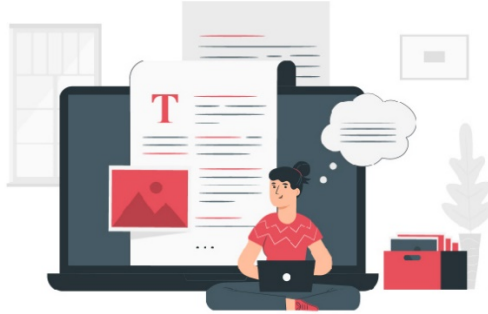


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Joshi's *The Apprentice*: God Sees All Human Suffering but Waits for Human Efforts

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Abstract:

Man is unable to bear the consequences of Godless universe and so believing in God is a fundamental requirement to explain and understand the problems and sufferings of whole humanity. Atheistic existential philosophy, particularly proposed by Jean Paul Sartre, does not completely reject the possibility of the existence of God. He proposes a conditional statement about the existence of God, “*If God exists, man is nothing, if God does not exist, man is free*”. According to him, if man gets the notion of the existence of God, his condition will not be changed in this materialistic world because he is thrown in this world to choose his way and take its responsibility. He says that God sees all human suffering but waits for human efforts to resolve them. The present article proposes that the belief in God is a fundamental need to understand the nature of worldly suffering and the role of human being to resolve them through the protagonist of Joshi's *The Apprentice*. Generally, a question always arises in the mind of everyone that if God is omnipresent and omniscient then why He does not respond to human suffering. If He is benevolent then why He is silent towards the pain, suffering, anxiety, and death awareness scattered everywhere in the world. Perhaps, in the stream with Sartre, Joshi's *The Apprentice* also highlights that being silent towards the suffering of humanity, God gives the opportunity to the whole humanity to choose its way and proceed according to it. So, the present

study stands justified in its approach to have a clear picture of supernatural role towards human suffering through the protagonist of Joshi's *The Apprentice*.

Keywords: Human suffering, Sartrean existentialism, Arun Joshi, The Apprentice.

Introduction:

Arun Joshi is an existential writer who has taken a prominent place in the world of modern Indian English fiction writings. He came on the horizon of novel writings with his very first existential novel *The Foreigner* which published in 1968. He got the most prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for his fourth mysterious novel *The Last Labyrinth* in 1982. He experiments with the doctrine of existentialism through his curious protagonists, specially the factors responsible for their freedom of choice and the consequences of these choices on their psyche. In his fictional world, he investigates deep into the psyche of his protagonists and highlights the inner turmoil of their minds. The fictional world of Arun Joshi consists of five novels as: *The Foreigner* (1968), *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), *The Apprentice* (1974), *The Last Labyrinth* (1981), and *The City and the River* (1990). His fictional world definitely highlights the Indian (*The Gita* and Buddhism) and Western existential philosophy in general and Sartrean existentialism in particular.

The Apprentice (TA), Joshi's third novel, is a story of an existential hero who runs through the paths of unemployment, employment, poverty, corruption, repentance, and salvation. It is really a master-piece of Joshi's fictional art. Through this novel he provides the existential nourishment to the psyche of suffering humanity. Like his other novels, this novel is also about to inner conflict, alienation and isolation from self and society, and a search for meaning in life. The novel narrates the parable of human suffering in the form of a monologue with the National Cadet in a confessional mode of conversation. He narrates the confessional story of his wrong deeds to the young cadet how the social and National responsibilities of modern men are getting declined in this materialistic society, and how the modern men are keeping aside these moral responsibilities towards whole humanity for merely their personal benefits. The protagonist of the present novel, Ratan Rathor suffers from the evils of materialistic society and runs through the lanes of unemployment to employment, Gandhian ideology to corruption, and finally repentance to salvation. Ratan highlights that in the period of post-independence India modern

men are torn by the pressures of unemployment, purposelessness, corruption, and a growing sense of alienation from self and society.

