

IDENDI CRICIS IN ARUN JOSHI'S NOVELS**C. Kannan***Asst. Professor of English, Yadava College, Madurai-14***Dr. C. Raju***Associate Professor, Yadava College, Madurai-14*

ARUN JOSHI'S novels shivel a well-defined vision life and an awareness of some of the serious problems of our time. He does not write according to any set formula nor are his novels directed towards propagating any theory or doctrine. He does not proffer any prescriptions. His real job is to expose a condition and make people think about it. He, however, gives some how to rouse oneself and meet challenges of existence. The sources of his stories are real human experience but he transmutes these experiences in terms of fictional art. Joshi looks upon his novels basically as attempts at self-expression and self-understanding.

The crisis of identity as an offshoot of alienation is one of the agonizing experiences of modern man. Some of the philosophers and thinkers have called the present age to be age of alienation. Many agonizing aspects of modern life such as the generation gap, the anti-war movement, the hippie phenomenon, the credibility gap, the compartmentalization of modern man's life, the stunting of personal development and ragging sense of meaninglessness of life and others have made the modern man lose his confidence. This has resulted in his estrangement from the self the family and the society. He is not able to grasp the meaning of his existence in a hostile world. He is a stranger and an exile. He feels lost and finds no solace in religion and philosophy which all thrust him towards becoming senseless, absurd and useless.

This age of alienation is also one of anxiety. It is paradoxical that despite scientific and industrial achievements, the contemporary man is doomed to find himself in a tragic predicament. Amidst this situation, man becomes or feels like a stranger not only from the outside world but also from his own self. This seems to be root cause of crisis of identity which is one of the factors of the crisis of the present. Man has been plunged into uncertainty, perplexity and unsettlement. There is confusion, rootlessness, frustration, disintegration, meaninglessness prevailing in the human psyche. This is also true to the case of the Indian ethos which is perplexed by a growing sense of rootlessness maintaining itself as a crisis of identity. Modern man, living amid affluence, leads a joyless existence. "The typicality of modern life and that of the heroes of Arun Joshi's fiction are the existential encounter with nothingness".

20th Century modern existentialism, taken as a whole is a philosophical movement of the twentieth century deadlight with man's disillusionment and despair in the modern world. After the two world wars, the world was torn into pieces and existencialisms flourished then as a philosophical movement and existentialist thinkers begin to define anxiety, anguish, guilt, dread, despair, death and meaninglessness, etc... Of the post-war world in their own ways and achieved a compelling effect on the thought of the literary artists all over the world. Broadly, there are three groups of the existentialist philosophers- theistic, atheistic and absurdist.

Arun Joshi is an outstanding INDO-ANGLIAN writer of human predicament. In spite of the scientific and technological developments which have increased the sources of his pleasure and comfort, the contemporary man finds himself in a tragic mess. He is estranged from his inner most nature as well as his fellow men and has nothing within or without him to depend upon in the moments of crisis. The disillusionment of the present day urban civilization which results in the withering of lives, hopes and joys is powerfully projected in the novels of Arun Joshi. In his protest against the dehumanizing influence of our civilized life and emphasis on the worth and dignity of the individual, Arun Joshi has close affinity with the existential writers of the west.

"Arun Joshi, like the existential writers, is seriously concerned with man's feeling of anxiety arising from a sense of futility in life". The theme of anxiety arising out of the chaos prevalent in modern life appears in almost all the novels of Arun Joshi. To quote the words of Saxena: "Man's rootlessness and the consequential loneliness and anxiety is the keynote of Arun Joshi's unique vision of the predicament of modern man in contemporary Indo-English fiction". In fact, 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.

Arun Joshi, sensitively alive to predicament of modern man, has ably delineated unfortunate consequences of the absence of a values and faith in life. In truth, he has been rarely excelled in exemplifying the existential dilemma of the present-day world. He has portrayed the various dimensions of pressures exerted by the complex character and demands of the society in which modern man is doomed to live. "This awareness of man's rootlessness and the consequential anxiety is the keynote of Joshi's unique vision of the plight of modern man". He has added new dimension of Indian fiction in English by his new experimentations in themes and techniques.

Arun Joshi, through his fiction, broke new grounds in his search for new themes. He has "renounced the larger world in favors of the inner man" and has engaged him self in "a search for the essence of human living". Being an outstanding novelist dealing with the existential dilemma of modern man, Joshi has chartered in all his give novels the crisis of

the modern man. Modern man fails to understand today the very purpose behind life and the relevance of his existence in a hostile world. The modern scientific advancements have also added not only to his physical comforts but also to his mental discomforts. Hence, he finds himself in a tragic mess.

