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**Corruption and ‘Crooked Practices’: Representation of Social Realism of Post-
Independence India in Arun Joshi’s *The Apprentice*
Arun Kumar Biswas**

Abstract:

Society in post-independence twentieth century India, no doubt, underwent many challenges, threats and evil (mal) practices. Corruption and various malpractices embodying such ‘crude reality’ have greatly wrapped the post-independence Indian social life and systems. The Indian English literature has obviously depicted all the seamy truth of life. Arun Joshi’s *The Apprentice* (1974) is a vivid literary dossier of the contemporary Indian society preoccupied with the ideologies of money, power, and corruption. In the typical Joshi’s style, the novel vividly illustrates the existential predicament of contemporary life with its ethical confusion and moral chaos and the quest for meaning and remedy in the changing social context. The novel deals with the journey of Ratan Rathor, an ambitious careerist public employee, who gradually becomes corrupt for materialistic gain through bribery and betrayal. The present paper seeks to explore the grim reality of post-independence Indian society as represented in Arun Joshi’s *The Apprentice*.

Key words: Reality, existential crisis, post-independence Indian society, corruption, crookedness, bribery.

Corruption is worse than prostitution.

- Karl Kraus

Introduction

Reality being the soul of literature records contemporary time and spirit it is produced. The Indian English literature typically registers the essence of Indian society and people. It also



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represents diverse aspects of post-independence Indian society both in tradition and transition. There is hardly any doubt that post-colonial twentieth century India underwent remarkable transformation and witnessed so many threatening incidents, evils and challenges that cast a significant impact on the individual and the society. M.K. Naik, an eminent critic, remarks:

With the attainment of independence on 15 August 1947 began a new era of challenges and changes in Indian life. During the first twenty five years of its independence the nation underwent experiences which would have all but shattered a country with less inner strength and latent resilience. ...The sweeping changes in the political and economic spheres were matched by a virtual transformation in the social scene. ... But the most disturbing phenomenon on the socio-political scene has been the steady erosion of the idealism of the days of the freedom struggles, the new gods of self-aggrandizement and affluence having rather too easily dethroned those of self-less service and dedication to a cause. (Naik, 187-89)

This 'winds of change' (Naik, 28) began to be felt in social life and evil practices. Corruption and various malpractices are some of the biggest evils and challenges that noticeably wrapped the Indian society and systems.

Corruption and India

Corruption practiced through dishonest action not only corrupts the individual but also contaminates the society at large, hence a national threat to any country like India. What Karl Kraus (1874-1936), an Austrian writer and journalist, remarked is pertinent in the Indian context too: "Corruption is worse than prostitution. The latter might engender the morals of an individual, the former invariably engenders the morals of the entire country." (n.p.) Now let us define and explain briefly the nature of corruption and the mechanism of such malpractices. The term "corruption" means any illegal and dishonest action done for personal gain. The Oxford English Dictionary defines corruption as "Dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power,



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typically involving bribery”. Defining the process and the impact of corruption C. J. Friendrich writes: “The pattern of corruption can be said to exist whenever a power holder, who is charged with doing certain things, i.e., who is responsible functionary or office holder, is by monetary or other rewards not legally provided for, indeed to take action which favour whoever provides the rewards and thereby does damage to the public and its interests” (Friendrich,74).

The incident of corruption occurs in global scale and wider degree in every society including India. This is evident from the various reports of corruption and the establishment of anti-corruption wings worldwide. India, like many other countries, is supposed to be riddled with corruption. The disease of corruption has, no doubt, deeply infected Indian society. With so many branches such as bribery, favoritism, threatening, and other malpractices, corruption (an umbrella term), is said to have taken center stage in the Indian society permeating all facets of life. It is not a new phenomenon in India. In spite of being a country of “Satyameva Jayate”, India often witnessed its practice. But, this trend of corruption and malpractice, no doubt, goes rampant in the following decades after the independence affecting the people of different strata as found in the various scams and scandals. Regarding the socio-political malpractices in the Indian democracy Robert W. Stern remarks:

. . . the most noted disappointment of democratic political development in India has been the growth in parallel of political corruption and criminality. The ‘folklore of corruption’, as Gunnar Myrdal calls it, is pervasive in India. It is generally believed that political transactions are routinely tainted with corruption. The public servant acts according to how and by whom he is bribed or intimidated. The businessman uses “black money” to buy favors from politicians and bureaucrats. The politician sells his loyalty and pays for votes and so forth. (Stern,195)

In the ‘modern’ India, there is no iota of doubt that corruption in the forms of bribery, nepotism and partiality has found an unofficial acceptance in the social psyche and behaviour.



