



Research Paper

The Intricate Labyrinth of the Mechanism of Self in Arun Joshi's *the Last Labyrinth*

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ABSTRACT

The present research work focuses on intricate complexities of the modern man with the clear insight of the quest of the protagonist, Som Bhaskar. The focus is to show how the modern and technological expansion, cause lot of harm to the social milieu of India. The accomplishment of the pristine targets, of affluence, employment and leverage by any mechanism are, a repercussion of the mechanism of social progress and industrialization under the impact of the West. Futility of desires, anomie, utter chaotic situations, despondency, and erosion of values – all these things highlight the futility of existence. . Through intense self-examination and soul-searching, Joshi's heroes attempt to finally get the way to the intricate labyrinth of life and arrive at a personal equilibrium and fulfillment. Arun Joshi has highlighted most effectively some of the internal metaphysical and ethical questions. The research ponders on the need to expose the westernized Indian aristocracy, which has lost its spiritual roots by scrutinizing the conundrum of one's existence with substantial potency resistant to an outspread backdrop of maturity. The narrative investigates the concept of detachment and the hankering for the obligatory of life in the metaphorical quest from ignorance to enlightenment of the narrator-hero Som Bhaskar. Som is a young, educated and intelligent millionaire industrialist. Arun Joshi in the novel divulges himself as a person who exposes the hollowness of the western culture and its negative impact on Indian psyche.

Key Words: Quest, Self, Existence, Mechanism, Spirituality.

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I. INTRODUCTION

India was a legend long before the Englishmen came and established themselves as the rulers of this land. The accession of the Englishmen furnished the people of India with the juncture of a different culture, western culture. Indian for ages followed its old ancient culture with Sanskrit and other languages as the part of their life before the coming of the colonizers. With the inception of English language and English schools, old beliefs and values started losing their impact on the psyche of the people of India. The speedy modern and technological expansion, the modernization of life is the cardinal facets of the advanced civilization which caused lot of harm to the culture of India. With the progressive plea and re-shaping strategies, the social milieu led to pragmatism. The modern man has completely engrossed in participating in the new venture of life hence detached from the society and his own self.

With the inception of modernism, man's psyche incessantly tarnished the resentment, gloom and abandonment of the conventional standards that had perpetuated the whole generation before Independence. The craft of living a troubled life without stress, soul searching, preserving human kinship can collaborate to be called as a sign of backward. This backwardness is nothing but an utterance of modern man's detachment from his inner self and from the cosmos. The Englishmen did not only vandalize the indigenous cultural values of India, they have also disfigured the essence of the culture of India. The accomplishment of the pristine targets, of affluence, employment and leverage by any mechanism are in reality, a repercussion of the process of social progress and industrialization under the impact of the West. Man, in this dehumanized and preface world, has lost his individual identity and has gone away from the reach of the voice of his soul. He suffers from a sense of not-belonging. He, to his utter confusion and consternation, has become merely an automation driven by impersonal forces. He fails to realize his desires and the true meaning of his life. Life to him is nothing but,

merely a conundrum. He is secluded from society, from cosmos, and what is worst, from him. Futility of desires, anomie, utter chaotic situations, despondency, and erosion of values – all these things highlight the futility of existence. This situation persists in spite of incredible and astounding progress in science and technology. The material achievements have not added to the equanimity. Man has become lugubrious, despondent, baffled and topsy-turvy. Man, in the wide world, found himself in a horrible state of unwantedness, aloofness and foreignness. It is a realization that has gripped the world. The think-tank of the twentieth century, everywhere under the sun, looked concerned with this lethal predicament. The Indian-English writers are no exception. They give vent to this feeling faithfully in their works. The Indian novelists writing in English have explored the wide implications of this search of self in their works. They have tried to evolve or discern a strategy that may lead one to a state of de-alienation. There are a large number of Indian writers – Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Chaman Nahal, R.K. Narayan and many others – who express emphatically this feeling of man's isolation on this populous planet.