The twentieth century becomes an age of alienation with man in confusion, prostration, disintegration, disillusionment and meaninglessness. This meaninglessness of human existence has corroded human life from various quarters. Further, he is also aware that he is no longer the master of his destiny and there are forces that threaten his life and hope. He feels helpless and is anxiety ridden. The existential states of disappointment, isolation and meaninglessness have received adequate attention in the West. All Western writers are concerned about the unfortunate spiritual predicament of the modern man. Certain Indian novelists have made significant efforts to deal with the predicament of modern man. "The work of Arun Joshi in particular reads like the *SPRITUAL ODYSSEY* of the twentieth century man who has lost his spiritual mooring. Despite some differences in their approach, all of Joshi's heroes are men engaged in the meaning of life". Joshi in fact, has tried to project through his protagonists their crises of the urbanized and industrialized modern civilization.

Arun Joshi's first novel *THE FOREIGNER* written in the form of things past, is about Sindi Oberoi a rootless Youngman. Joshi shows a sensitive awareness the agony of loneliness in uncovering the psychological conflicts in the character of Sindi in his quest for meaning through a maze of relationships that compel him to grapple the metaphysical problems detachment and involvement. The novel explores in depth the problems of Sindi Oberoi. He is always lonely and ill at ease in the world in which he has to live. He belongs to no country, no people and regards himself as " an uprooted young man living in the latter half of the twentieth century".

Sindi's detached view of the world; his typical relationships with others make him very much akin to Albert-Camus' *Meursault THE OUTSIDER*, as the title of the novel *THE FOREIGNER* also suggests. Born in Kenya of an *INDIAN FATHER* and *BRITISH MOTHER*, both of whom died early, Sindi is brought up by his uncle. "Sindi feels himself a Foreigner, an outsider, a stranger, not just because he is a Kenya born Indian living in the United States and later in India without home or family but because he is obsessed by the impermanence of things. Sindi goes as an engineering student to Boston, where at a foreign student's party he meets June, attractive young American women, with whom he has a short-lived but passionate love-affair. His loneliness is apparent to anyone who meets and talks to him. Both June in America and Sheila in India feel the detached nature of Sindi. Sindi is alien everywhere physically as well as metaphorically. In the beginning of their first encounter.

Sindi finally starts working strenuously, and with the co-operation of all the employees sets the establishment in order. He involves himself with a positive detachment because "The fruit of it was not his concern". Joshi's second novel called THE STRANGER CASE OF BILLY BISWAS also develops the theme of man's feeling of anxiety and alienation in the present century. "The novel offers an interesting contrast between the contemporary civilized life and the unsophisticated primitive life". The novel is critical of modern life that has ravaged human spirit and deprived man of his humanity and admires the simplicity and warmth of primitive life that is still capable of revitalizing man. The protagonist Billy, being aware of the deeper layers of his personality, feels totally alienated from the superficial reality of life. So renouncing his past, his family and the everyday world, the rich, sophisticated and U.S. educated Billy goes in search of the meaning of life. The novel probes into his "dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languishes for ever, hidden from the dazzling light of the sun". Thus Joshi, in his novel, introduces an unusual protagonist who suffers from a sense of alienation about the world around him, and finally opts into a primitive whorl. Although Billy feels alienated from the modern civilization, he seeks and finds fulfillment in his communion with the tribals. There is, however, an unmistakable sense of affirmation in Billy's painful journey from alienation to community. As such, Joshi's elemental concerns are alienation and community.

The strange case of Billy Biswas is that Billy, being the son of a Supreme Court judge and educated in Britain and America, is harried by a sense of alienation from the human civilization. Finally he settles down in the midst of the hill tribes. Billy believes in the order of primitive life which is closer to nature. It is in this primitive tribal life that he finds his own fulfillment and the essence of human existence. What impresses in the novel is Billy's passion to penetrate deep into the human psyche and not just skim the surface realities of the civilized world. Billy is married to mina, unusually pretty, aristocratic girl. But soon after having a son by her, the primitive urge in him, which he has always pushed into background, becomes irresistible. Within two years communication between the husband and the wife fails. Billy sums into their predicament.

Joshi's third novel, THE APPRENTICE, also depicts, though less exhaustively, the plight of the contemporary man, who is "sailing about in a confused society without norms, without direction, without even, perhaps, a purpose". The protagonist Ratan Rathore realizes that there is no escape from society or self. Rathore, who, out of sheer exhaustion of joblessness and privation, is forced to shed honesty and the old-world morality of his father to become an "apprentice" to the corrupt civilization. One is alienated in this "phony" world unless one accepts and adjusts to "the guilt" of the modern society in order to belong. Ratan, after his initial hesitation, yields completely to the corruption of modern

society and thrives on it. It takes almost lifetime to reject the "petrified and frozen world of civilization for he is the child of a double inheritance.

