

## Marking Out the Catharsis in *The Apprentice*

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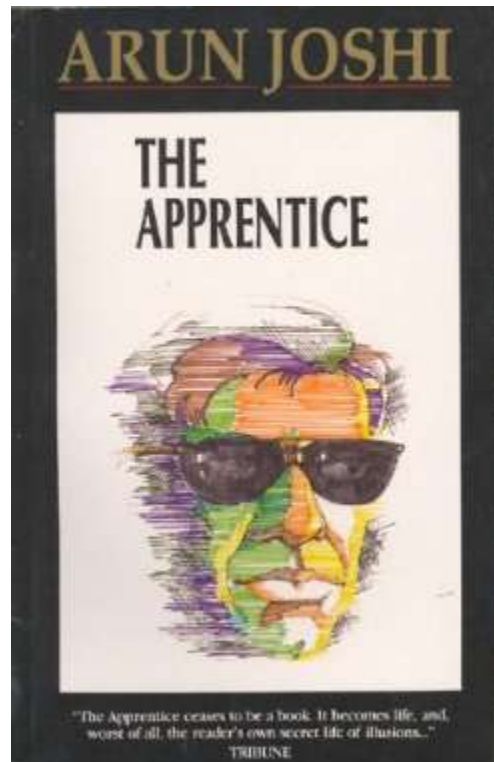
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### Abstract

The present article is an attempt to trace those elements which mark catharsis in Arun Joshi's *The Apprentice*. Arun Joshi is a perfect scanner of human mind and is able to notice both good and bad aspects of its characters. *The Apprentice* is the best example of Arun Joshi's tackling of human psychology.

This novel contains the story of a young man who from his very childhood dangles between the good and the bad paths of life. With the passing of time he decides to choose the path of amoral living by pursuing corruption and its resultant gains in many types of sins. When at last his mistakes force his best friend to commit suicide, his encounter with himself and with another character Brigadier makes him realize his errors. Now he leans towards goodness, and to

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clean up his soul, he chooses to polish shoes outside a temple. He chooses to smell the shoes as his punishment so that he can remind himself to be good.

In this article this process of purification of the soul is highlighted through some instances in the novel. By applying the speech-act theory, a clear appreciation of the work can be accomplished. The devices defined in the speech-act theory prove to be a major tool in the operation of the above mentioned novel. By zooming out the speech-act in dialogues the catharsis element can be marked in the novel. Ratan's regaining of the moral code proves the catharsis approach of the author as well as of literature.

### **On Defining *Catharsis***

*Catharsis* means purification, the purification of soul. First, Aristotle has defined this term and later Plato also describes it. Both highlighted the fact that literature works best to purify the human soul. Literature evokes emotions and feelings in the human heart and extends the range of sympathy without any force, compels an individual to justify his goodness or badness. Only a good piece of literature can accomplish this task. Likewise, only a resourceful and creative author may get credit for this job.

### **Arun Joshi and Catharsis**

Arun Joshi is a prolific writer who successfully deals with the human mind. He naturally grasps the vivid complexity and simplicity of human nature. This is why the characters developed by him are realistic, and even their flaws are universally found and can be observed everywhere in our society. At the same time, readers finally feel something moving them deeply, and are motivated to purify themselves along with the characters.

Arun Joshi's third novel, *The Apprentice* is the story of Ratan, a corrupted government employee, who after spending many years of sinful living, finally feels himself guilty and begs forgiveness of his father, his mother, the brigadier and finally decides to punish himself by polishing shoes in a temple. He says:

I never enter the temple. I am not concerned with what goes on in there. I stand at the doorstep and I fold my hands, my hands smelling of leather and I say things. Be good, I tell myself. Be good. Be decent. Be of use. (143)

## **Ratan**

Ratan is the son of a freedom fighter who died in an uprising. His mother was a chronic patient and had suffered greatly because she had no money. It is due to this personal experience with the lack of money in life, that she encourages him to be a mercenary. While he was at the growing stage, he was torn between the idealistic and practical approaches towards life, but later he decides to be a mercenary. He expresses his approach to life in the following way: “educated, intelligent, cultured and it was my right that I should rise in life, to levels higher than the others aspired for.” (*The Apprentice* , 31).

## **Result of Amoral Life**

Henceforth his only aim of life is to build his career by hook or crook. He does not recognize any morals of life. He seeks all the wrong ways to earn money, but in doing so, he loses his peace of mind. He thinks that it is because of his amoral approach to life that his friend Brigadier and Himmat Singh have to die. He holds himself responsible for the deaths of these two persons and hence he decides to polish shoes in a temple where he experiences the shrinking of boundaries between the slums and the rich colonialists.

## **A Flashback Story**

In terms of speech act, Ratan Rathor himself does not involve any speech act directly; it is his flash-back story in which he seems to be making decisions. His decisions are influenced by his mercenary approach to life; he even acknowledges his marriage as a gizmo taken up for the sake of his career. He marries a girl whom he does not love. For his progress forward, he ignores his past relationships with no regret. He leaves the person who provides him the job.

