

# Research Innovator

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# Research Innovator

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## CONTENTS

Sr. No.	Author	Title of the Paper	Page No.
1	Chiya Parvizpur & Fazel Asadi Amjad	The Unconscious Criticality of Wright's Native Son to Capitalism	1
2	B.A. Tina Zahel & Prof. Dr. Franz Josef Gellert	Ageing Workers in SMEs and the Influence on Corporate's Internationalization	12
3	Mimita Sachdeva	Life Skills and the Autistic Child	26
4	Talluri Mathew Bhaskar	The Fire and the Rain: A Myth Retold	29
5	Dr. Ankita Khanna	Assessments beyond Writing: An Attempt to Provide a Fair Chance to the Learners	44
6	Dr. Meetakshi Pant	Total Factor Productivity and Financial Structure of Steel Industry	49
7	Ashish Kumar	Carelessness of Man's Mind: a Study of Albert Camus's the Stranger	62
8	Dr. Manju Lalwani Pathak	Debunking the image of Sindhis as Refugees	68
9	Rita Malache	Approaches of tribal development: A critical Perspective	72
10	Prof. Dr. Patil Vijaykumar Ambadasrao	Wendy Wasserstein's An American Daughter: An Analysis	82

11	Dr. Khandekar Surendra Sakhar	Portrayal of Relations and Globalization in Kiran Desai's Novel 'The Inheritance of Loss'	89
12	Dr. Rakseh Rai	A Study of Social Intelligence among College Students of Tura (West Garo Hills) in Meghalaya	95
13	Prof. Vijay D. Songire	Male Sufferers in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye, Sula and Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things	109
14	Prof. R.Y. Shinde & Dr. Archana Durgesh	Vijay Tendulkar's His Fifth Woman: A Brief Introduction	116
15	Prof. (Dr) Mala Tandon	Alternate Schooling and Teacher Education: Issues, Challenges and Priorities	122
16	Dr. J. Thirumaran	A study on three leading stochastic Optimization methods in simulation	130
17	Dr Tanu Tandon Mr. Durgesh Pathak	Media and Education: Pathways to End Women Violence	135
18	K. Ravi Sankar & Dr. V. B. Chithra	The Inner Awareness of the Human Soul: A Study of the Apprentice	139
19	Dr. Vitthal V. Parab	A Socio-Literary Perspective in the Novels of Jhumpa Lahiri & Bharati Mukherjee	147

**The Inner Awareness of the Human Soul: A Study of the Apprentice****K. Ravi Sankar***Research Scholar JNTUA Ananthapuramu, (A.P.) India***Dr. V. B. Chithra***Assistant Professor of English JNTUACEA Ananthapuramu, (A.P.) India***Abstract**

Arun Joshi (1939-1993) was born in a well-educated family in 1939 in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. His father was a famous botanist and rose up to the post of the Vice-Chancellor, first of the Punjab University and later, of Benaras Hindu University. Arun Joshi had a brilliant academic career. Joshi attended the schools in India and the United States of America. He got an engineering degree from the University of Kansas and further he acquired a degree in the Industrial Management from M.I.T. Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1960. Arun Joshi worked in a Mental Hospital in 1957 in the United States of America where his uncle was a Psychiatrist who dealt with chronic psychological cases. His sensitive mind was impressed so much that one can find his chief protagonists describing an inner life within the inner world of the soul divided against itself, its aspirations and conflicting urges turned on the will and action with the novelist's searchlight carefully scrutinizing it all in full focus.

Arun Joshi's the third novel *The Apprentice* (1974) exposes a severe criticism of a rotten society with its meaningless pursuit of success and career, unscrupulous amassing of wealth in defiance of the sanctified values of its tradition like honesty, integrity of character, selfless service and honour. The novel is structurally similar to that of Albert Camus *The Fall*, also depicts the pitiable plight of the contemporary man explores deeper into the inner awareness of the human soul. It depicts the tormented attempt of a guilt-stricken individual to retrieve his innocence and honour.

