

Emotional Disturbance In Arun Joshi's Novel The Last Labyrinth

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Abstract

Arun Joshi has concentrated much on the existentialist philosophy and the issues related to several aspects of life. The author explores the depth of human psyche to deal with the factors affecting the balance in life. The novel, *The Last Labyrinth*, deals with an obsessive and highly sensitive individual of Som Bhasker whose feelings grapple with the adventure and romance of his life. It explores to dilemma of existence in the life of Som Bhaskar, a millionaire industrialist and his incessant urge to understand the labyrinth of life. The protagonist experiences innumerable pressures psychological, political, cultural and spiritual in the course of his life. This paper examines how the novel has the influence of the various factors which include the protagonist's sufferings and stream of consciousness. In the present study, an attempt has been made to explore the fictional world of Arun Joshi in which he evolves a process of probing the uncertain, mysterious and inscrutable dark regions of human psyche. He explores the truth about the complex nature of life, besides attempting to comprehend it the perennially irresolute elements of deep-down process governing the human psyche as interacts upon the absurd reality and culminating into the disintegration temporarily, and finally tries to overcome the sense of absurdity with life-affirming values.

Key words: dilemma, psycho, labyrinth, spiritual.

Introduction

Arun Joshi wrote the novel *The Last Labyrinth* in 1981. This novel explores the protagonist's inner life. In this novel, Joshi focuses the protagonist, Som, who belongs to the upper society and his quest for life to reveal the true meaning of life. He plunges into the unfathomable depths of human psyche to identify the disturbing factors affecting to its balance. Arun Joshi is an Indian writer. His novels bear contemporary characters that are urban, English speaking and feel disturbed for one or other reason. Labyrinth is a symbol of bewilderment, a symbol of being lost in life. This novel is basically a love story. It explores the hero's search for the meaning of life and pre occupied with men having a mystical urge. It is a novel that portrays its hero with his identity in a more involved technique of story – telling. But, the conflict of the individual this time is not with society alone but with the forms and forces that could not be reckoned with reason or science.

This novel desires to incorporate the protagonist's restive search for his roots and his exploration of directions the directions towards existence. The author's perfection lies in the intimation rather than in the specifically criticised social issues. *The Last Labyrinth* can be seen as a tale of two cities Benares and Bombay as it the western, logical, industrial and technological and the oriental, magical feudal and perfidious. The protagonist, Som Basker, is a modern millionaire who is

guided by reasons and not by faith. "If I believed in God I could pray, may be run a rosary through my fingers. But that's out sitting around. I get into arguments, with the living and with the dead, with myself. And I have had enough of world's arguments (10).

When the novel opens, we get acquainted with Som Basker, the protagonist of the novel who becomes a millionaire at the age of twenty five after his father's death. Though married to a woman of his choice who has borne him two children, he is hardly satisfied with his affluent position. Against the confusions, anxieties and agonies of his life there emerges the metaphysical background of the novel.

Though Ratan perceives the world useless, as a student, he is distressed by useless behaviour of life and begs his headmaster's wife to explain it all. Later, he becomes tied and complains that life is full of problems and entangles in labyrinths within labyrinths like the strip of Benares. He leads his life in conceit of pretension, which could be compared only with the meaningless aviation of stairs. Som remarks that nothing is uncomplicated and one is always running a sort of obstacles.

Som, born in a wealthy family, takes over his father's desire for the first cause. This desire is spelt out at the very beginning of the novel when Som's father says: "I believe in Science, yes, but Science cannot solve the problem of the causes. Not many realize this paradox" (26). Accordingly, Som is has an inbuilt strike for something unclear, obscure and unspecific. He does not know what he is searching for. Initially, he strikes for sex and enjoys sex with several women. Though married to a pretty woman, he is attracted towards a woman an antique looking woman, Anuradha lives in an ancient Haveli of the huge ancient envious of Benares. But, Som gets peace of mind in the company of Anuradha. .