This is his own decision, which projects his mean and selfish character. It is because of this flaw in his nature that he decides to lead a life without morals. These are all minor but important decisions taken by him for his own personal advancement. One of his major decisions in life is to participate amorally during war time. Here the reader can observe how the resurrection of Ratan's soul takes place in the story, as he admits his amoral act. When he cleans up his soul, by having a decision "to guide man" he shares his own experiences of life and advises younger people to own up to their responsibility to society.

### **Confessing His Life**

When Ratan is sharing his experiences with an NCC cadet, he admits that what he has achieved in his life is due to his power, which is the basis of his corruption. This feature explicitly comes out in one of Ratan's self-expressions:

Our health is looked after by the government I have a telephone, which is not common-one always gets it. I have insurance. I have twenty thousand in the bank, which is not fortune but will tide you over a rainy day. Besides, I would have pension when I retire which should be enough for me and my wife. My daughter, God willing, should be married by then.

So, you see, I did not need the 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. (*The Apprentice*, 58-59).

### **The Episode at the S.P. Office**

The passage reveals the self-examination of the character. It unfolds Ratan's ironical confession about how the narrator, in spite of his awareness, fails to get out of the clutches of corruption. In a monotonous description, here, Ratan's confession underlines use of expletives. The episode at the S.P. office consists of expletives. S.P. displays his power to Ratan by saying:

Yes, by you," he further says he had had enough of my play-acting.

Lack of proofs, isn't that our final safeguard? Said S.P. There was a silence. A little later he spoke again. He seemed ready to collapse with exhaustion. ( *The Apprentice*, 112).

The purification of Ratan is the result of commitment, by which Ratan learns the real sense of life. He feels elevated in narrating his course of life to others. This is nothing but the expression of his commitment. He unfolds his commitment in this conversation. He uses explanatory, narrative and procedural discourse in the following lines:

I am going to kill you. I said, as firm as you please, standing up and stretching myself to my full height. I ordered him next to get up and stand against the wall, my idea, no doubts, of the firing squad. ( *The Apprentice*, 128).

## **Apology**

In these lines above, Ratan wants to kill Himmat Singh in anger. He declares it to him directly and feels a great uplifting as though he is an agent of God. In his later confession he acknowledges his faults and admits his selfishness, he decides to make an apology to all whom he has hurt. He tells:

Then I beg forgiveness of a large host: my father my mother, the brigadier, the unknown dead of the war, of those whom I harmed, with deliberation and with cunning, of all those who have been the victims of my cleverness, those whom I could have helped and did not ( *The Apprentice*, 143).

## **Seeking Solace and Forgiveness, and Changing Mentality**

To sooth his conscience he decides to go to the temple. This passage reveals that he goes to the temple not for religious reasons but for the sake of his moral improvement. For this self-resurrection, he polishes the shoes of the visitors in the temple. This action minimizes his ego that keeps him away from all evil deeds and corruption of life. The author also deals with social activities to highlight the importance of society to shape up one's individual character.

In speech-act theory, behabitives are discussed. In *The Apprentice* the description of the changing mentality of Ratan illustrates catharsis. Ratan feels a change to have come over him “almost overnight” he stares at the women openly, willfully to the point of rudeness. He feels confident that he has a “right to stare, right even to do more than stare”, “if he gets the chance”. The sudden power of money makes him feel ‘cocky’ and he overlooks the “Group of army officers, exhausted and disheveled, returning probably from some far flung out post....” Because his thoughts are “full of other thing”, he is engrossed in fantasies of pleasure that awaits him.

You are lying, Mr. Rathore, he spat out, and leaned back in his chair. My reaction to this accusation was one of great anger. I was completely, almost hysterically offended. What I found offensive was not the accusation itself, but the fact that it had been made. Our annoyance with your generation, my friend, is not that you know us inside out but that you drag your knowledge, like a rotting carcass (*The Apprentice*, 66).

### **Pretending to be Honest**

This game of bluff is running in the mind of a person, who is lying but pretends to be honest. Arun Joshi beautifully exemplifies the psychological factor here. If we go further into the details, the readers can encounter this issue more clearly. Ratan never thinks that he will be caught but the next moment, he catches himself guilty. This confirms the role of human psychology which causes denial of accusation, and the effort to save self-esteem; either one is wrong. The transformation of the amoral view takes place in some situations as at the freedom fighting, and partly where a minister and other persons meet to talk morals to him and where for the first time Ratan is scared of death. In order to exemplify the transformation of the soul, it can be analyzed in the following lines:

First of all I have no need of money. I am quite sure of that. I needed it no more than sitting here, after two cups of tea, I need a third. I may drink it because others do, or because it is offered free, but I need it for neither survival nor happiness. In this poor land I can be called comfortable, even well-off. (*The Apprentice*, 58).

