun Joshi's novels.

Joshi's protagonists are confused men who find themselves participating in a wild and rat race with no clear goal in mind. The economic drudgery, social pressure, the dissolution of old faiths and dogmas and uncertain loyalties mercilessly crumples their life and wounds their psyche. So they adopt a cynical attitude towards life and established social norms and values.



Introduction:

The novel was originated in Europe. With the establishment of European colonies it stepped into the non-European countries. Though fiction was the last appear on the Indian English literature Canvas it started overtaking most other forms of literature. The Indian fiction writer uses this genre as a career for their indigenous experiences and culture.

The earliest novels were attempted by Kailash Chunder Dutt and Shoshee Chunder Dutt rather in the form of tales than novels proper and were published in journal. It was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee who introduced the novel in its proper form in India with publication of his first and only novel in English Ramanujan's Wife.

A Surprising thing regarding the development of Indian English novel is the emergence of women novelist, however, female education was not being encourage and it took enough time to spread. Before the turn of 19th century mainly three female writers figured prominently. These are Toru Dutt, who attempted and unfinished novel *Bianka* or *The Young Spanish maiden* romantic love story set in English; Krupabai Satthianandan wrote *Kamla*, a story of Hindu life and *Shagun*, the story of native Christian life and Shevantibai M. Nikmbe, who produce *Ratanbai*, a sketch of Bombay High caste Hindu young wife.

In the thirties of the last century the most remarkable event on the realism of Indian English fiction was emergence of the great trio Mulk Raj Anand, RK Narayan, Raja Rao. Each of them with their own creative efforts and their own characteristics way exposed the possibilities of Indian English fiction.

Among the contemporary Indian English novelist, Arun Joshi has highlighted most effectively some of the eternal metaphysical and ethical questions. Joshi went to Indian philosophy for the solution of the crisis of existence created in his novels.

Arun Joshi's place among the major Indian English novelist of the twentieth century is undisputed. Joshi's premature demise in 1993 cut short his promising literary career. He could contribute to Indian English fiction only Five novels; *The Foreigner*, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, *The Apprentice*, *The Labyrinth*, and *The River and The City*.



The modern world is characterized by mechanization, organization and growing vitality due to changing values of depersonalization, Self misgiving, delusion, rootlessness, discontent and other maladjustment. All these have made alienation a part of our life first alienation from the society and second alienation from the self. In the fictional world of Arun Joshi the question of self and his existence are two points to be proved.

Arun Joshi adds a new dimension to the genre of Indian fiction in English by introducing the theme of alienation in his novels. His fictional world is characterized by the alienation of the individual shown through a crisis of the self in an emotionally disturb environment.

Alienation is one of the greatest problems of the twentieth century. The post-world war period has been an age of great spiritual crisis causing a sense of rootlessness isolation and meaninglessness in the modern mind. The twentieth century man is shocked to realize that he is no longer the master of his destiny and that there are forces which threaten to wither his life and his hopes and aspirations.

The Vedanta philosophy, the teaching of the Geeta and the way of life taught by Mahatma Gandhi had a great influence on Arun Joshi. This impact is not casual or coincidental it seems to form the philosophical and ethical fabric of some of his major work. In the *Foreigner* Sindi Oberoi a ruthless hero who seeks detachment from the world at last come to realize the actual meaning of the theory of detachment as depicted in the Geeta.

In the strange case of Billy Biswas the protagonist Billy Biswas goes to the hills in the lap of nature like the seers in Indian legends and scriptures in search of his spiritual height and to get inner peace. Sindi in *The Foreigner* and Billy Biswas in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* seem to be exploring things, trying to find out their own bearings and moorings. They are disillusioned and convinced that it would be pointless for them to try to participate in the indifferent Anglicized social world of India. They are unable to relate themselves meaningfully to their surroundings and consequently with divided personalities they find themselves helpless in reconciling with themselves. Billy and Sindi represent the predicament of the seeker – Who am I? Where am I from? And they oscillate between the modern and the primitive.

In the city and the river Joshi reveals his cultural and spiritual ethos.



So far as Arun Joshi treatment of the theme of alienation is concern, it is unique and different from his other contemporaries. As it would be evident from the detailed analysis of his novels in the following chapter that though he views relation as an extension problem, that diagnoses and solution of the same are different from those of his western counterpart. Joshi has the implicit backing of rich cultural tradition and therefore the solution that he seems to suggest to the problem of alienation it is based on that. But he is against sentimental extolling of Indian philosophy and values of life. He rather articulates through his novels his genuine faith in the integrity of the primitive values of sensuousness, passion and action. He is more emphatically concerned with the search for the essence of human living and the need for the acculturation of man to establish him back to his roots, self and peace. Thus Joshi marks a definite departure from the general run of India English novelist in many ways.

Conclusion:

The crises of identity, alienation, rootlessness, those of ethnic, racial, linguistic, moral, political and others have become as fashionable today as was the crisis arising out of melancholy in the seventeenth century English literature in which it was a fashion to pose melancholy. Joshi's philosophical burden also verges upon existentialism. His fondness for the theme of alienation and the crisis of identity is the result of his existentialist outlook. It is almost paradoxical that our scientific and industrial civilization has led the contemporary man to the edge of doom.

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