**Key Words:** The Apprentice - Ratan Rathore - Guilt-stricken individual - Perfidy - Chicanery - Cowardice - Corruption

*The Apprentice* (1974) Arun Joshi's the third novel explores deeper into the inner awareness of the human soul. It depicts the tormented attempt of a guilt-stricken individual to retrieve his innocence and honour. In all his novels, Joshi describes the painful predicament of his protagonists. In his first novel *The Foreigner* the protagonist Sindi Oberoi, an alienated rootless young man searches for his identity and roots, withdraws himself from all humankind. Finally, when his

vision is clear, he returns to the human world from detachment to attachment, "Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved."<sup>1</sup> The Second novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, describes the withdrawal of Billy Biswas the protagonist, from the civilized society and emotionally dehydrated "upper-upper crust of Indian Society"<sup>2</sup> which he belongs to. He finds himself the primitive society of the tribals into which Billy vanishes deliberately. And in *The Apprentice* (1974)

Arun Joshi depicts the protagonist, Ratan Rathor, estranged from his unpolluted self and as a victim of money-minded corrupt society. Finally, he tries his amendment through humility and penance by wiping the shoes of the temple- visitors daily. In *The Apprentice* Joshi exposes a severe criticism of a rotten society with its meaningless pursuit of success and career, unscrupulous amassing of wealth in defiance of the sanctified values of its tradition like honesty, integrity of character, selfless service and honour. The novel is structurally similar to that of Albert Camus *The Fall*, also depicts the pitiable plight of the contemporary man “sailing about in a confused society without norms, without direction, without even perhaps, a purpose.”<sup>3</sup> (74)

*The Apprentice* is a confessional novel wherein the narrator- protagonist unfolds the story of his life in the form of an internal monologue. Ratan Rathor, who is both the hero and the anti-hero of the novel, probes into his inner life and exposes the perfidy, chicanery, cowardice and corruption of his own character at the mock-heroic novel. He is neither a rebel like Billy Biswas nor a rootless foreigner like Sindi Oberoi. He is a practical man who, getting his idealism shattered in the corrupt society, proposes to survive by sycophancy and practically adapts himself to the mysterious ways of the world. The novel is both a treatise on current social and political scene and lament of a distressed soul. The novel reminds us of Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times*. Here the social reality becomes the nucleus of the novel wherein Ratan, like Sindi and Billy, comes out yet another reflective introvert whose life corresponds to bitter social norms and consequently undergoes

suffering and, of course, salvation towards the end. The novel enacts three stages in the human-divine comedy of Ratan. The pre-independence period is the dawn, the period of idealism, the phase of innocence, the post-independent India is the broad daylight of experience, the inferno of corruption, the last part the area of expiation, and is the door to the purgatory. Thus, the novel stands as psychological study of innocence, experience and expiation of the protagonist’s life.

The title of the novel, seemingly ordinary, in fact affords a clue to its nature and significance. The *Apprentice* deepens the meaning of the familiar world ‘apprentice’ to cover the entire effort of the protagonist to learn how to live a life both meaningful and purposeful, in the best sense of the term, in a society where all values seem to have been lost and there is actually none to guide, no master to whom one can attach himself for his guidance and a sense of direction. An apprentice is “a person who work for an employer for a fixed period of time in order to learn the particular skills needed in their job,” “ a beginner, a novice”.<sup>4</sup> He is essentially a diligent learner of a skill, craft, or trade leading to a vocation in the sense of a profession, a means of livelihood. But to a serious learner, whether of a craft or art, the process of learning can be never-ending. No one with any conscience can ever say that he as fully mastered what he set out of to learn. In this sense he remains beginner, a novice who has miles to go. For such a person learning itself becomes a vocation, an all absorbing activity which gives meaning and significance to his life. Joshi employs the world ‘apprentice’ in this broadened sense of the term in the novel.

Ratan the apprentice of the novel himself explains in what sense he regards himself an apprentice in his middle age, and the nature, purpose and goal of the apprenticeship he has been piously pursuing:

“What am I apprenticed to?  
If I only exactly knew! Or  
if I could put into words  
what I do know. But life  
runs on approximations and  
if an approximation will do,  
you could say that *I am  
learning to be of use*. I  
know it is late in the day.  
But one must try and not  
lose heart, not yield, at any  
cost, to despair. - - - what is  
to be of use? - - - I have  
only rough answer again - -  
- *I would be happy if I  
could do what do as best as  
I can. Without vanity and  
without expectations and  
also without cleverness.*  
(P.143)

Though we see the confessional note in Joshi's other novels here it is only the central concern of the protagonist. What he chooses to do as best he can is to “learn to wipe the shoes well” (p.144) of the visitors to the temple every day. He is fully aware how hardship and humiliating this exercise. This unusual apprenticeship is not only not going to be easy but its results, which are expected to be mental, moral and spiritual, are not yielded easily and quickly either. Ratan is aware of it too. Having lived a life of false values for long, he has to educate himself from scratch in those true values of life which make life meaningful and purposeful. Further, to be of use not to himself but to others, the

community and society, he has to forget himself and think of others and his responsibility towards them. There is no end to this apprenticeship and Ratan may well remain an apprentice all through his life.