II. DISCUSSION

Arun Joshi's novels gives a clear insight to an Indian response, although acritical response, to the challenges of our time. The process of adjustment of the time-defying Indian wisdom to the new cultural values of the West, are studied through the crises of Joshi's westernized heroes from the upper-crust of Indian social milieu. Joshi's heroes, like the ancient sages of the great epics, fall back upon their internal nature. After finding no hope, no light, no support to the ever chasing and bewildering questions about their existence, they look into their shining souls. Through intense self-examination and soul-searching, Joshi's heroes attempt to finally get the way to the intricate labyrinth of life and arrive at a personal equilibrium and fulfillment. Arun Joshi has highlighted most effectively some of the internal metaphysical and ethical questions. Arun Joshi, being an Indian writer could not avoid the extensive and infinite impression of the teaching and morals of *The Bhagwat Gita* on Indian psyche. According to the belief *The Bhagwat Gita*, is not solely a sacred writ but a terrestrial testimony which emblemizes men's constant dilemma, extraction, quarry and embroilment as much as avouchment of certitude. The foundational preeminence of *The Gita* is on man and how he should execute. There are many instances where the scribbler has interpolated the values of *The Bhagwat Gita*, enunciating the distress, the dilemma and the crusade. The novelist's reconnaissance into the intricacy of life stirring on the individual usually conduce to a categorization for maneuvering of relic auscultate to avouch severely ingrained in the credence of his antecedent. G.A. Ghanshyam and Vasumati delicately observes, "Joshi's novels provide an Indian response, although a critical response, to the challenges of our time. These processes of adjustment of the time-defying Indian wisdom to the new cultural values of the west are studied through the crises of Joshi's westernized heroes from the upper-crust of Indian society."

The Last Labyrinth (1981) is Arun Joshi's fourth novel. The novel has won Sahitya Academy Award for its excellence and it is acclaimed to be a masterpiece. The initial setting of the novel takes us to the house of the protagonist, Som Bhaskar whose house is near the sea with its mysteriousness at the far end the shores of another continent. The depth of the sea is immeasurable so as the life of the individual. The values of the historical past which used to make life sublime and meaningful have lost somewhere in the rapidly ever-growing civilization. Human beings in their race of achieving more and more have forgotten their precious past and adopted a new culture of their colonizers. Another setting of the novel is Anuradhapura, A city of ruins, which represents the ruins of the India's glorious past. Arun Joshi describes the westernized Indian aristocracy, which has lost its spiritual roots by scrutinizing the conundrum of one's existence with substantial potency resistant to an outspread backdrop of maturity. The narrative investigates the concept of detachment and the hankering for the obligatory of life in the metaphorical quest of the narrator-hero Som Bhaskar. Som is a young, educated and intelligent millionaire industrialist. The novelist characterizes Som Bhaskar as a person of modern generation who represents the hollowness, the incompleteness, the chaos and the uncertainty. He agonizes from an incorporeal hunger and restlessness. Throughout his life, he has the quest in his mind, "Through the light of my days and the blackness of my nights and the disquiet of those sleepless hours beside my wife, within reach of the tranquillisers, I had sung the same strident song: I want. I want. I want. I want." The quest is not the quest of Som Bhaskar alone but the quest of every common individual in this modern world who has lost somewhere in this materialistic world and has stopped listening his inner voice.

The novelist has delineated the dilemma of modern man's life with the meaninglessness of his life. Som in the novel is never at peace. There is a constant urge in him to find the meaning of life. He identifies a desolated self, inertia and seclusion within himself and astray in the labyrinth of thoughts. He has been tormented by a bare self and comments, "It is the voids of the world, more than its objects, that bother me. The voids and the empty spaces, within and without." The novelist focuses his attention on the dilemma of the individuals like Som Bhaskar who do not cognize that the labyrinth of life can be puzzled out by certitude rather than science and ratiocination. Som is aware of the fact that he cannot imagine his life without his wife Geeta in spite of that he develops sexual relationships with different women in order to adjudicate contrariety of his own

life. He is unable to find the answers of his quest neither in his wife nor in Professor Leela Sabnis. Leela's world of intellect and abstruseness does not exhilarate him. Hari Mohan Prasad critically analyses Som's quest in the following lines, "His hunger is of body and spirit both. Hunger of body is cry for emotional authentication and hunger of spirit is a yearning for self-realization."

