

CHAPTER - IV

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The development of the modern Indian novel in English can be traced from its experimental stage to realistic and then to psychological. Essentially, realistic novels in English came to be written in India for the first time during the 1920's, when with the surging nationalistic feelings, the scene shifted to the contemporary struggles and agitations. The novels written between the two World Wars were chiefly concerned with the exploration and interpretation of the social milieu as is evident from such representative works as Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable (1935), R.K.Narayan's Swami and Friends (1935) and Raja Rao's Kanthapura (1938). These novels did not make any conscious attempt at dealing with individual's personal predicament. After 1947, however, the novelists' interest shifted from the public to the private sphere. They began to treat the theme of the individual's quest for the self in all its varied and complex forms. The delineation of the individual's inner problems and crises has imparted permanent significance to Indian novels in English.

It is quite evident that in modern times, Indian novel in English has developed in a parallel direction with British novel; action rather than character, social milieu rather than individual identity. Here, we may draw a parallel between Bennett, Galsworthy and Wells on the English scene and Anand, Narayan and Rao on the Indian scene. The novelists who followed, Lawrence, H.James, Joyce, Woolf, D.Richardson, have on the other hand, concentrated on the psychological development of their individual character. In India, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi have shown parallel interest in portraying psychological character in their novels.

Portraying a character is a complex process, involving a lot of work on the part of the author. A character is the aggregate of traits and features - general, physical, personal and emotional, a verbal construction of which exists in the novel. The novelist has to reveal a character through dialogue and action and also through such explanatory devices as response, choice and point of view. Conflict and contrast, search for identity and self-discovery make characters convincing and life-like. Quite often, the novelist bases his characters on real models in life and in some of the major characters, he projects his own self, drawing on his own person as the model. The novelist's real skill lies in the convincing presentation of the inner working of his character, which at once establishes them as distinct identities. Arun Joshi is such a skilled novelist.

Arun Joshi is one of those modern Indian novelists in English who have broken new grounds. In search of new themes, he has renounced 'the larger world' in favour of 'the inner man'. He has engaged himself in 'a search for the essence of human living'. An outstanding novelist of human predicament, Joshi has chartered in his novels the inner crisis of the modern man. The most besetting problem that man today faces is the problem of meaninglessness, which Joshi effectively tackles.

All of Arun Joshi's novels are splendid but at the same time, serious and disturbing. They are singularized by certain existentialist problems and the resultant anger, agony, psychological quest and the like. He skilfully presents the different facets of the crisis of identity in modern man's life. The central image in all his novels is of a foreigner. His characters are not merely cast in the dilemma of dual cultures, but they are also living metaphors of alienation - Sindi

Oberoi who is a foreigner wherever he goes, Billy Biswas returning to the primitive world to find life-essence in Bilasia, Ratan Rathor torn between guilt and confession or Som Bhaskar lost in the labyrinth of death and life, existence and reality, doubt and faith, Darwin and Krishna. He attempts a serious probe into the existential problems of mankind by focussing on such individualistic characters.

Arun Joshi's novels are solo-character novels. The protagonist is the major character. The remaining characters are either subordinate or minor. The novels revolve around the protagonists, Sindi Oberoi, Billy Biswas, Ratan Rathor and Som Bhaskar. But for their individual traits and also for their role in the revelation of the major characters, the other characters are also worth remembering; for example, Bilasia, Mr. Khenka, Meena Chatterjee, etc.

The protagonists of Joshi's novels are psychologically disturbed persons. He uses different techniques to portray the inner realities of these characters - character contrast, narration, point of view, choice, circumstances, dreams, hallucinations and letters. Babu Khenka is presented as the other self of Sindi Oberoi. They are the two aspects of the same psychology - one foolist and the other unwise. Billy and Romesh Sahai are the two poles of opposite personalities. The one is impulsive, eccentric and the other cool and calculating. In The Apprentice, Ratan is presented as totally changed after getting a job. Here, one observes the conflict between the two selves of the same man. In The Last Labyrinth, all the other characters are portrayed as in contrast to Som Bhaskar's. In fact, they are not only human beings, but represent different attitudes, philosophies, and ways of living life.

