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A Critical Study of Reflection of Upanishads in Arun Joshi's *The Apprentice and The Last Labyrinth*

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ABSTRACT

The prominent post-modern Indian writer, Arun Joshi is known for his artistic presentation of Indian philosophy. His novels *Apprentice* and *The Last Labyrinth* reflect the Upanishad wisdom and have opened a new scope of research for the Indian writers and researchers. Present paper is a study of reflection of Upanishads in the select two novels of Arun Joshi. The brief analysis of the novels in light of influence and reflection of Upanishad brings into the light the Indian wisdom filled in Upanishad and how the novelist has painted it in his novels. In both the novels, the novelist has presented the present and the knowledge of past interestingly. It is indirect way of conveying both, the bitter truth and the remedies from the ancient wisdom.

Keywords: Upanishad, Indian Philosophy, Arun Joshi, IWE



Lead In:

Famous Indian authors such as Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, and others formed a legacy of Indian English literature that Arun Joshi followed. In contrast to his predecessors, he expresses compassion for the universal contemporary man striving to find purpose in life in a world of vanishing religion and deteriorating culture. Arun Joshi provided a new dimension to Indian English Fiction with his brilliant presentation of current subjects like alienation, rootlessness, meaninglessness of existence, and death motif.

Reflection of Upanishadas in Arjun Joshi's *The Apprentice*

A post-independence Indian society that primarily speaks the language of money and commerce is shown in *The Apprentice*. Joshi worries about people's money-mindedness, which has increased alarmingly since independence. Crude materialism has essentially converted man into a moneymaking machine, dwarfing finer aspects of personality at the expense of higher character traits. Ratan Rathor, the protagonist, loses his father's values in return for dubious deals. His subsequent relentless effort to restore his dignity and integrity is recounted throughout the novel. This is Arun Joshi's shortest novel, and it represents the inadequacy and frustration that comes from living only for money. Ratan, the protagonist, is caught in his own confusion. But at the end of the story, he becomes Jnani, or the self-seer.

Yah tu sarvaani bhootaani aatmani eva anupashyati;

sarva bhooteshu cha aatmaanam tatah na vijugupsate. (Ishavasya Upanishad verse-6)

(He who sees all beings and forms, in the Self, he alone really sees; he also sees the Self in all beings and forms, thereafter, he feels no hatred towards anyone.)

A person who has realised God's perspective expands beyond his own bounds and becomes infinite. We can't imagine ourselves in his shoes, seeing the world through his eyes. Od-realisation denotes the loss of individuality and the emergence of universality. The Geeta uses the term Sarvatma Bhava to express a saint's sense of interconnectivity after God-realization. This is the essence of practical spirituality. In short, it's the essence of waking, the litmus test of God-awareness, and the seal of uniqueness. It's hard to detest someone who sees life so broadly. Dislike and hatred occur when we see others as different. A realised individual cannot acquire negative feelings, which is one way in which realisation improves the wellbeing of all mankind. The Sarvatma Bhava is the only guarantee of man's happiness. The spirituality has made a significant contribution to man's growth. Only spiritual growth can bring about a civilization free of hate and distrust. The protagonist comes to this insight and grasps the purpose of life, but not without a struggle. He is easily dragged into a world of greed and corruption, ending in the death of his buddy the Brigadier, for which he is partly



responsible. He helped spread defective weapons and other disasters. This makes him mourn a wasted life. "Some losses are difficult to accept," adds Ratan, who finally becomes an apprentice. He is a middle-aged spiritual apprentice who wants younger people to learn and sacrifice. Ratan Rathor's penance is spiritual. He accepts shame to pay the price. The protagonist's character changes completely. He has a grasp of the meaning of life and its activities. Ratan has spent his life attempting to escape the shackles of meaningless urban civilisation. Finally, he enters the temple, seeking religious assurance. Surprisingly, he discovers that religion is not immune to corruption. Finally, Ratan Rathor undertakes the world's most arduous penance to regain his mental equilibrium. He says it:

It is morning. I did not know your room faced the river. How deserted the temples look frozen, petrified, like our civilisation itself. It is a pity how the good is thrown away with the rubbish. Perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps there are men, like you for example, who might yet hold back the tide. After all, they have done so before. There is hope as long as there were young men willing to learn from the follies of their elders. Willing to learn and ready to sacrifice, willing to pay the price (144).