Joshi demonstrates that there is no self without society and that they are mutually dependent on one another. Even if one feels alienated or estranged from it, one has to return to it and accept one's responsibilities and obligations to it for one's own good as well as that of society. Sindi Oberoi in *The Foreigner* had no roots anywhere and withdraws himself from all involvement in society until he could identify himself with Muthu and others of the Khemka enterprises, view him as one among them, and participate in their lives by helping them. Ratan on the other hand belongs to a nation and enjoys the security provided by his family and society in which he has his roots. But he feels alienated and estranged from them for a time, partly due to his circumstances and largely because of what he does and doesn't do for want of a sense of direction and strength of conviction to choose the right course of action that is before him. He develops a sense of guilt which increases and becomes an unbearable burden as time passes by, filling his soul with torment and torture. Although he lives and moves amidst people, he feels lonely, morally isolated and estranged from them all and even from his essential self. He has none to communicate with to share to his fears, failures and dilemmas. He feels guilty and lonely because he becomes a social and moral stranger. His salvation and remedy in society becomes possible only when he admits without hesitation, about his misdeeds and

unburdens himself before someone who is able to understand and judge him without narrow-mindedness.

The exploration of a guilt-stricken conscious and compulsive forces that lead to confession as well as the relevance of confession to the tormented and confused hero are the major concern of modern confessional novel. The confession serves a threefold purpose in Ratan's case. The first, the need for confession is an attribute of criminal consciousness. By compelling the young student to listen to his grisly tale, Ratan regains some of the human courage that his crime had earlier robbed him of. Secondly, it offers him the possibility of cleaning his soul, the layers of filth piled upon it, during his 'successful' career as a government official. There can't be a cleaning of the soul without any clear confession. Finally, through his confession he seeks to achieve a perception which is, however, deeply personal. Aptly Joshi casts Ratan's story as first-person confessional narrative and makes and protagonist himself tell his story from his point of view Ratan makes his confession to a young student, an N.C.C. cadet, who has come to Delhi a couple of months in advance of the Republic Day to participate in its parade. He is alert, intelligent, sympathetic but skeptical, and as yet untrained by the rot affecting his society. In the process of telling his story to this young man whom he meets by chance, Ratan tries to clarify to himself precisely what causes led to his own moral downfall. He also raises a number of pertinent questions which he asked himself sporadically on occasions and had not found satisfactory answers to them. Thereby he is able to achieve clarity of perception of himself, his society and the

world in so far as an average man of his kind can achieve. The opportunity to talk frankly and at length over some weeks to his listener enables Ratan to regain his ability to communicate with his society, and his responsibility towards it. He feels renewed and his faith in himself renovated.

In his retrospective narrative Ratan has to recall, though not through tranquility, many of his past experience and reconstruct them to present a connected narrative of his life to his listener. However a middle-aged man's recollection of his experiences, especially those of his adolescence and youth, are apt to some degree to be different from the actual experiences. Thereby the authenticity of the recollections may become doubtful. Therefore recalling and narrating self has to keep itself judiciously apart from the experiencing self. This is a problem that all autobiographical narrators have to encounter and resolve. Ratan tides over it more or less successfully, because of intension to give a candid and truthful account of his life as far as possible. For over a year he has meditated over his life, examined it critically and assessed himself with sufficient detachment. He has realized the value of humility and his own significance, and been looking for an appropriate listener to the story of his life.

The novel, like Coleridge's great poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, has a cause and effect structure. But it is not rendered entirely in chronological order. There is a simple dislocation of the chronological order of events and a constant interlacing of the past and the present. The narrator represents those incidents of his life which highlight the nature of his guilt and which are important to his confession. The selective principle

exercised by the narrator himself shows his detachment from the author. These similarities have been noticed and commented upon, notably by Tapan Kumar Ghosh.<sup>5</sup> But he tends to compare Ratan and Mariner in their experience of guilt, confession and liberation. But there are also some important differences that are noticed. Both bear a burden of guilt and are anxious to dislodge it and seek redemption through an honest confession. Their guilt isolates and estranges them from society. What is worse, they experience an extreme loneliness. The urge to confess is irresistible in both so that they may be purified by remorseful confession. But their manner of confession, the auditors to whom they tell their stories and the final outcome of the exercise are different. The Mariner is under a supernatural compulsion to confess. But he has no freedom to choose his listener; the wedding guest whom he addresses abruptly is predestined to be his listener. Neither the Mariner can escape confessing to him nor his listener can escape listening to him and absorbing silently the implication of the tale.

