

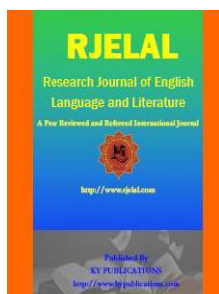


APPRENTICE: A PEEP INTO HUMAN NATURE

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ABSTRACT

Arun Joshi's novel *The Apprentice* is a story set in the pre and the post independent India and deals with the society and the people of that period. The characteristics and deeds of the characters of the novel represent the nature of mankind in general. Main story is built across Ratan Rathor who narrates the tale of his life to a student. The paper depicts the change in human nature under the influence of the materialistic society in which people are living. The advancement in the society is increasing constantly the desires of the people with little hope of these ever being fulfilled. The avarice and self-love of people is responsible for causing disintegration and chaos to the world. Love and relationship is linked only to the monetary affairs and cunningness of the people is on rise. Selfishness of the people can take them to the extent of deteriorating other people's right. The diplomacy and hypocrisy shown by the different characters of the novel is linked to the humanity in general. Jean Jacques Rousseau's concepts of human nature, inequality and self-love are used to analyse the causes behind the crookedness of human nature. Rousseau, in his book *Discourse on Inequality*, has given detailed analysis of the change that has occurred in human nature due to the result of his detachment from natural environment. Negative aspect of self-love, Amour-Propre, given by Rousseau, who has talked about two types of self-love, is also analysed while taking into consideration various characters of the novel. Loss of human values due to this inclination to materialism and the state of general chaos is also dealt with.

Key words: Avarice, Chaos, Disintegration, Desires, Materialism, Self-love,

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"The first man, who, after enclosing a piece of ground, took it into his head to say, "This is mine" and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society" (Rousseau, *on Inequality* 63).

Jean Jacques Rousseau, a well-known philosopher and writer, has talked at length about the changes that have taken place in the nature of human beings as a result of their coming into contact with the civilization. People have lost their natural instincts of

compassion and pity; and instead, have turned out to be corrupt, greedy and selfish. (*On Inequality*). The confessional novel of Arun Joshi, *The Apprentice* in which the protagonist lays bare his misdeeds before a student, is in fact a tale about the humanity in general depicting the ways of the world. Ratan Rathor begins his narrative from the early days of his life and moves towards his present stage of a middle aged person. Ratan's story just provides an outer structure to the overall nature and living conditions

of the people throughout the time. The narrative unveils the different aspects of human nature and the reaction of the people to different situations as per their own convenience. The novel is in reality a web in which different types of human behaviour are spun together. The writer has quite aptly described the different categories of individuals and their reaction towards the different types of situations. Each character of the novel has a typical human trait which is adjustable as per the demands of the situation.

Facets of human nature like jealousy, selfishness, hypocrisy, self-love, crookedness, apart from love and devotion, are depicted in the novel. Different characters of the novel seem to be the personifications of these traits and there are more negative than positive aspects of human nature being portrayed. In fact the novel depicts man as he really is; having high hopes and aspirations to be good but ending up as self-centred and indifferent. Most of the characters of the novel are self-absorbed despite having high ideals at the beginning. The response of Ratan's mother towards her husband's decision to quit his job for the cause of freedom movement, shows the self-centredness of human beings. "You fool" she said, "what right had you, what right?" (8). Ratan's mother is shown as a realistic being who thinks life without money to be impossible. But this is truth as the society has been made such that it is really not possible to move ahead without a penny in hands. Money has been made to be the most important possession in today's world and Ratan's mother cannot be considered wrong when she says, "man without money was a man without worth. Many things were great in life, but greatest of them all was money" (19). Our living conditions demand money at each and every step and that's why money is indeed the most important instrument for survival.

Ratan, like a typical young man in college, aspires for a bright future. He wishes to be good and of some use to the people, "To be good! Respected! To be of use!" (18). He even thinks of following his father's path toward patriotism and to join SubhashChander Bose's army. As he is not able to do so partly due to his mother's disagreement and partly due to the lack of proper means, he wishes to

continue with such ideals throughout his life; not knowing at that stage that the "bourgeois filth" (32) will overcome his ideals. Ratan goes to seek a job in Delhi, hopeful that his qualification and intelligence will earn him a lot. But his dreams are shattered when he fails to secure a job and instead faces humiliation many times. He envies his roommates who, despite being poorly educated and with less potential than him, are earning their livelihood. In order to maintain his so-called self-esteem, he lies to them that he has got a job and also reduces his communication with them. After recovering from the illness in which his roommates take care of him, he starts going to the work which one of his roommate has secured for him. Again his ego overcomes his compassion and he breaks off all his relations with them once he gets a new place to live in. Ratan is in fact the true representative of selfish and apathetic nature of people who are only concerned with getting their own wishes fulfilled. He forgets the whole kindness shown by the people with whom he has been sharing room and instead looks down upon them. His best friend, the Brigadier also meets similar fate at the hands of Ratan and is forced to commit suicide. Brigadier is held guilty of abandoning his men during the war because of the defective weapons which were, in reality, released by Ratan. Ratan is provided the chance of saving his friend but he fails to do so because his self-centeredness does not allow him to disadvantage himself for his friend. It shows the coldness and egotism of human nature and the lack of empathy for the others. The crookedness of Ratan cannot be said to be of his own making, the society he is living in is equally responsible for it. Ratan had witnessed his father's execution who sacrificed himself for the cause of the nation. Ratan's father was a Gandhian who believed in non-violence and peaceful protest, but is killed and it's quite painful that his death has left little impression upon the people who don't take much time to forget him. Even Ratan wonders about the meaninglessness of his father's death and the wastage of his life. "No life, I had thought...no life had been more pointlessly spent than the life of my father" (80).