It is also a new chapter in his life for the protagonist, who has become spiritual and devout. As a result, Arun Joshi does not look into the abuses of Indian culture, cosmic irony based on Hindu notions, or utopian Brahmanism, self-glory itself, engulfing the western historical position in its own abstractions. Pre-office assistant Ratan Rathor was enmeshed in the web of Indian social politics, embracing and being put down by characters like the Sheikh for his survival and lifestyle. He was in a void because he couldn't discern a warehouse from a temple, justice from crime. He degrades a dismal hole by following Himmat Singh's instructions and suggestions. But he is utterly unaware of the repercussions and intricacy of his actions, as well as the various challenges and issues that may arise. In this book, the author seeks to illustrate the reality and absurdities of Indian politicians, administrators, and other authorities. A parallel narrative of India's social and political events is included in the book, from historical, social, political, and religious viewpoints. In India, corruption is so ubiquitous that it destroys the soil's roots. This book's protagonist is a victim of a degraded society. Without his confidence, education, knowledge, and sensitivity, society's harmful effects would have been irreversible. Ratan's life, fundamentally meek and timid, parallels post-colonial India's rise. As a result of this, our leaders' shadowy influence pervades every facet of life. They make the best of every situation. It exposes and discusses various aspects of post-colonial civilization, such as corrupt methods of life, immorality and illegal deeds, shady bargains and dark bargaining. Amidst adversity, Ratan Rathore owes all of his personal traits to his people. Because he believes India will never be at war, he lets a con artist sell substandard items to his departments. The protagonist's personality flaw is subtle and suggestive. A wealthy man with children and a cooperative wife accepts a bribe despite all of these advantages. Humans have been grappling with this sorrowful howl since the start of



recorded history. Why would a guy sink when he has everything he needs to live peacefully is a bewildering, astonishing, and ageless enigma. No one has yet found a satisfactory solution to the problem of greed, egoism, and covetousness. In India's rain-fed agriculture, this is the curse. Why do politicians, bureaucrats, and other personnel take bribes while living well, joyfully, and elatedly? Despite his earlier view, Ratan realises that there may be no man on an island. Ratan used to believe that man is an island, and he is still unsure. But once he realised what he was, he knew he was neither a landmass or a warp. But his ambition to stand out from the throng has not kept him out of trouble. This book's confessional aspect is also crucial. Ratan's persona is well-portrayed. An important turning moment in their lives, Ratan the storyteller and Ratan the persona are two unique persons. He has at least partially comprehended the meaning of life and grown as a person. His sole objective in life is to make up for his disastrous decisions for the country. As a result, the engaging first-person narrative is complemented with a distant third-person tone. It demonstrates Joshi's writing talent as well as the protagonist's detachment from the plot. The protagonist-narrator delivers a series of monologues to the reader. This method has several advantages. It permits the protagonist - narrator to keep recounting his dark storey, rebuilding and linking his life from the past to the present. Second, it allows the writer to show the protagonist's inner and outside fight with himself in a dramatic way, delving right into his thoughts and exposing it to the reader. Aiming to express the protagonist's innermost desires. Ratan's monologues are all directed to the audience. But he addresses himself, especially when he narrates introspectively about good, evil, God, etc. Overall, the monologues maintain the tone, mood, and atmosphere of a single-person oral tale. They keep the vocabulary, tempo, and even gestures of a guy speaking to one person. Some reviewers have misunderstood the function of the listener in the storey. In fact, he has a major role throughout the storey. He is a sharp and insightful listener who gets drawn into Ratan's storey. He responds carefully. His dynamic presence pervades the storey. This is reflected in the language, as is his attentive attention to Ratan and his occasional interruptions of the storey with perceptive questions. Ratan tells his storey, its twists and turns, and the concentration it gets. After all, a monologue requires only one audible speaker. Not all audiences are passive and quiet. Ratan solely answers his pal's questions. One of the most important themes of *The Apprentice* is the search for meaning and purpose in life in a society when all values have seemingly crumbled and there appears to be no master to instruct, no one to whom one can attach oneself for guidance and direction. An apprentice is a "novice" who is "learning a trade by working for a small wage." He is a diligent student of a skill, craft, or trade that leads to a job or income. For a devoted student, learning may be unending, whether in a trade or an art form. None of us can ever claim mastery of anything we set out to learn. In this regard, he is a novice with much to learn. Learning becomes a passion, an all-consuming endeavour that gives meaning to one's life. Joshi uses the term "apprentice" broadly in this work. As a result, the protagonist resolves to start over. Ratan tries to grasp the meaning of life, to know himself, and to achieve a balance



that reconciles man with himself and his fellow man. Ratan, the protagonist, matures and becomes more socially responsible.

Influence of the Upanishada on *The Last Labyrinth*

Arun Joshi's literature has explored man's existential dilemma from several angles. The difficulty of choosing the right route has always had religious connotations, emphasising faith. We are adrift in this world without faith, and only divine intervention can save us. Indian tradition has long highlighted the importance of mystic devotion in the development of the human soul via faith in God. Paul Tillich explores religion and bravery. Bhakti yoga is a Hindu spiritual path or practise centred on loving devotion to a specific god. This definition comes from the Shvetashvatara Upanishad.

yuje vāṃ brahma pūrvyaṃ namobhir vi śloka etu pathyeva sūreḥ

śṛṇvanti viśve amṛtasya putrā ā ye dhāmāni diviyāni tasthuḥ. (Shvetashvatara Upanishad 2.5)

(O senses and O deities who favor them! Through salutations I unite myself with the eternal Brahman, who is your source. Let this prayer sung by me, who follow the right path of the Sun, go forth in all directions. May the sons of the Immortal, who occupy celestial positions, hear it!)