Here, the author depicts the protagonist Som Bhaskar as a successful man, who gets everything in life – wealth, education and even brilliant life. He is a millionaire and gets education in Harvard University, after his return to Bombay and assumes the power of the industries under his domination. He goes through an imperceptible hunger, restlessness and great desire. He worries:

"I want. I want. I want. Through the light of my days and the blackness of my nights and the disquiet of those sleepless hours besides my wife, within reach of the tranquilizers, I had sung the same strident song: I want. I want. I want. I want." (14).

Though incongruity to Som, Anuradha betrays the unyielding belief in faith. Though born in an oppressed caste and hardly educated, Anuradha gets victory over Som. In their love affair, the mysterious woman disappears. She realizes the concept of sacrifice. Arun Joshi says: "Anuradha's role in this novel is to lead Basker through the subconscious. Then, he loses her. I was hinting at the old classical dictum that you do not get anything without sacrificing something. So, she is to be taken away from him" (Sunday Statesman).

The Last Labyrinth is the narrator Som Bhasker's dilemma by focussing attention on his relationship with the other character of the novel. His grandfather is a man of town, fond of women and drinks. He inherits the qualities of both his father and grandfather, for he is a boozier, a philanderer, a highly impulsive man greatly thirty for knowledge. He is an obsessive and highly sensitive. He has his grappling with the feeling of emptiness and void at the core of his being. He is an ambitious son of prosperous industrialists. He becomes mentally shattered and physically exhausted with dreams and insomnia.

Additionally, he is obsessed and rapping with the feelings of emptiness and void at the core of his being psychologically. Som is fissured psychologically, because he is completely immersed in the labyrinth of life which leads him through innumerable sufferings. The reason for the disorder, in psyche, from the point of view of another person is that the defined desire in him to possess everything chases him relentless. A mysterious voice, which always hunts him, is audible only to him. To know the reason being void in his psyche, Som makes many attempts that are futile. He feels void, loneliness and is lost in the labyrinth of thoughts. He is left with insomnia and he can do nothing about it at the conscious level.

Som has made several unsuccessful attempts to find out the reason for the void in his psyche. His mother is a religious woman who believed in God and divine healing. Som is a representative of those modern men who may have gained the whole, but have lost their souls, their spiritual and cultural moorings. His conflicting self, with its endless desire to possess, is resolved through his association with Anuradha, Gargi and Geeta. Anuradha showers love and sympathy on him and miraculously saves him from his ailments. This faith can be aimed only after passing through a painful ordeal and overcoming the imposes of intellectual doubt through knowledge of human sufferings and through spiritual commitment.

Som is unable to come to terms with the world, because he hasn't been able to come to terms with himself. He wants everything in life be it business shares or faith in God's, mystery of a women "the secret of the universe" (129). He wants to know, if there is a mystery in life where everything may fit properly. The failure leads him to bitterness and makes him vindictive towards those who had put him on this planet. If death is to terminate all, there will be no point in seeking "little pleasures or little vendettas" (65). Ever since his mother's death, he has been in the grip of this fear – psychosis.

Som is a split personality. He has inherited the sensuality of his grandfather and the spirituality of his father. He craves for somebody in whom the physical and the spiritual worlds meet. It is this craving that made a mess of his married life with Geetha. Although she is sensible and sensitive, all that a wife could do is to remain discontented. Here, Geetha is, like Som's mother, a child of another world traversing, like a plain at a higher attitude "a corridor separate from the dark vestibule" (19).

Joshi seems to support the religious scientific attitude towards life to disentangle puzzle of existential problems and comes out of the maze of life. The realisation of God needs surrender; sacrifice and strong will to change one's mind and accept the reality. Introspection is not the enough strength in mind to thinking and existential conditions. Som's gradual development to realize this fate of life becomes the substance of the novel. The Labyrinth fails to identity that it is spiritual rather than the material phenomena that he is changing of relationship and pursuit of different women which can satisfy only the hunger of the body, never the spirit.