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Regarding the pervasiveness of corruption in the post-independence political and socio-cultural life M.N. Srinivas, eminent sociologist, writes: “Corruption has grown phenomenally during the last 30 years and no area of life is free from it. Over the years corruption has come to be accepted as a fact of life and it is widely known that the citizen has to pay officials and politicians for permits, licenses and other favours” (178). This trend is grounding more in the 21st century Indian society. This is reflected in recent study by Transparency International India in 2005, which argues that more than 92% of the people undergo direct experience of paying bribe or peddling influence to avail public services (*Transparency International* 1-3).

One is not born corrupt, but becomes one. The seed of corruption is nurtured within from the social culture of any society. The cultural ‘logic’ or conditions based on particular socio-cultural values in given society is the guiding factor of social behavior pattern of people. The major socio-cultural makeover and moral decline may lead society towards corruption and manipulation. Various sociological studies suggest diverse factors accountable for enhancing corruption in India including complicated government systems and lack of transparency in law, bureaucracy and offices etc. Critics and sociologists argue that such malpractices as corruption are the major hindrance to the development of our country. N. Khatri argues: “Corruption and red tape ... are the major barriers to growth of entrepreneurship in India” (Khatri, 26).

Literary representation of corrupt practices

One can hardly deny the interconnectedness between literature and society. Imitation of social life and its reflection in specific form characterize literature. It is the medium of expression of what and how the writer observes and thinks of the society and life. Milton. C Albrecht opines: “Literature is interpreted as reflecting norms and values, as revealing the ethos of culture, the process of class struggle, and certain types of social—facts” (425). The way the author depicts and makes us see the society thus expressing social life is simply his artistic representation, if not



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political representation. Hence, literary representation is in a way the authorial delineation of the society, persons, incidents, ideology and thought in literature.

Literature makes an effective representation of contemporary social reality. Literary representation of social corruption and mendacious practices in many forms is found in English literature as in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Milton's *Lycidas* (1638) which display the false and 'fallen' clergy and corrupt society of contemporary England. Charles Dickens's novels like *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) deal with the theme of corruption and hypocrisy in the Victorian society. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1949) allegorizes the world of corruption and power politics. Indian English literature obviously could not remain immune to this seamy side of life deeply affecting the contemporary Indian society. This stark social realism is reflected in R.P. Jhabvala's *The Nature of Passion* (1956), Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow* (1971), Arun Joshi's *The Apprentice* (1974), and *The City and the River* (1990). Indira Sinha's *Animal Men* (2007) too contain a number of condemnatory references to the world of corruption and crookedness. Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* (1990) portrays a great financial scandal resembling the Nagrwal conspiracy case in which the chief cashier of a national bank paid huge amount just complying with the highest rank of power. Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) is about a man, Balram who faces the world of bribery, crime and politics.

Social realism in Joshi's *The Apprentice*

Arun Joshi (1939-1993), one of the prominent Indian novelists in English, probes into the deeper layers of human psyche in terms of contemporary socio-cultural situations with the thematic and technical excellence. Written in the post-independence India his novels exploring "that mysterious underworld which is the human soul" (Mathai, 8) mirror the contemporary social condition and underlying demands and tensions men undergo. Joshi explains: "My novels are essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and of myself" (qtd. in Dhawan, 18). Joshi attempts to delve into existential problem, psychological conflict and spiritual



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dilemma by focusing on individualistic characters largely based on the actuality of his own life which imparts his novels a realistic touch. While in America Joshi was influenced by the western existential ideology originated in philosophical and literary discourse of Kierkegaard, Sartre and Camus and others. A modern philosophical movement, it deliberates on human predicament and deals with man's inner conflict, disillusionment and despairs thus focusing on the problems of the meaning and purpose of life in incompatible condition. Existential writings are characterised by the notion of anxiety, frustration, alienation, and crisis of the individual in the 'alien' world.