Place of God in Sartrean Existentialism:

Sartrean concept of God is based upon the concept of man's absolute freedom to choose his own way. He declares that man's sense of freedom cannot be reconciled with the dilemma of the existence or non-existence of God. The problem of synthesizing man's sense of freedom with God's existence has puzzled humanity for a long time. Sartre's direct conclusion to this problem is to say that God does not exist. Man's sense of freedom and responsibility takes importance over the existence of God. According to him, *"I am condemned to be free. This means that no limits to my freedom can be found except freedom itself..."* (B.N. 439) This existential freedom allows man to create his own essence. Man is thrown in this materialistic world to choose his own way and take the responsibility of his own actions. In the view of Sartre, *"To be man means to reach toward being God. Or if you prefer, man fundamentally is the desire to be God"* (B.N. 566). According to Sartre, man is free to choose his way that will lead to the completion of a certain goal. Man is able to do so because he does not have a fixed essence which may determine his being. By choosing his own way, man manifests his freedom.

For Sartre, if God created the universe, and thus He is continually creating the universe, then this condition would compromise the freedom of man. To make an object is to determine its nature. Thus, if man is merely a creation of God, then he is not free. Perhaps, Sartre fails to make a distinction between the problem of God's creation other than Himself and of reconciling God's omniscient nature with man's freedom. No doubt, the relationship between the creator and His creation provides a lot of problems for philosophers because it is entirely difficult to examine to what extent God is responsible for the consequences of His own creation. For example, if God created man and if man becomes corrupt and dishonest, then does this mean that God is responsible for the deprived condition of man? Thus, Sartre's conception of God is not concerned with establishing a God in the center of universe, but it is concerned with establishing a man in the center of universe. Sartre rejects Leibniz's concept of God that He had created man's essence but left this essence to be determined by man. Thus the problem of man's freedom

and God's existence can only be resolved by saying that 'God sees all human suffering but waits for human efforts'.

Human suffering:

Human suffering is a common phenomenon which is often connected with mental, physical, and ethical pain of human beings. Man spends much of his life time in suffering with pain and trying to search a remedy for these sufferings. Suffering is always seen as a distress resulting from the damage of self-identity or threat of death-anxiety. There are so many kinds of human suffering pervaded in this world, but suffering as a reward is the key point in the present study. Generally, when we suffer with mental or physical pain, we lose our moral confidence with the passage of time. In the same way, the protagonist of *The Apprentice* turns from the Gandhian ideology of his patriotic father to corruption due to his mental suffering, but finally he sees it as a reward to proceed on the highway of salvation. Human suffering is an existential suffering which is the result of struggles with the meaning of human life. It may seem like a simple idea, but one must think of it as a reward in which one questions the meaning of one's life in this world. Thus, a common course of human suffering is a conflict with death-anxiety and other existential threats to human existence.

In the words of Greek philosopher Aristotle, pain and pleasure are the passions of our soul and wherever there is sensation there is pain or pleasure. So, one should not consider pain as a divine curse. Because severe mental suffering easily preoccupies human psyche, one should not be puzzled that people always want to know why and how they became the victims of the suffering. Suffering may lead humanity to speculation on existential problems like role of pain and suffering in human life. In the view of philosophers, human suffering can only be completely understood from the integration of knowledge about its causes and results. Human suffering is so broad that to understand it knowledge is required from many disciplines, like literature, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and medical sciences. This is why psychological, philosophical, literary, and scientific knowledge can provide a basis to understand the real picture of human suffering.