On the other hand, Ratan looks for an appropriate listener for telling his story and waits for months to find one, though things “for one long year burnt inside my skull, simmered in slow fire. And I could not find an audience” (P.141) for long. He desires to find one who is alert, understanding and sympathetic. When he finds the young N.C.C. cadet unexpectedly on a Sunday evening near the Krishna temple, he feels that he is the one for whom he had been waiting for, and so makes an acquaintance with him at once. If the Mariner begins at once and abruptly to tell his story to his listener almost at a

breathless pace and completes it one sitting, Ratan narrates his at own speed over some weeks and in several installments. That seems appropriate because his disintegration was gradual unlike the Mariner's. He intends to trace the stages by which he descended into a life of corruption and settled in it, because there was a time when he was innocent and had sense of honor and some courage. It is his fond hope that the story of his corruption would serve as a warning to the younger generation on whom the future of the nation depends.

Nothing is in Ratan's style of narration to suggest that he makes intentionally computed moves to make the young man listen to his confession with concentration, despite his anxiety that he should. For the Mariner telling his story is a part of the punishment for his crime. Every time he tells it he has to revive in mind the horror of it. Ratan too goes through a similar experience but he on his own tells his story to agree himself. Further, by the time he buttonholes the young man, the process of his redemption has already begun as he has been regularly at the penitent and purification shoe shining near the temple. Of course, at the end of his narration he is not fully redeemed man. Redemption is always a long-drawn out process for anyone, and one has to work out his salvation with conscientiousness, however Ratan can hope to be fully redeemed in God's good time, and his confession itself is a part of the journey towards it. Significantly, when he completes his story, he is hardly thinking of himself of his future. His thoughts are on the younger generation and its future, as it has to confront and survive in a degenerating society. He becomes a reliable narrator of



his life as he avoids boundaries of self-protection and excessive and melodramatic self-criticism.

First-person confessional narratives are not new to Indian English novelists. But the narrative strategy that Arun Joshi adopts in *The Apprentice* is certainly something new in the Indian context, and justly invites scrutiny. The novel is shaped as a series of Broning-like dramatic monologues spoken by the protagonist-narrator to a listener. These monologues form its narrative body. This strategy has certain definite advantages. It enables the protagonist-narrator to tell his dark story continuously and thus renovate and present a connected narrative of his life from the distant past of the present. Secondly, it helps the novelist to present dramatically the protagonist's confrontation with his own self, inner and outer, probe directly into his psyche and lay it bare for the reader to see it without the mediation of another person. It conveys the best protagonist's sense of inner compulsion and urgency to communicate and confess, and gives the entire narrative a like urgency.

All of Ratan's monologues are naturally addressed to the listener. But the address himself too, especially when his narration takes an introspective turn dwells on such recurrent questions about right, wrong, God etc. On the whole the monologues sustain the tone, impression and atmosphere of an oral narrative addressed to a single listener. They also retain the language, the swiftness, and even the gestures of a man talking to his single listener. The role of this listener in the narrative which is chiefly spoken to him has not been properly understood by some critics. As believed by C.N.Srinath<sup>6</sup>, He is not just "an Imaginary companion" whom

"the narrator addresses now and then" "to break the monotony" of the narration, Joy Abraham<sup>7</sup> endorses this opinion. As V.V.N. Rajendra Prasad<sup>8</sup> supposes he is not "just passive" who listens, while "the narrator himself puts the questions and express the doubts that may arise in the listener's mind." In fact he has a visible and active role to play all along the narrative. He is an alert and intelligent listener and gets genuinely interested in Ratan's story as it progresses. He responds to it sensitively. His active presence is felt throughout the narration. That he listens attentively to Ratan and punctuates the narrative every now and then by raising intelligent questions, although his voice is audible only to the narrator and not to us, are all understood in the very manner. Ratan tells his story, the turns it takes and the emphasis it acquires now and then. After all, the convention of the monologue requires that there is only one audible speaker. It does not follow necessarily that the audience is or should be passive and silent. Ratan only repeats the questions raised by his young friend.