Arun Joshi uses first person narrative technique in his novels. It helps a lot to expose the inner realities at conflict in the mind of the character. As the protagonists are psychological characters, it is the best way to give them liberty to express themselves through their respective points of view. Sindi Oberoi, Ratan Rathor and Som Bhaskar exploit this advantage. The only defect of this technique is that the other characters remain undeveloped; they can be seen only through the angle of the narrator. In The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, the pattern is changed. The Collector friend of the protagonist, Romi, is the narrator. But Billy is such an emotional and impulsive person haunted by primitive force that it would not have been possible for him to narrate his own story. Billy also speaks sometimes. The freedom of self-expression given to him helps to throw light on his inner crisis.

'Choice' of the character also plays an important role in revealing the character. Sindi's detachment finally turns into attachment because of his choice to lead the Khenka enterprise. Though Billy's choice seems to lead him to tragedy, it proves that he is the forerunner of the modern civilized world. In his search for career, Ratan makes different choices like marrying the head-clerk's niece. He bargains. He gets an opportunity to make the right choice, that is, sacrificing for the sake of friendship. But he chooses wrong and repents.

Dreams and hallucinations also help to reveal the characters. Billy and Som have some fantastic dreams since their childhood. Joshi has been successful in portraying their psychological disturbances and erotic behaviour through references to their dreams and hallucinations. This sharply distinguishes them from all the rest.

In addition to these techniques, Joshi uses other techniques also. The use of 'letters' places the character in a particular situation, as in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas. In The Last Labyrinth, Arun Joshi uses metaphors and symbols to present the mystery of human psyche.

Arun Joshi deviates from the realistic method of portraying characters which, though endowed with individual traits, typify the generally relevant, essential and decisive characteristics of the environment, the social milieu to which they belong. In his novels, the social scene is used only as the background in the context of which the psychological characters are developed. His technique gradually develops from simple to complex. In the first three novels, we can judge the protagonists using E.M.Forster's Scale. They can be called 'round'. But in The Last Labyrinth, the protagonist Som cannot be measured using this scale. One thing is clear that Joshi is always successful in depicting the psychological turmoil in the mind of the protagonist.

The characters help to express the themes of the novel. The philosophy or attitude expressed by the protagonist is the theme of the novel in Arun Joshi's case. His heroes are the mouthpieces of the author. Arun Joshi is a 'connoisseur' of souls divided against themselves. Educated mostly in the United States with a degree in Engineering from the University of Kansas, he worked in a mental hospital in the States, where his uncle was a psychiatrist, and dealt with chronic schizophrenics there. This experience was bound to create a strong impression on his young and sensitive mind. It is quite natural, therefore, that the chief protagonists in all the four novels describe an inner life within the underworld of the soul, divided against itself - its aspirations and conflicting urges turned on the will and action -

the novelist's searchlight carefully scrutinizing it all in full focus. There is good reason to suppose that there is something deeper than empathy for such characters in the novelist's heart.

Arun Joshi's characters may be compared with Matthew Arnold's and D.H. Lawrence's characters. Arun Joshi's Billy Biswas is very much like Matthew Arnold's Scholar Gypsy and he illustrates also the Lawrentian search for the essence of life. Ratan Rathor may be compared with Conrad's Jim, who is full of revolt against the bourgeois ideal of self-preservation and loses his dignity and honour in a moment of crisis.

Joshi seems to neglect the women-characters in his novels. Nowhere in his work do we find a woman having a role equal to that of a man, although the part played by the women in the lives of the centrally placed male characters is very prominent. What results, consequently, is the creation of female characters who are most often reduced to some sort of symbols. Viewed solely through the eyes of the male perceivers - Billy Biswas and Som Bhaskar, Bilasia and Anuradha represent the spiritual aspects of human life.

In his novels, Arun Joshi seems to narrow down his study of human world to the portrayal of a few outstanding characters, excluding the wider range of life and action. Most of his characters seem to be moving in a world devoid of values. And consequently, they tend to search for their roots. In the portrayal of his characters, Joshi introduces an undercurrent of satire.

Arun Joshi has certainly added a new dimension to the character portrayal in Indo-Anglian fiction.

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