Ratan alone is not to be blamed for his slyness, as there are other characters as well who

represent such traits. The engineer and the lawyer, for example are worth mentioning in this aspect. The engineer promised Ratan to help him in every manner. He used to come to the street to see Ratan off and showed the utmost generosity but eventually reduces it to ignoring him. His actions remind of some lines from Gabriel Okara's poem, "Once Upon a Time":

Feel at home!' 'Come again':
they say, and when I come
again and feel
at home, once, twice,
there will be no thrice-
for then I find doors shut on me. (14-19)

Similar thing happened to Ratan who is initially welcomed at the house of the engineer but has to stop his visits because of the indifference shown by the guy. Modern man is easily tired off showing compassion by helping others and shows off very soon. The similar thing is done by the lawyer who soon gets tired of doing favours to Ratan and eventually breaks off all the contacts with him. Selfless service is done by only a few people these days, otherwise most of the people are uninterested in the wellbeing of others. Even if an act of kindness is shown at some point of time, the same treatment cannot be expected every time. This meanness and coldness of human nature is the result of the influence of money and greed on the people, what Ratan's father calls "bourgeois filth"(32). The quest for money and status among the people has resulted in distancing people among themselves and reducing the level of affection. Money has become the ultimate concern of people and even the family relations are mostly determined by monetary affairs. Ratan, for example, does not share much with his wife apart from the talk about promotion and salary. "What had I shared with her in the twenty years of our married life that could be called intimate....But the closest I had come to sharing secrets with her was to tell her of promotions I received...." (114-15). At the most critical phase of his life that is his dilemma about the confession of his crime related to the defective weapons, he is not able to share anything with her. In fact, at this stage, he feels himself to be living with a stranger, despite having spent so many years of his life with her. This

shows how formal and unaffectionate the family relations have become.

Even the religious institutions are not free from such vulgarity and viciousness of human nature as is shown by the priest to whom Ratan goes to seek penance and is instead offered a bribe by him to get his work done. The loss of faith in God and the disobedience towards the religious instructions can be said to be the result of all this. The secretary and the Minister who are involved with Himmat Singh regarding the clearance of the defective weapons are also a part of this system of corruption. Himmat Singh himself represents those individuals who think themselves to be wronged by the society. He thinks the society to be responsible for having created a whore of his mother which caused much disorder to his entire family. To take revenge, he gets involved in the black marketing rackets so as to come face to face with the people who he thinks to be responsible for his misery. The corrupt social system makes the rich richer and forces the people with less facilities to get involved in these humiliating businesses in order to make up for their living.

In this chaotic and disintegrating world, everything seems to be moving towards destruction but there are still some people who have kept this flame of humanity awake; the Brigadier, Ratan's father, the roommates of Ratan, the officer of Ratan whom he gets transferred and the S. P. who compels Ratan to confess his crime are included in the category of those limited people who are selflessly sympathetic. But as is the way of the world, such people are never credited for their deeds and instead have to suffer endlessly. The brigadier is charged with deception, Ratan's father is killed, the roommates face indifference and the officer is forced to get transferred. The S. P., despite being sure of the crime of Ratan is not able to arrest him because of the indulgence of his superior in the case.

It is a typical trait of humans to be selfish and greedy but the whole blame cannot be placed upon the mannerism of the individuals. The living conditions created by the society can be held equally responsible for the insensitivity of human beings. The life has been made such that everything rests upon the amount of money we possess. As

Rousseau says, "MAN is born free; and everywhere he is in chains. One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater slave than they. How did this change come about? I do not know" (*Social Contract* 14). The comment of Rousseau seems absolutely accurate in context of the novel as the characters are not acting as per their own will. The prevailing system of the society has in a way enslaved the people and made them act as per its demands. Even the so-called legislatures of the society are not completely free; they do their work in such a manner that their positions remain secure. So, they work not as per their own will but as per the demands of the system they are involved in. The Minister and the Secretary are in a way the executors of the society, but at times they act as per the dictation of Himmat Singh, a dissipated rogue whose ways and rules are completely against the rules laid down by the law of the land. People act as per his notations as it's the most easy way of gaining wealth and maintaining their status. It's only our possessions that are counted in today's acquisitive world; the means of acquiring these assets being totally negligible.