M. Mani Meitei in Indian Ethos in Arun Joshi's *The Last Labyrinth*:

"Isolates and highlights the quintessentially Indian beliefs, myths, cultural, social and spiritual imprints and ways of thinking. This study dilates upon the manner wherein all these ingredients combine and coalesce to create artistically ethos of the novel. In other said the discontent searing the very soul of Som, the protagonist in the novel has been subjected to a sustained scrutiny to diagnose its origin, nature and consequences."(19-20)

Though labyrinth is a sign of mystification, the sign of existence is lost in life. All the people, at one time, have the feel that they are disorientated and see in the labyrinth the sign of condition. *The Labyrinth* is the sign of absurdity of existence like Camus Sisyphus. The reality of Arun Joshi's themes concern may be stated as 'life itself as a therapeutic process'. There is not a starting and end process in this novel.

The title of the novel, *The Last Labyrinth*, is highly significant. It stands for the great mystery that hangs about the books' deep structure and itself a matter of great inquiry. Labyrinth has been defined as the complex prison built by Daedalus for king Minos of creates to contain the Minotaur. The name probably is derived from Labrys, the sacred double axe of the Cretans and there was the temple of bull cult in creates.

The symbolic meaning of the labyrinth is associated with sex. Som's attraction towards Anuradha leads to bring sexual partners, together no matter what problem it would create, for he is married and has two daughters and she is Aftab's mistress or unmarried wife. The sight of Anuradha and Mehndi revives his latent passion or physical hunger kept repressed for years. To Som sex is a mystery and he wants to know what is in the last sexual labyrinth. His lust after sex is symbolized by the peacock with unfurled tail woven into the carpet of the room which is given to him and where he sleeps with Anuradha. Contrary to this, Som's spiritual quest in the last part of the novel signifies yet another meaning of the last labyrinth.

The central character of the novel, Som is a fusion of two conflicting human faculties, instinct and reason. This blend of two distinctly separate sides of human faculty corresponds with the basic thematic background of the novel. A notable feature of Arun Joshi's heroes is despite being highly placed both by training and by profession in the society, they are not society's men. They are driven by forces unknown and irritations and all their actions are not intelligible to the rational mind. They are individuals who have very rich life within rather than life without and are subject, almost by instinct, to an unconscious link with the primal world.

Arun Joshi's writing reverberates with the feel of Indian life. His mastery over the treatment of Indian themes, ethos and culture is effectively correlated with his use of a sensuous and picturesque language. A typical Joshi's style is really striking as the following passage would show; "Across the steps, in a staggered row, half a dozen men their marvellous oiled bodies faintly gleaming, barrelled through marathon of calisthenics. A young Sanskrit scholar recited hymns at the top of his voice....."(48)

In order to settle him and find answers to his defective wishes; he turns in an irresistible fornication and runs to different women to satisfy him. It is to experience through a direct instinct and wisdom that only give sufferings. Man is alone and an unprotected person in this planet. In every moment of life, the mind longs for a loving heart that may appear from somewhere to give love upon him, sooth him and support him. In most difficult situations of life, is the uncomplicated and lost unconstrained imagination comes to the mind, but the universal and almighty God, the lost aspiration give support and strength. Unexpectedly, if it is a double dealing, it is acceptable. Then, the over attitude of Som is only a foolish attempt. Aftab tells Som:

"That is what you think. I told you, you are different. You don't understand us. You work by logic. By your brain. You are proud of your education or what you consider education. There is an understanding that only suffering and humiliation bring....you are empty of understanding" (200).

Arun Joshi has used dreams in this novel not only to project the mind of Som but also to place it against the rational restraints of moral and social conventions. His dreams are unpleasant and full of pain and anguish, “a kind of punishment, something like the fatigue that the soldiers are sentenced to” (204). His dreams stand for abstract ideas like life, love, death which is not clear to him.