As far as Joshi's narrative and technique are concerned, his work of art carries, to some extent, the philosophical implications of existentialists especially of Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Sartre and Camus. His fictional forte recreates a world where man gets confronted by the self and the questions of his existence in quest for meaning in life. His novels are characterised by existential themes of inner crisis, frustration, rootlessness, alienation and existential predicament. Joshi's attitude to life is that of a positivist. Despite western influence, he accepts the Hindu 'Indian form' of existentialism as manifested in *The Gita* and *The Upanishads* which directs positivity in crisis. He strongly believes: "Hinduism is highly existential philosophy that lays too much emphasis on the right way of living" (Banerjee, iv). However, Joshi's works written from the existential viewpoint include *The Foreigner* (1968), *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), *The Apprentice* (1974), *The Last Labyrinth* (1981) and *The City and the River* (1990). His novels articulate the absurdity and dilemma of human existence experienced by his protagonists in their life. So his novels are "both a chronicle of chaos and mode of quest" (Prasad, 9).

Like all the novels, *The Apprentice* (modelled on Camus's *The Fall*) is a psychological study of existential predicament resonated in the sense of dilemma, confusion of ethical values, alienation, and meaninglessness the protagonist, Ratan undergoes in the changing society of post-independence India. A psycho-realistic novelist, Joshi concentrates on the contemporary man's moral confusion, psychic duality and spiritual abyss resulting in the existential crisis, and his constant quest for meaning as well as a remedy in the labyrinth of degenerating society.



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According to Lionel Trilling, “the novel, then, is a perpetual quest for reality” (*Liberal Imagination*, 172). *The Apprentice* records Joshi’s deeper understanding of Indian reality of his time. Here Joshi presents a post-independence Indian corrupt and dishonest society with existential crisis where people immerse in moral anarchy with corruption and deception, and pragmatism disrupts idealism; and means out ends; where men go crazy with desire and greed. Joshi is both sympathetic and critical of this modern situation where man’s adoration for sole mundane progress, instead of long cherished values of life, which he thinks, plunging him down deep into spiritual emptiness. He depicts this aspect of social degradation through the interior ‘crisis of character’ of the protagonist and also through the contrast between pre-independence idealism cherished by Gandhi and post-colonial pragmatism, ‘disorder’ and disillusionment, which are the crux of the novel. Unlike the Gandhian days of freedom struggle, self-interest and dishonesty are said to predominate this ‘new’ Indian world where money defines morality and ideals succumb to deals. A literary dossier of contemporary society, the novel is predominantly about the culture of money, power, politics and corruption rampant in the successive decades after the independence. In his typical existentialist technique, the novelist deals with the journey of Ratan, an idealist public employee, who gets corrupt and amasses huge money and wealth through crookedness, bribery and betrayal in ‘the money’s kingdom’ in the face of harsh materialistic reality. The novel directly aims at exposing the socio-political corruption and degradation of post-independence Indian society. Prof. Iyenger observes: “As a fictional study of the anatomy and dynamics of the almost omnipresent corruption in the country, *The Apprentice* is a powerful indictment. The human story and the stark message both come through” (Iyenger, 748).

Joshi casts the novel in “a series of Browning-like monologues” addressed to a college student to whom Ratan Rathor (like Camus’ Meussault) in a confessional tone “lays bare the motives, aspirations, dilemmas and frustrations of his past” (Mathur, 130) and thus projects his existential crisis following spiritual insight. The narrative accounts of Ratan’s search for a happy and meaningful existence, a recurring theme of Joshi’s novels. Ratan Rathor is an honest educated