This is an important Upanishad Mantra because it refers to all humans as 'amritasya putrah' - everlasting sons, meaning that everyone is divine. Swami Vivekananda established this Mantra and its teachings in Chicago in 1893. This Mantra is noteworthy because it combines bhakti-devotion with jnana-knowledge, which is an Upanishad's distinctive trait. As stated in this shloka, Bhakti yoga is the road of devotion, the means of reaching God via love. For most faiths, this spiritual route is the most natural. The bhakta, or God-devotee, wants God-realization—union with the Divine. The bhakta does this via the power of love, the most intense and compelling emotion.

Som Bhaskar's path from materialism to Bhakti reflects the modern man's need for meaning. Bhaskar is having a mental collapse and cannot grasp God's logic. Consciousness resides beyond of sense experience and logic. Acharya Mahaprajna highlighted the distinction between thinking and awareness:

Only a tiny portion of your awareness is in charge of your thoughts. A little quantity of awareness is all that is required for human life's trade. You may become a spectator of your own awareness and what is going on inside it at times. Because awareness is as limitless as the cosmos, individuals with moral bravery, patience, and initiative have the privilege of



delving into consciousness. We are unable to comprehend the infinite breadth and depth of awareness because we are used to thinking and behaving within limited parameters. (87-88)

Philosophers have debated the existence of the self. Assertion and denial entail thinking. Som Bhaskar, like most modern men, opposes God's sovereignty and legitimacy. His mind, however, hears unanswered questions. Som Bhaskar is a tortured guy who grows thirstier as he drinks. He cannot believe in God's incarnations logically, but a part of him wants to. What awaits him in the final maze?

Bhaskar is a modern-day hero who signifies turbulence. He is eager to learn and maybe believe, but he is unable. He is divided between life and death, illusion and truth, body and spirit. He's hungry, restless, and insecure, like Hamlet. He's always sang "I want, I want." He is the product of a seemingly infinite existence. In between are Bombay and Benaras. He attempts to live without religion, clinging to one object or person, feeding one passion or another, but he is never at peace with himself. Years ago, he had an odd meeting with holes in Ajanta's caverns.

He's had emptiness both external and internal ever since, and an unusual, melancholy sense. He's a mash-up of masks and inner disharmony. He's searching for his true self. That is Bhaskar's storey, his life experiences and ideas. The way Bhaskar interacts with other characters reveals his narrative. The City Slicker liked girls and liquor. His father, on the other hand, was a scientist trying to decipher the Universe's secrets. He set out to find the First Cause. His interaction with Bhaskar reveals plenty about him.

Faithful men can understand life with these explanations. Bhaskar, on the other hand, is a rationalist who struggles to believe. Bhaskar's mother and wife, icons of faith and endurance, provide another layer to his life. His mother died of cancer but never lost faith in God. Geeta is his intelligent wife. Even though Bhaskar has a great marriage and cannot imagine living without Geeta, he has adulterous encounters. He keeps rushing to other girls. Leela Sabnis is logical. She is a scholar's daughter with a philosophy degree, and she would use analysis to explain Bhaskar's disease. As she puts it, "I think, therefore I am" whether it comes to religion or the soul (Last Labyrinth 80). Bhaskar's relationship with Leela Sabnis fails due to his lack of clarity and assurance. Her substance and soul realms did not clash. Bhaskar's horizon is dark. He desired a point of contact between the two realities.

However, Bhaskar's relationship with Anuradha is the most complex. Anuradha, a tall, attractive, and mysterious woman of unknown age and background, slowly becomes his life. The microcosmic maze of existence and reality is Aftab's Lal Haveli and its labyrinth. Anuradha's eyes are a soul mirror. Bhakti yoga aims to cleanse the senses. The senses are continuously polluted and distracted by pleasure. By practising bhakti yoga, these senses can be cleaned, allowing direct contact with the Supreme Lord. After a long journey, Som



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Bhasker abandons his rational concerns and embraces religion, as depicted in *The Last Labyrinth*. So he can traverse the human life maze.

Conclusion:

Aside from those who think Joshi's works are existential, a few reviewers haven't forgotten the Indian influence. Arun Joshi's writing has a particular Indian voice and sensibility. It analyses the modernity of the human situation in India and some basic human concerns. Modern in his topic choice and presentation, Joshi derives strength from his cultural roots. Arun Joshi's *The Apprentice* and *The Last Labyrinth* were studied using Upanishads. Statements of the writer on them and the Hindu intellectual heritage, focusing on Upanishads. His philosophy is based on the Upanishads' Hindu perspective of life and existence.



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