Complaint for God is Ignorant of Human Suffering:

No doubt, the silence of God during the suffering of humanity makes everyone rebellious against the notion of a benevolent God. Everyone wants a genuine answer to the question how can a God be benevolent and allow suffering to the whole humanity? Man wants to know where is God when he suffers a lot? It is completely worse and troublesome to feel entirely alone during the period of suffering. The protagonist of *The Apprentice*, Ratan Rathor raises this question that there are so many problems in the world and he is thrown into it to resolve them. During his childhood, he notices that there is no any source of income in his miserable family and so his mother is living a life of fatal death. His mother suffers bitterly because his father had abandoned his responsibility towards his own family merely for the sake of Gandhian ideology. Here, Ratan complains that Gandhian ideology and benevolent God both are silent at the miserable condition of his family. His mother is haunted by the economic condition of her poor family and the suffering of tuberculosis. He asserts the suffering of his mother in these words: “... *there was no money and every night my mother spat blood. Every night, night after night...*” (TA, 8)

Further, Ratan highlights the sense of human suffering in this materialistic world devoid of God by saying that people are thrown in this world to die: “*I knew, as everybody knew, that they had come to die*” (TA, 10). He complains that he feels anchorless from divine power because He seems silent towards human suffering. He has to suffer a lot of problems in his life due to the unexpected death of his father. So, the lack of source of income in the family stops his educational career and consequently forces him to search for a job. He also opines that God has abandoned him in this world without mercy and compassion and seeing his suffering silently, He goes on His own way, spinning His walking stick into the unknown. As he reflects this human suffering: “*God see all, we say, but having seen, goes His way, twirling His walking stick, He sees all, but does not necessarily at the same time judge*” (TA, 44). Thus, *The Apprentice* is a parable of an anxious man who enters into the inner consciousness of the individual to explore his mental suffering and its possible solution in this materialistic world. The protagonist of the novel is a man who is thrown back upon himself to search the solution of God’s silence towards human suffering. As he claims that human life is anchorless in the wind of human suffering:

“reduced ... To the status of those leaves of autumn that are blown here and there, at the mercy of the wind” (TA, 65).

Seeing the murder of his patriotic father and the suffering of his mother, he turns his head towards the benevolent God but gets no answer to his mental turmoil. According to Ratan, he is an eyewitness of the cruel murder of his father by a British police officer while he was leading a political march against British rule in India. After his father's murder he goes to Delhi in search of a job, but has to undergo a lot of suffering and humiliation at the doors of employers. He also sees that his mother is suffering from mental, physical, and economic problems and so becomes a skeptic about money as it is the only ends of a happy life. Finding no consolation from social, political, or ethical background for these two incidents, Ratan turns from Gandhian ideology of his father to materialistic view of his mother. He questions to God, *“Why must truth be so troublesome? Facts so upsetting?”* (TA, 42). He suffers a lot in this *“unknown city”* (75) by getting no answer for his mental suffering from God when he reflects, *“a planet turning in the darkness, going heaven knows where”* (TA, 77). But he is a man who is made of double soil, the Gandhian ideology of his father and worldly wisdom of his mother and hence turns from ethical side to human efforts to get the answer of human suffering in this world:

“It was not patriotism but money that brought respect and brought security. Money succeeded where all else failed. There were many laws but money was law unto itself” (TA, 19).

At the time of the Indo-China War, Ratan is threatened to think that God is deaf towards human suffering. When the Chinese Army is threatening our National security, the authorities of our country, instead of preparing for National security, are engaged in preparing their personal interest. He is astonished to see that the responsible ministers of our country are making false statements about the security problem and the price-rise across the country. He is more astonished to know the character of the war minister who is reasoning of enriching himself by planning with his secretary and broker Himmat Singh to deliver defective war materials to the Indian Army when the National security is at crisis. He sees a gradual decline in every strata of society where everybody is busy in money-making as if money is the only end of human life. All values and norms of human life are subjugated by money. This money-mindedness has spoiled

the entire society. Seeing the decline in moral values, Ratan moans before the silent listener: “*In Money’s Kingdom, my friend, only money is king. All others are slaves*” (TA, 77). In this way, Ratan claims that God is indifferent towards human suffering.