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youth of an Indian middle class family. His father, a lawyer by profession, sacrificed his life and family for the sake of the country's freedom. His Gandhian philosophy of idealism attracted him in his tender years. However, Ratan's idealistic attitude and personality underwent remarkably change when he came to Delhi with a dream to earn a name and prosperity. Ratan constantly pursues career, and he still lives a simple ideal life of his father. He says to the boy: "I should make a mark on the world, a mark as visible and striking as my father's" (*Apprentice*, 23). But the rat-race competition and pretension in a corrupt and materialistic society spoils his cherished ethics. His idealistic motto slowly fades away as the vaulting desire of pragmatic world begins to redesign his mindset. Ambition being a driving force of life can be geared towards the overall development of an individual. Heinz Kohut in 1977 explained ambition as "the core of personality development" (qtd. in Roy's *The Psychology of Ambition*, 25). But ambition has various dimensions. It is a kind of desire. The basic human desire is to live first. "So ambition being about desire is also about a desire to live and an ambitious person has also necessarily a strong life force or a survival instinct. We might call this sort of psychological Darwinism or a struggle to survive in a competitive world lies at the root of ambition" (Roy, *The Psychology of Ambition*, 25). Primarily, it is this 'survival instinct' which makes him ambitious and complicated in the way of world. While searching for a job he undergoes humiliating experiences, and he is rejected and jeered at every pre-planned interview. He realizes that "the jobs would be filled by people who had, in some manner, been pre-selected" (*Apprentice*, 29). This futility following his humiliation and insult creates a sense of fear and identity crisis. Now living /existence for him is more important than idealism. Threatened by a bleak future he moves to the verge of 'moral collapse'. He says: "But such was my faith And what is more shattering than the breakdown of a faith? What hurts is the collapse of faith that they destroy" (*Apprentice*, 23). He faces the psycho-existential predicament when the individual have to make 'choice' pleasant or unpleasant among alternatives. According to Sartre and his propounded existential principle, 'man is nothing but what he makes of himself' (qtd. in *Understanding Existentialism* 6). He realizes that one must create his own goal and values for meaningful life. A twentieth century modern man,



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Ratan defines his existence and values in terms of his perception of his world, and based on his choice/ decisions. In the dilemma of choices he 'falls' prey and prefers to the 'demoralized' course.

Once the moral world broken and the moral conscience overcome, one can easily evade the crisis of ethical values and lessons. He finds no wrong in his action, right or wrong. This is what happens to Ratan. Like Dr. Faustus, after initial vacillation he violates the creed of morality and suffers from no moral crisis until the final realization. In the course, Ratan, confused and muddled in the harsh soil of life, utterly yields to the sham standards of his society. He becomes practical and selfish. Finally, through pretensions he manages with the help of a stenographer a job in the department for war purchases. Gradually, driven by selfish desire, he appears a hypocrite and a liar. He confesses retrospectively his hypocrisy of which he is always aware: "I had added a new dimension to my life. I have become a hypocrite and a liar at the age of twenty one; in short, a sham. . . . From morning till night I told more lies than truths. I had become a master faker. . . . A faker. A sham. A faker soon forgets who he really is" (*Apprentice*, 27). From now onwards, the personality of Ratan takes a new turn completely, his ideals under threat crushes. In his professional pursuit, Ratan, unlike his father who described career as "bourgeois filth" (*Apprentice*, 32), is motivated by materialistic ambition and opportunism which make him forget the distinction between virtue and vice. Initially, his ambition was rooted in his basic survival instinct, but now it is imbued with the excessive desire of greed and utilitarianism. Now it is an ardent desire to 'enjoy' more progress and success in life, a desire to achieve reputation, power, wealth, and position. Psychologically said, it is the second stage of ambition fulfillment.

In fact, the aspiration of his betterment as well as speedy career advancement always motivates him. He is a representative of the young careerist generation of contemporary India. A 'yes man' of his boss, he always yields exclusively to pleasing of his boss for fast promotion. He confesses: "I was an upstart, a man quite shamelessly sucking up to the bosses" (*Apprentice*, 35). He easily betrays even his friend and colleagues for a lucrative career and promotion in all



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manners, decent or debauched. He is a fast-moving careerist who redefines the secret of success, which, he seeks to achieve through docility and blind adherence to the boss, instead of hard work: “What? An instinct for survival? . . . Some survive through defiance, some through ability. Still others through. . . the obedience and the docility”(Apprentice,33).Ratan’s career mounts up through the ladder of “Flattery and cunning. The more—the better.” (Apprentice,66)Gradually, he sinks into the world of fraudulence and tricks, marking the spirit of the age. He becomes “a thick-skin” (Apprentice,46) person. He tells: “I had become a scoundrel. But believe me, we were all like this. I was not the only one. . . . Everybody lying”(Apprentice66-67). Interestingly,this is how he self-justifies his fraudulent action.