## A Symbol of Custom

In this passage offering or taking tea in office symbolically shows a custom. Here indeed, there is a change in Ratan's emerging ego yet this change takes him into the world of pleasure, and fogs the meaning of the unconscious or the deeper self for him. Money makes him feel 'as good as the best'. His approach to life shall strengthen the incestuous and narcissistic orientation of his emerging self, involving him in a 'syndrome of decay'. This passage reveals the tormenting and tortuous self-examination of the self, when it is sorting out its own problems, unmistakably suggests some of the civilized values that obtain in a metropolis.

## Transformation

At the outset of Ratan's career, transformation of his persona from moral into amoral takes place because of his own mother. As his mother warns Ratan from time to time to have a mercenary approach, she insisted he must think about the negative aspect of being a poor one. She says:

Don't fool yourself, son, she said. Man without money was a man without worth. Many things were great in life, but the greatest of them all was money....

If I underrated the power of money, she said, I would be sorry some-day. ( *The Apprentice*, 19).

It is the use of directives by his mother that changes the whole mental level and attitude of Ratan. Later directives take him away from the idealistic approach of life and so he becomes determined to earn money irrespective of means. Here mother's warning in the form of directives is a by-product of the philosophy of survival. Now she appears to him like a post independent India's version of Lord Krishna revealing to Arjuna the mystery and the laws of the Universe. His deeper self is suppressed and enters into the new arena of life, i.e. the life of immoral acts.

## Response to Life

Ratan also responds to life when he is engaged genuinely with the quest of inner self. Ratan, when feeling dissatisfied, runs after all money just like mammon; but, eventually he feels guilty as money fails to give him peace. He concludes his experiences in following way:

“The more money I accumulated, the more I was dissatisfied and the more I was determined to ‘enjoy’ life. And all the time I thought of death” (*The Apprentice*, 89).

### ***The Apprentice - A Tale of Conscience***

This utterance obliquely suggests that a distracted life is death of the self. It makes the novel *The Apprentice* the tale of a conscience – torn man with a message, which Ratan wants to convey with an emotional charge:

The crookedness of the world, the crookedness of oneself. How to get rid of it? ‘Revolution of God?’ The Sheikh had said. But what do I know of either of them, my friend? Of Revolution, or of God? I know nothing. That is the long and the short of it ... And I do know what to do, where to begin. But time is short and one must begin somewhere, anywhere (*The Apprentice*, 142).

Here Ratan simply questions his soul and in response takes a decision to establish new values and policies for the sake of his country. In order to save the fall of his nation he acts like a rebel and endeavors to bring positive changes in society to uproot corruption. In *The Last Labyrinth*, Som expresses his own feeling being impressed by Gargi’s views. He believes that it is only she who can answer his query. Gargi’s explanation of his question ‘I want, I want’ satisfies him. Som obsessed and weighed down by such feelings and ideas, confesses:

I had sorrows that did not let me breathe.

... Then, there was the greatest sorrow of them all—that no one even guessed: there was the sorrow of idleness



In the novel *The Apprentice* Ratan is exploring the behavior and habits. In his dialogues, he exhibits a plea to make an anti-corruption society by showing its negative features. In it Ratan shows all his will for changing by using words in the narrative tone. His self-questions are here to evoke the inner soul to be truly good, which is part of the Holy Divine.

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. At our age, I hear my friends say, at our age one must learn to be comfortable, to flow with the current. Let us hold on to the gains, my friends say, we have lost we have lost. It is too late to put up a fight.

Perhaps they are right. But it seems to me that there are losses and losses. There are losses that one cannot so readily accept. There are things, shorn of which, it is very difficult to die. Therefore I say let us give battle, howsoever late the hour (*The Apprentice*, 143).

### **The Declarative Tone**

This passage is a fine example of the declarative tone, which conveys Ratan's views. He analyzes the affect of corruption in India and wants to recover the moral core of Indians. Here, Ratan has become an 'apprentice' of spirit and engages himself in the act of soul-making and wishes younger persons would learn service and sacrifice. Ratan's heroic struggle for higher consciousness has ended the civil war in him. Therefore, he uses his little acts of unselfish service to give meaning to his life and death. The journey through the dark alley of one's unconscious is over and Ratan arrives at the high water mark of love for his fellow beings. He now has hope and faith in the new generation, where the process of spiritual journey has started. There is one more example of declarative tone is used by Ratan:

He was born in filth and in filth he had grown. But he had dealt with them, the bosses, men like my Secretary, he had dealt with them on their own terms and he had troubled

some of them. He was not proud of it, not anymore, but he had at least not sold himself, like I had, nor for that matter, had he betrayed a friend.( *The Apprentice*, 138).

## Final Resolution

Here through this passage Ratan finally is able to think properly with all his moral values. He can now differentiate himself and others. He understands that there is no outer source who forced him to be bad but his own weakness is the reason of his own fall.

Readers can conclude that Ratan's final decision to admit his fault, to feel his moral duty for his country and his determination to remain an honest civilian is a fruitful product of literary work of Arun Joshi. Reading this most readers will become immersed in a labyrinth of deep thoughts. Somewhere in their hearts they think that the character of Ratan more or less resembles their own shadows. Finally they partially turn out to be honest to avoid the dilemma of their heart and mind.

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