Human Suffering only Demands for Human Efforts:

Akin to Existential theory of God and *Karmic* theory of *The Gita*, Ratan also opines that Nature or God cannot change the circumstances around man, but it is the human efforts that can change his condition in this world. After his father’s death, he lives helplessly in Delhi with his friends and through one of them he succeeds to get a job as a temporary clerk in the department of War. From that day, believing in the theory of action, Ratan never looks back for help. Now onwards a visible change takes place in Ratan, which does not affirm the divine help for the survival of human being. The early sincerity and loyalty with the divine help during the period of suffering is replaced by the doctrine of human efforts in the time of crisis and disaster. By now he realises that the whole world revolves around the human efforts and “*If men forgot how to make deals the world would come to a stop... it is not the atom or the Sun or God or sex that lies at the heart of the universe: it is DEALS*” (TA, 48).

Ratan meets Himmat Singh, who offers him a big bribe for the supply of defective war materials to the Indian Army which results in the death of his honest friend, the Brigadier. Before signing the deal with Himmat Singh, he manifests some hesitation for the fear “*the people would come to know,*” (72) but the broker affirms him that only idiots like him trust that there is a divine book written by God which they must follow: “*There was no such book, Rathor... What existed... was not written by God but by a silly society...*” (TA, 72) It is the very difficult situation in his life which throws him into the pool of corruption and isolation. But with this incidence, Ratan fully understands that it is not God or others but man is only responsible for his own deeds. He declares honestly, “*How all these years, I have been alone, so horribly alone in my anger, in my failures, carrying them in secret, like a thief...*” (TA, 71)

Ratan is a guilty of taking bribe for the deals of war materials to the Indian Army and so he is lost in the twisted world of corruption and has lost the track of intuition. Besides being conscious of the corruption team he fails to get out of it and becomes a part of this blind system. He realises his fault and says boldly, “*I did not need money. If I had ever needed money it was when I had been offered it the first time- by the contractor- and I had refused*” (TA, 59). At this blind fault in his life, Ratan does not look towards God for divine mercy but takes the responsibility on his own shoulders to search a solution to his mental suffering. At first Ratan writes his confession, but modifies the truth and tries his best to justify his act. After the death of innocent Brigadier, his vision dragged Ratan wherever he goes and with this he is filled with endless mental suffering. Finally, he realizes that none can survive in isolation and he must take the responsibility of his own action. In his eagerness to find ethical consolation for his mental suffering, he goes to the temple but sees that God is also silent on the corruption of *Puzari*. Here he realizes that perhaps God sees everything but waits for human efforts to find the solution for human suffering.

Further, when he thinks to surrender his actions before the feet of God, he is perplexed as to what type of God He is who does not respond towards human suffering. Here, he wants to know the relevance of God in the domain of human efforts to find an answer for his mental suffering. He feels uneasy and experiences a battle within his inner-self. His nervousness increases with the passage of time. With a distressed and suffering mind, he goes from place to place but finds no consolation. He feels alienation and isolation from his self and society and this situation affirms his resolution to take the responsibility of his own mental suffering. At this point, the broker Himmat Singh diagnoses his mental suffering by saying that the crookedness of the society is difficult to repair and it can only be resolved by human efforts. So, in the utter darkness of his mental suffering, he realises the truth of human efforts by wiping the shoes of the devotees before the temple:

“But if it was God’s darkness, he asked, what was the cure? What was the cure of a crooked world? None, perhaps. Revolution, perhaps. Or, perhaps- perhaps- he seemed to hesitate for a long time- perhaps God Himself. God alone perhaps could remove His darkness. But where was God, he cried out again, suddenly excited, his voice ringing with despair. What was God? And where?” (TA, 145-46)

Conclusion:

Joshi chooses a young listener through Ratan Rathor to tell the parable of human suffering because he wants to convey this message to the new generation that they do not wait for God for their worldly problems and take the responsibility to solve them. Merely wait for divine help drags human being towards the downfall and decay. Thus, the protagonist of the novel, Ratan conforms to the silent listener that God is silent towards human suffering but waits for human efforts. There is no solution for human suffering inside the temple and so man must search it by means of his action. So, it is worthless to go inside the temple in search of God. To take the responsibility to remove one's own mental suffering like Ratan Rathor is the right devotion to God.

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