However, Ratan, an over careerist, possesses quickly the officer’s post through filthy conspiracy against his young honest colleague-cum-competitor who finally “asked for a transfer” (Apprentice,67).This new concept of success based on principle of self-interest and manipulation, irrespective of the ways, as already said, marking the milieu of the age, is revealed in his words again: “The right or the wrong of the side one took was not in question, nor were there touchstones by which one chose. No morals were involved. It was the skill in maneuver that mattered. Which more or less was an end in itself” (Apprentice,41).This is suggestive of Ratan’s belief in the end-oriented utilitarian theory (unlike the means-oriented humanitarian Gandhian creed, as accepted by his father) intruding slowly into the post-independence Indian society. The failure of faith in nobility, honesty and truthfulness shocked Ratan earlier. But at present he, a changed man, believes the old values no more useful. Ratan now considers the legacy of his father’s idealism of “To be good! Respected! To be of use” (Apprentice,18)to be of no use. His mother’s advice that “money is the law unto itself”(Apprentice,19) given to him at his tender age later becomes the guiding principle for his success. Interestingly, he fails to reconcile between the two ways of life. K. Rani says in this context:

What went wrong, however, is that the mother had discussed only the end and had not mentioned the means. The latter mere found by Ratan in his own. . . .He is self-



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degenerated because he neither could rightly choose out of the two self-contradictory philosophies of his mother and his father... nor reconcile the two ways of life. (Rani,96)

The materialistic social reality finds an existentialist expression in the pragmatic worldview of the Superintendent, his god-like boss, who advises Ratan: "This world has nothing to do with God; it is 'a money's kingdom' where 'only money is king'" (*Apprentice*,73). Joshi criticizes this morally degraded capitalistic/ mechanical worldview leading to degradation of souls. Joshi, a disciple of Gandhi, emphasizes the means and morals over the ends. But the Superintendent never believes in the validity of the means which surprises Ratan initially. Associated with the practical view of the Superintendent Ratan is now convinced that the world is not governed by God, or sex or such other things, but by the deals or money power. He redefines life in terms of deals or vice versa: "Deals, deals, deals, my friend, that is what the world runs on, what is it all about. . . . It is not the atom or the sun or God or sex that lies at the heart of the universe: it is deals.... It is not whether you like making deals or you like money" (*Apprentice*,48). In fact, his hasty decision of marriage to the Superintendent's niece too was a packaged deal for his career.

As a Gandhian advocate, Joshi believes that gold and greed cannot buy mental contentment rather it lies in 'simple living and high thinking'. But this is something which was slowly disappearing in the contemporary post-independence Indian society which was gradually moving more and more towards the mechanical individualistic money culture which, to some extent, widened the scope and opportunity of corrupt and crooked practices. Joshi continuously shows this change of social values and money-mindedness prevalent in the post-independence decades through Ratan's gold rush for soul materialistic possessions. (The name "Ratan" meaning wealth is very symbolic here.) This materialistic drive apparently pleases him but mentally he is in doldrums. It creates in him a kind of existential anxiety or "dread" (the term used by Kierkegaard). He forgets that possession generates responsibility and pain, and thus a sense of anxiety and crisis. In the process, this search for more 'meaningful' life makes him an existential character. From the beginning, he is eager to find a 'purposeful life' and continuously is in



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search of better meaning in life. In spite of being a rich family man with a wife and marriageable daughter and having all the basic amenities as well, he feels discontented and restless. He gets addicted with women, sex and wine. Yet he fails to overcome mental crisis. He finds his life more unfulfilled and incomplete but his alienation from his moral self gets complete. Highly individualistic aspiring self, Ratan forgets the difference between need or ambition and greed. Ambition and need can be achieved if not excessive, but never one's greed be satisfied and sometimes it finally leads to psychic unrest and disturbance. So is the case with Ratan. His excessive thirst for material pursuits for more success and fulfillment causes an obsession syndrome. This keeps haunting him thus generating his existential crisis. That Ratan still has an 'obsession' for money is evident here: "All that I could think of was my money and the fact that I was not enjoying life. . . . The more money I accumulated, the more I was dissatisfied and the more I was determined to "enjoy" life. . . . All of a sudden it had become an obsession" (*Apprentice*, 85). Here one reminds of Camus' notes that there is a fundamental conflict between our 'desire' and 'fulfilment' in this world. One will never find the desired 'meaning'. It has to be created. Hence, the search for meaning integrates frustration. This is what happens with Rathor.