Here are certain identifiable similarities in the narrative strategy and content between Arun Joshi's *The Apprentice* and Albert Camus' *The Fall*. Therefore V.V.N. Rajendra Prasad has stated that *The Apprentice* is closely modeled on *The Fall*.<sup>9</sup> V. Gopal Reddy is content to hold that "one may unmistakably find in *The Apprentice* the impact of *The Fall*."<sup>10</sup> Regarding their similarities, both are confessional novels and employ the strategy of monologic narration. Their protagonists, Ratan and J. B. Calmence, confess in detail their hypocrisy, cowardice, clandestine activities, frustration and failures, and in short their

moral degeneration. In the process they also unravel the widespread corruption of their times and hold disquieting mirrors to the collapse of moral values in their societies, if Joshi has borrowed the monologic technique from Camus he has made a significant variation rather than an imitation of it, and puts the device to a different use from that of Camus, his own artistic intention being different. Therefore there is not enough ground to assess that Joshi has closely modeled his novel on Camus'. In fact Ratan and J.B Clamence are conceived differently by their creators, and the difference is fundamental. How Ratan chooses his listener has already been seen. Clamence, who describe himself as a 'judge-penitent', actually intrudes upon a Frenchmen sitting at the next table at the bar and buttonholes him to listen to his story. Ratan tries to tell his story honestly without any cover up, deception and emotional behavior. He thus becomes a reliable narrator. Though he dwells on the corruption of his times and society, he holds only himself responsible for his misdeeds and tries to make amends for them.

Whereas J. B. Clamence is a stranger to frankness, honesty and determination. Unlike Ratan he is an intellectual and is conscious of it. He is subtle and cunning too. He is deliberately a deceptive narrator. He himself says, "It's very hard to disentangle the true from the false in what I'm saying."<sup>11</sup> His deal sign would be "a double face, a charming Janus, with the motto: Don't rely on it."<sup>12</sup> His "failures to meet his own grand moral crisis, when he once refused to go to the aid of drowning suicide become our general failures to accepts moral responsibility."<sup>13</sup> Finally, Calmence wishes to bring out the

'fundamental duplicity of the human being'.<sup>14</sup> There is no need to labor the point that Ratan in his intension as well as performance as a confessor is at the opposite end. In creating Clemency, Camus is concerned with the problem of honesty especially in confession.

Rattan begins his scrutiny of his times with an account of the elation, hopes and expectations that the advent of freedom generated in all people. He and others like him worked enthusiastically and sincerely night and day. What is important is that he punished by his own conscience much more than any court of law ever can. Finally Ratan is able to pursuits, and acquire a sharpened awareness of himself, his morning which he had lost for a time. He realities the imperative need for relatedness as an individual as well as a social being. He reaches the conviction that the only sustaining basis for action is that it should be of use to oneself and others. In dusting the shoes of the congregation at the temple every day, he finds such an activity which reclaims his humanity and brings him back to the fold of his society from which felt he had been isolated and estranged. Thus largely by his own effort he is restored to the community. It is like the prodigal returning home. Ratan also affirms quietly that however depressing and disquieting the present may be, given the will and readiness and to learn, it is still possible to survive and make sense of one's life. Thus at the end of *The Apprentice*, Ratan Rathor, emerges as a positively changed man, grown mature in outlook, and socially responsible person. M. K. Gandhi in his autobiography writes, "A clean confession, combined with a promise never to commit the sin again, when

offered before one who has the right to receive it, it is a purest type of repentance."<sup>15</sup>

At the end Ratan a man without shame and honour, "perhaps a man of our times" (P.144) tell his young and still unpolluted listener that though the present is miserable and the future uncertain, there is still a ray of hope. He pins hope on the youth of the country who are willing to learn from the follies of their elders, "there are young men willing to learn from the follies of their elders. Willing to learn and ready to sacrifice. Willing to pay the price." (P.144) The novel significantly

ends at dawn: "It is cold dawn. But no matter. A dawn, after all, is a dawn." (P.144)

Ratan, who is in search of his self, finally realizes his self at the end. He is now a man with commendable sensibilities, who after rediscovering himself wants to dedicate himself to the welfare of the society. The novel *The Apprentice* is a powerful indictment of the omnipresent corruption in India as well as a human story with a stark message. O. P. Mathur remarks, "Ratan Rathor's penance is not physical but spiritual. He is willing to pay the price by suffering humiliation."<sup>16</sup>

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