The cruelty and cunningness in which man indulges is also the result of the society where he resides. If the society never demands a person to be wealthy and money is not given so much importance, the conditions can be quite different. Increase in the possession of wealth makes a person greedy to acquire more and more to fulfil the demands of this materialistic society. As Rousseau has propounded in his book *Discourse on Inequality* that the natural man is far better than today's civilized man whose needs are difficult to be satisfied. The needs of natural man as per Rousseau are limited only to food, sex and rest; while the civilised person is greedy, yearns for status and wealth and his demands are unlimited. Rousseau believes nature just differentiates among the people on the basis of their physical features rest of the differences are created by humans themselves. Rousseau says:

I conceive two species of inequality among men; one which I call natural or physical inequality, because it is established by nature, and consists in the difference of

age, health, bodily strength, and the qualities of mind or of soul; the other which may be termed moral, or at least authorised, by the common consists in the different privileges which some men enjoy to the prejudice of others, such as that of being richer, more honoured, more powerful, and even that of extracting obedience from them. (*Discourse on Inequality* 8-9)

People come in contact with the society they live in and acquisition of the materialistic things create the inequality among people. Ratan starts his career keeping in mind the high ideals and principles. He needs the money but refuses to take the bribe he is offered due to his alignment to these principles. However, he slowly begins to indulge in the prevailing system and loses his association to those ideals. The disintegration of his ethics begins and he gets involved in the cunning ways of the world of which he is a part. It is under this influence that Ratan takes bribe when he least requires it. Ratan gets fully indulged in the existing system of the society and becomes habitual of showing sluggishness to his job. His previous dedication towards his work is completely lost and he just goes on passing his time; paying no heed towards the work he is assigned. It is the self-love of Ratan that makes him over-concerned about his own career even at the cost of the well-being of others.

In the *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau has talked about the inclination of humans towards self-love saying that reason creates self-love in a person who begins to take interest in his own welfare. But the emotion of pity induced in man by nature helps him to moderate the self-love and contribute towards the welfare of all species in general (47-50). "One of the most celebrated features of Rousseau's thought is his distinction between two basic variants of self-love: amour de soi, which is absolute and thus indifferent to one's social standing, and amour-propre, which is relative and thus deeply concerned with one's standing" (Cooper 661). 'Amour-Propre', as Rousseau believes is an artificial sentiment which makes a person inclined towards his own good than of anybody else. So, applying Rousseau's explanation of these two

types of self-love, it can be seen that most of the characters of the novel are inflicted with 'Amour-Propre', as they are inclined to get more benefit for themselves than the others. The secretary, the Minister, Himmat Singh and also Ratan can be included in this category for they are more concerned about their own good than of the others. Ratan is given a chance to save Brigadier's life but due to this self-love, he fails to sacrifice his own for the sake of his friend. "The man who grew violent and rebellious even at the thought of careers and bourgeois filth, becomes in due course a thick-skin and washout" (Barkha).

The circumstances of a person's life can mislead him, but in today's world, the conditions are such that it becomes difficult to manage our existence by adopting sincere means. Hypocrisy and fraudulence have become a part of our daily life and the people who try to keep away from these things can't live out normally. The officer of Ratan who tries to maintain discipline in the office is treated in such a worst manner that he is forced to get himself transferred. His honesty and dedication fails to gain him anything and instead he is humiliated by his own staff. His seriousness towards improving the conditions of the work is made fun of by Ratan and his colleagues. Instead of concentrating on his job, Ratan focuses on doing away with that officer. "The greatest task I had thus far set myself was the humiliation of a good and decent man....I was the one therefore who masterminded the conspiracy" (67). The society has made man so much nasty and avaricious that he can go to any extent for the sake of preserving and elevating his position

It is the natural tendency of humans to be both generous and greedy; depending upon their convenience and the situation they are faced with. Most of the times people act in a selfish manner in order to get their own work done. People take no time to ditch others for the sake of their own benefit. The modern man is getting so much engrossed into the fulfilment of his own needs that he hardly cares about the way he has chosen to acquire them. People might talk of ideals and principles but when the time comes, they do what best suits their comfort, as Ratan tells the student, "When the moment comes we remember what best

grinds our axe" (32). Modernity has changed the attitude of civilization and the bound of humanity is breaking away. The result is that there is a general suffering among the people who despite having every material comfort fell distress. Ratan and his wife are having all the materialistic requirements of life yet their lives are without any peace and love.. "As Ratan Rathor, coming face-to-face with the social reality, conforms to the phony social norms and subsequently suffers like the typical existentialist characters" (Sharma 57).

Conclusion

The novel *Apprentice* seems to be a true representative of the disintegration and chaos which modern man has brought to this world through his greed. The quest for materialistic possessions has taken away the natural human instinct of compassion and pity. Virtue and morality are left meaningless in face of the corruption and viciousness present in the society. Most of the characters of the novel including Ratan are a part of this wickedness that is overtaking the entire humanity. With every increase in their status and wealth, people are yearning for more and more and despite attaining tremendous wealth, people are far from being happy and contented. Materialistically speaking, Ratan and his wife are complete but so far as their family relation is concerned, it's not up to the mark. Technical developments have been made but the disintegration of the humanity is creating a pathetic picture. In the end, this line of Rousseau seems quite appropriate, "...do to others as you would have others do to you...." (*on Inequality* 51).

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