This materialistic obsession syndrome finally engrosses Ratan in the corrupt world of greed, hypocrisy and degeneration. This is manifest in Ratan's confession of his crime of taking huge bribe during the Indo-China war. He received it as per the deal much against the ethics of officialdom for personal fulfillment. Despite his dilemma, Ratan readily compromises the nation's crucial security goods--the arms and ammunition. While posted in Bombay the deal was made between him and Himmat Singh, the Sheikh, with the ministerial intervention. Under this deal, he approved an order for the defective arsenal for the warfront. He made the deal without the consent of the brigadier, his friend and all the documents were tactfully erased under the master plan of the conspiracy involving the Secretary, the Minister and the dealer, the Sheikh. Joshi here exposes 'the superstructure of reality' built by the link of the politician, bureaucrat and businessman, "the trio that incidentally runs the country" (*Apprentice*, 130). This clandestine nexus of the trio reminds one of popular saying that 'corruption is true enemy to development'.



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Ratan's involvement into the criminal action reveals, as the novelist suggests, how deep is the root of corruption spreading in the post-independence Indian administration and society:

You see, to cut a long story short, just before the war started I took a bribe. An enormous bribe. Yes Mr. Crisis of Character took enormous bribe. No more, no less. A month before the Chinese invasion a man came to my Secretary, or rather to our minister. The minister passed him to the Secretary. He was the Sheikh. The Sheikh had a big pile of military materials lying in Bombay which I had rejected because they were no good. ... I refused to pass them. Himmat Singh—that was Sheikh's real name—then offered me a cut, a bribe. This bribe, for some obscure reasons, I accepted. (*Apprentice*,57)

The episode captures the depravity and duplicity in Indian character and society, the predominating spirit of the age, and fictionalizes what happened consequently in the Indo-China war in 1962. India was defeated because of the poor quality of the ammunition. Many soldiers lost their lives due to the "war's damages" (93) and their families became "victims" (93). However, the war-returned brigadier, who is found guilty is court-martialed and put under observation. The news comes to Ratan, the real culprit. A sense of guilt haunts him. But the anxiety syndrome already in him makes him cynical and tricky. The very conflicting thought that: "What happen to me after I had confessed? What would happen to my career, my reputation? Minute by minute the questions multiplied like a virus" (*Apprentice*,114) thwarts him. He again undergoes an inner crisis and duality as he is torn between his moral duty and personal interest revealing his existential dilemma of 'to be or not be'. Ratan's self-revelation brings out his inner conflict that leads to his existential stance: "What was right? What was wrong? What was the measure of doing things or not doing them?" (*Apprentice*,72). He is concerned more about his status than the magnitude of his crime. Joshi often thinks that the collapse of humanistic values coupled with material affluences results in the artificial 'value deficient' society. Ratan, is such 'a new age man' who, a coward, lives with the philosophy of survival without 'responsibility' and recourse to spiritual creed or universal values. From an



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existential viewpoint, a man should be willing to take full ‘responsibility’ for his actions. Joshi himself, influenced by *The Gita*, felt so: “I strongly believe that an individual action effects on others and oneself. So one cannot afford to continue with an irresponsible existence but has to commit oneself at some point” (Banerjee iv). Once the liability is recognized, man is inclined to take the full blame on himself rather than blaming others or situations. But Ratan denies his accountability and makes his brigadier-friend, his rescuer, a scapegoat. He deliberately sidesteps the values of friendship and duty in need. He says: “There is no point in confessing” (*Apprentice*, 107). The brigadier is shocked at Ratan’s betrayal and denial, and later, he commits suicide to avoid further humiliation. This demise cuts the linkages of Ratan’s crime. Regarding the self-centered ideology of Ratan’s character, Rashmi Gaur and Shivani Vatsa write: “Ratan with high degree of sense of values, character and morality is transformed by the contemporary value deficient society into a cunning, nefarious and unscrupulous man” (Gaur, 159).