Ratan begins his life with high ambitious ideals to the honest, true to his self and make a mark in the world like his father. But, finding himself a misfit, he had to abdicate his true self to fit in the corrupt society and eke out a living. "He is thus alienated from his true self and his ideals. In his feverish pursuit of careerism, he submits himself to all sorts of corruption that the modern world offers". He leads a frustrated and exhausted family life. Though he accumulates more money, he feels restless and dissatisfied. His corrupt deal at the end costs the life of the Brigadier, his closest friend. He realizes the gravity of his sin. At last his alert consciousness alienates him from the degenerated society.

Finally, Ratan's sense of individuality comes into conflict with his life of hypocrisy. He realizes that one can not live for oneself because no human act is performed in isolation and without consequence. Therefore each act should be performed with a sense of responsibility. So, feeling a sense of alienation and a quest to understand the meaning of life, he undergoes the sternest apprenticeship in the world. Symbolically he starts at the lowest-dusting the shoes of the congregation outside the temple every morning on his way to the office. "Thus he would like to expiate his sins of cowardice, dishonesty and even indirect murder. He learns the lessons of humility".

THE LAST LABYRINTH, Arun Joshi's last novel, narrated in the first-person singular, is the story of Som Bhaskar, a wealthy young industrialist, who relates the events of his life in flashback. Like Sindi and Ratan, Som also belongs to the upper strata of society and his quest of life too, like theirs for the meaning of life. The progression from alienation to community does not occur here as the theme of the novel. As Joshi has conformed to Gopal reddy alienation of my characters in the novel which I have written so far ultimately leads them back to community. I realized that in my latest novel the last labyrinth for the first time this does not happen". The novel deals with the theme of alienation that simply presents the hollowness of modern- aristocratic world. Som Bhaskar represents the contemporary western-education, affluent young man who feverishly searching for his roots discovers in the process a haunting emptiness and void. He gets mentally shattered, morally degenerated and physically exhausted with dreams and insomnia.

Joshi here expresses his concern for the modern man who is turning out to be more materialistic and his lust for materialism indulges him in endless pursuit of wealth and power. Som Bhaskar is married to woman of his choice, who has borne him two children and is "all that a wife could be", yet he "goofed it all up" and is relentlessly driven into indefinite hungers. Amidst intriguing juxtaposition, the novel plunges into a haunting world of life, love, god and death, the greatest of all mysteries "the last Labyrinth". As Pathak comments: "the novel raises some pertinent questions about life and its meaning and tries

it unravel the still unresolved mysteries of God and Death". As it is typical of Arun Joshi, THE LAST LABYRINTH is the connoisseur of the underworld of the soul. The protagonist Som Bhaskar is a troubled soul. He is an insomniac who writes out the novel to relieve the tension in his soul for a somewhat therapeutic purpose as he uses his womanizing and his boozing. He has a morbid urge for knowing, in which he is a greater incarnation of Sindi or Billy Biwas. This is a sure sign of the schism in the soul. He suffers from voids within, as he puts it in his narrative, Even though married to a beautiful wife, Geeta, whom he loved, and who gave him two children, he is existentially alone, and all his business wizardly is existentially purposeless.

The City and The River, Joshi's latest novel, continues to treat the predicament of his characters in a hostile world. "THE CRISIS OF THE INDIVIDUAL, however, has been replaced by the socio-political crisis of the city, which is a conglomerate of individuals and can be said to represent the whole humanity". Here Joshi poses significant questions about identity, commitment and faith. He approaches these questions from the political viewpoint. The novel is a political allegory and it can be read as a commentary on the relevance of meaning in life. The action of the novel takes place in a nowhere city. The two important characters are the ageless Yogeshwara and the nameless-one who symbolize the processes of regeneration and decay. The main plot of the novel revolves around the familiar theme of power struggle. The Grandmaster, who rules the city by the river, is determined to become its unchallenged king. His intentions are reinforced by the existence of an old prophecy. There is rebellion by the boatmen, who are their allegiance to the river. They are willing to die for their allegiance for the river is a sacred symbol of the divine mother. The Grandmaster and the boatmen represent the urge to dominate and the desire to assert one's identity respectively. The eternal conflict continues and a new city is born. It is this repetition of things which imparts meaning to life. Without this continuity all human activities would become futile. Thus Arun Joshi's novels portray the identity crisis of modern man to discover the meaning of life. His protagonists are lonely and misfits in the world in which they have to live and face the meaninglessness of life. Though they are not religious, they are humble enough to learn lessons taught to them by life's problems. Joshi also suggests a different solution in each of his novels. His novels nevertheless go a long way in affirming the value of meaningfulness on life. Thus we may come to conclude as Arun Joshi is a writer of Diaspora reflections in his works and characterized by alienating by his characters and identity crisis of characters in each novel. Arun Joshi not at all a reflective writer but his works may elaborate a small character into the big themes. Though his diasporic ideas does not indulge in his major works, but Arun Joshi rightly portrays that every human being in a character role that role will reveal all major themes in the world. Thus we analyze his works in some other manner.