According to Abdul Saleem, "The center focus of his fiction is on the self who is lost in the labyrinth of industrialized and dehumanized society. He feels, helplessly isolated, alienated and dispossessed. Joshi as a novelist is not content with apparent realism or with recreation of experience in realistic, naturalistic or generalistic manner. He feels a need to reshape it and to rediscover the reality which lies hidden beneath the apparent actuality." In the novel, Som's tussle is not with the social milieu but with the configuration and enforcement farther acumen and erudition. He recognizes that the meaninglessness of the microcosm and assured that individual's survival is extremely difficult "a labyrinth within the labyrinth," the more you discover, the more mysterious it perceives. Even after knowing the fact that human life is full of difficulties, Som begins his expedition in the quest of exhilaration, serenity and felicity. In this chaotic state of mind, Som encounters with Anuradha. Joshi has given a very clear insight to the character of Anuradha who is an embodiment of selfless love in the world of selfish people. She represents true independence of body and of mind. An incongruous charisma enchants Som towards Anuradha and he urges to achieve her at any cost. Consequently, he embellishes a sexual relationship with her and feels more dissatisfied. "Why should she appear mysterious unless, possibly, there was a mystery within me that, in her proximity, got somehow stirred, as one tuning fork might stir another." Som is of the belief that Anuradha can help him out to search his self because there is something in Anuradha which gives him solace and he tries to find out the reason behind it. He even urges to Gargi, the daughter of Sufi saint to help him out to come out of his dilemma. He entreats her help and she consoles him while saying that "there is no harm in believing that God exists." A rationalist by approach, Som doubts on the existence of God. "The problem lies in the stars," says Aftab. "We become what our stars make us." The urge to find solutions of all his problems makes Som believe about the existence of a supreme power, a prime mover of the entire cosmos. Inheriting her father's urge and surpassing him, Gargi has comprehended him with the existence of God. She protects the life of Som just as a spiritual guide resolves all the conflicts from the mind by answering all the questions. Som says, "It was as though a delinquent son, hungry and worn, had returned home."

The novelist tries to prove the existence of the divine power while portraying Gargi as deaf and dumb because she follows to only the divine and communicates with only souls. Gargi for him is the partaker of God's immeasurable ocean and her spectre is conciliating. Her connection performs as a cure to the unwell Aftab. Her communication gives refreshment to Anuradha and her glance calms Som. Arun Joshi apprentices her as an emblem of an alive evidence of the existence of God. Som's metaphorical yearning to ascertain his true self procures him and he longs for Anuradha. He catechizes Gargi to affirm that God exists. But God should be felt, discover and discern not learnt. Gargi informs Som "we are all children trying to reach up to the crack in the door to peep into a room." Som journey towards God begins from here. He gradually unravels that every individual will have to fabricate his or her attempts to surge God. Som has surmounted his initial juncture of ignorance and moved towards enlightenment. In spite of his technical education and science background, he is earnest, consequential and urges to affirm the existence of God. He begins his expedition in quest of enlightenment and proceeds towards the mountain to meet Lord Krishan. But when he gets the opportunity to encounter a man size conflagration blazing since time immemorial, he becomes a possessed man. In the novel, Som is evocative of those who may have procured the entire cosmos but somehow adrift their self, their ecclesiastic and ethnic anchorage. His adjudicating self has a fervent inclination to annihilate his inferior persona through his coalition with Anuradha, Gargi and Geeta. Anuradha showers her affection and commiseration on him and inexplicably protects his life from heart attack. Gargi enlightens him with the reality of life and makes him aware about the temporariness of the materialistic progress. Geeta is a very caring wife whose attribute is credence, which Som requires. She saves him from the offence of committing suicide, invigorating him from the siesta of darkness and ignorance. The novel encapsulates Som's quest for conviction through love for Anuradha and for Geeta, thus amalgamating the sensuous and the spiritual.

III. CONCLUSION

Arun Joshi in the novel divulges himself as a person who exposes the hollowness of the western culture and its negative impact on Indian psyche. He assures the reader by telling them that western values do not bestow tranquility and grandeur of self-consummation. Ancient Indian culture and values lying sluggish in the dark alcoves of his brain now howl for fulfillment, and the author is enthralled by the alchemistic and the imperceptible. Joshi delineates the hidden and mysterious world of Banaras, Anuradha, Aftab and Gargi with greater force and passion. Tapan Kumar Ghosh interprets, "The novel holds up a mirror to a certain section of the present-day Indian society with its cynicism, hedonism, loss of faith, confusion of values, and anxieties. Som Bhaskar, a typical product of the Indian upper-crust, is unable to come to terms with life because of his

failure to come to terms with himself.” The novelist’s approach is to re-enact the conflicts, confusion, quests and dilemmas of the life of modern man by criticizing the modern civilization which is busy in gaining materialistic possession.

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