What is most interesting of Ratan’s degenerating personality is the way in which he justifies habitually his offence and misdeed. Ratan thinks that the system is corrupt and everyone is involved in this wicked act. Hence, he declines to regret for his action. Rather, he finds, as already noticed, some sort of ego-satisfaction when he discovers the omnipresence of corruption in the whole hierarchy of the system. He feels glad that he was not an exception to the crooked system where in the struggle between lies and truth, “lies usually won” (*Apprentice*, 66). The description he gives of the “the crookedness of the world; the crookedness of oneself” (*Apprentice*, 142) is a record of contemporary social and cultural realism. Joshi mockingly employs Ratan’s self-satisfaction in delineating the mean practices and the hollowness of political and social system of that time:

I thought with *satisfaction* of a recent fraud by the scion of one of the country’s first families; the arrest of an Inspector-General of Police for accepting bribe from a racketeer, recall of an ambassador who had exchanged his country’s secrets for a mistress. I remembered how a recent election had been rigged, . . . an actress prosecuted for a



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basement--full of black money. . . . This, I knew, was merely a tip of the glacier.
(*Apprentice*,108)

In this world of ‘ubiquitous’ corruption Ratan typically represents the contemporary people. Joshi goes on to illustrate the degenerated corrupt Indian society, “a confused society without norms” (*Apprentice*,74) through Ratan’s self-mockery and his ‘strange’ way of justification of his deed:

If I had taken a bribe I belonged to the rule than the exception. Peons were frequently taking bribes. So were the government officials and traffic policemen and railway conductors. A bribe could get you a bed, a place to burn your dead. Doctors had a fee to give false certificates, magistrate for false judgments. For a sum of money politicians changed sides. For a larger sum they declared wars. Bribery was accepted ... by all those who acted in public interest. (*Apprentice*, 109)

This long textual reference is excerpted to show how Ratan’s rationalization of his corrupt practices historicizes the contemporary social reality. His deterioration reaches such a ‘mean’ level that he considers his taking of bribe as the ‘heaven-sent opportunity’ by war. Though he has been indulging in corruption and opportunism for many years by misusing his power and position, he claims to be a good person: “For twenty years I had made bargains with life, taken a bribe, lied, debauched, and yet I consider myself as good as the best” (*Apprentice*, 113). Morally more depraved than before, he thinks nothing is wrong in this corrupt culture if the situation is properly handled. One is not a criminal until he is caught. As he spoilt all the documents of his bribery, he is sure of “no possibility of getting caught” (*Apprentice*,73). His crude tendency and criminal audacity seems to echo the famous speech by Lord Acton: “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely”. Ratan believes that management anyhow is the last word to prove one guiltless: “What one really needed to do was to manage through life. By hook or crook. That was what really matter” (*Apprentice*,109). Manipulation and the deceitful



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management are the hindrance to the way of punishment of the wrong-doers, which leads to the growth of corruption in India. Regarding the rising corruption in India Rajani Kumari writes:

A contributory factor to the growth of corruption in India is that the cases relating to corruption are often handled in a casual and clumsy manner. Those in hierarchy vested with disciplinary powers shirk duty and show unwillingness to use their powers against corrupt practices. This may be due to different reasons like political or trade union pressure, vested interests, or sheer ineptitude in handling criminal investigation. The result is that the corrupt are rarely caught and even if caught are let off with minor or no penalties. (Kumari,38)