This novel captures influences of philosophical systems of East and West which deals mostly with the labyrinthine ways of life and death. Som constantly suffers from a blurring of reality. He is full of inner conflicts and contradictions. Som’s consciousness wanders in the mazes of the contradictory impulses which he has inherited and this is the reason for his void within. He becomes a psychological case. MukteswarPandey says, “Like Jungian or Pirandellian man, he is full of inner disharmony as is a loose cluster of masks or fragments of identity” (Pandey 116).

As a writer Joshi exhibits a strong liking towards the existentialist analysis of the human dilemma. Som carries with him a sense of alienation, lowliness and pessimism throughout the novel. Deeply affected by the conflict born out of the confrontation with contrary pulls, Som comes to experience the dark absurdity of existence and the process steadily becomes alienated.

Arun Joshi explores the theme of alienation and quest with greater intensity and against a wider backdrop of experience and relationship. It is the longing for the vitals of life in the mystical urge of Som, a young millionaire industrialist is focused. The intermingling of different forces makes Som a psychological case. His dilemma is born at the meeting point of western and Indian ethos. He lives in his anguish of alienation, but soon gets the realization that his dilemma is the result of cause or situations.

Arun Joshi decides to apply the scientific principles to social problems that would only be mystified and astonished by the people. Som’s approach is very close to the scientific method of experimentation and validation. By this way, his approach does not help limited a secret of life. Som endeavours to extinguish his devastated desires but remains in the custody of an object; a business enterprises and a woman named Anuradha of undetermined origin and age. “My hunger was just as bad as ever....later, it became more confused....a world spinning all but itself” (189).

Joshi’s satire and irony aiming at economic disparity, moral lapses, corruption, despotism of the Government as well by the trading community engulfed in hoarding and tax evading are quite admirable. Flashbacks are accompanied by progressive events running simultaneously. This structural layout, surely a technical ingenuity, is Joshi’s special gift as a novelist. The monotonous tedium of introspection and inner life receives kaleidoscopic flavour through his deft handling. The restrained narrative design and the techniques of suggestiveness are simply overwhelming with parallelisms, juxtaposition and overlapping of dialogue sequences.

This is highly suggestive scene on the Ghat of Benaras. The novelist can very vividly capture the Indian ethos with the help of powerful images. The Last Labyrinth presents an impressive fusion of the novelist’s vision of Indian life and philosophy and a fresh Indianized language. The novel has an appealing tone due to Joshi’s balanced treatment of Indian ethos and Indian English to suit his purpose.

As it happens, Som clearly understands because reason and faith are the two different thoughts placed on the same coin. This intellectual aspect is utilized by our logical mind and so faith emerges from the innermost reality of our heart. Moreover, these two parts have been created by the same creator whether we assign him as the God or not. The renowned performance can be clear and the devices may involve our sensory organs. To understand our senses, the logical reasoning cannot

help us however; it may protect us to avoid the delusion so that the individual may realize the true nature of God.

Joshi seems to assist a religious empirical attitude towards life to extract the puzzle of metaphysical problems which emerge out of the intricacy of life. The realisation of Gods needs the minds to relinquish; sacrifice and a strong will to change one's mind to accept reality. Introspection itself is not adequate, unless there is solidity in mind to severely alter one's mind, thinking and the existential condition. Som's gradual development to realize this fact of life becomes the reality of the novel. The labyrinth of the life needed belief, confidence and prayer, and an open heart to get settled. Som's problem is that he is eternally longing for contentment, but he fails to identify it psychological by rather than viewing as material occurrence. He is changing the relationship and pursue various women can indicate only the hunger of the body and not the spirit.

Conclusion

Arun Joshi indicates that the ideal truth and reality could be a subject for analysis, if only one is to betray of rationalism, humanity, sacrifice and suffering the three fold path which explores the spiritual truth. Although a close look at this novel unfolds an outstanding crisscross of the various oriented and literary influences, Arun Joshi's remarkably artistic sensibility assimilates these influences and renders the novel as a powerful masterpiece to focus his vision of life which is undeniably his own Hindu vision of life.

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