The selfish crude nature, as Joshi shows in the literary fashion of Chaucer and Milton, has crept, like a virus, into all strata of society including the religious life. Even the priest, the so-called 'saviour' of the truth, is involved in this corrupt mechanism. The Priest is keen to bribe anyone including Ratan himself, to save his son, a contractor. He used the substandard material in the construction of quarters for slum-dwellers resulting in the collapse of many roofs, and consequently his payment has been ceased. Ratan remembers what the priest said: "He [the priest] would not mind if he spent some money to get all that done. Everyone had a right to a cut. . . . He said he was a poor man and could hardly afford bribes but he did not mind it in a case like that. . . ." (*Apprentice*,102). Like the common masses, the political leaders too, as already hinted, are guided by the disease of corruption, falsity, and unaccountability. It is believed that a whole new generation of politician emerged in free India who had nothing to do with the philosophy of idealism of Gandhi and others who sacrificed for Indian independence. Gandhi thinks 'politics without moral principles' a sin. In the new set-up of post-independence India, there grew the ethically decayed power politics determined by money and muscles. Ratan experiences this truth of the day: "What counted was power. And the men were weighed in Money or Power. It soon became apparent to me that those who had neither were worthless" (*Apprentice*,61-62). Ratan is surprised to see the ministers unscrupulously giving wrong information in the parliament to



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mislead the nation and often changing the political side for handful of coins. Ratan remembersto barethe hypocrisy of the political persons, ministers-in-charge, patronizing fabrication and corruption:

One evening I heard a minister's speech on the radio. As I listenedI suddenly realised that he was lying, simply lying. I knew about the subject. And it concerned the rehabilitation of refugees. And he was lying about these poor people. I was amazed. But what amazed me even more was that when I mention the fact to my department head the next day, he merely laughed. He said they had deliberately agreed to give wrong figures! (*Apprentice*,60)

This crooked practice of mishandling of power on the political level is very common as reflected in the reply of the nameless M.P. to Ratan's question regarding the Indo-China war: "Nobody lost a war these days. There were always compromises." (*Apprentice*,82).That there is close nexus between the politicians and the businessman in terms of corruption, as already said, is clear from the hidden relationship of the Minister and Himmat Singh, who supplies poor war materials. Himmat Singh is a crook business operator. Like Ratan, he leaves the ideals of his honest father and later becomes crude-minded. He, like the superintended, advices Ratan before his acceptance of the deal: "There was no such law book, Rathor, he said. What existed, he said, was not written by God but by a silly society that would do anything for money" (*Apprentice*,72).Ratan in quest for meaningful existence gets convinced with this existentialist pragmatic view which becomes problematic when he desperately applies it in his life for "deals" forgetting the basic moral ideals his father cherished. This is ironic that an idealistic man Ratan, torn in the conflict between idealism and reality, becomes a part of the corrupt world.

However, in the midst of this corrupt and morally chaotic world Joshi, a Gandhian advocate finds rays of 'Upanishadic' hope in Ratan's inner conscience. Utterly driven by guilty complex, he inwardly suffers.This transforms him from a crook to a votary of love and altruism. He leaves the corrupt world, and he becomes an 'apprentice' to the world of God, instead of gold, where he



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wipes the shoes of devotees. He thinks 'polishing' removes the filth, "the layers of dirt covering his soul" (Iyenger, 748). He finally realizes that the way to salvation lies in responsibility, selflessness and sacrifice. Salvation is achieved though suffering which Joshi, like Dostoevsky, views as 'necessity' for spiritual purgation. So his selfless social service steps him to find solace in life. This self-realization and conversion can be assumed as an authorial voice for spiritual and Gandhian truthful way of life against the ill-practices of materialistic modern society.

Conclusion

As far as the theme is concerned, *The Apprentice* is an account of corruption, crime and quest. The fictional psycho-narrative chronicles the dark filthy side of post-independence Indian society as shown in the moral 'crisis of characters' and in the creed of corruption, dishonesty and duplicity. Joshi probes into the existential predicament of modern Indian people with dilemma, ethical confusion and spiritual hollowness to create the atmosphere of malaise, corruption and demoralization. A conscious novelist, Joshi explores from the existential point of view a realistic account of corruption and malpractices in various forms in astoundingly outspoken manner. The novel, a vivid social manuscript, can be translated "as a cynical hymn to corruption which has a biting and corrosive edge" (Awari, 3). Joshi's perceptive and psycho-existential portrayal of morally deflated characters and their corrupt practices prevalent among all strata of life—ministers, businessmen, officers and priests—critically exposes the predominating socio-cultural ethos of post-colonial India. In that sense this novel is a potent 'indictment' on the corrupt world of post-independence India, to say, a critique of the contemporary social reality.

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