Chapter - V

THE APPRENTICE

Much of modern fiction is either an existentialist fable or psychic drama. The protagonist of Doestoevsky is “Possessed”, Camus’s is an “outsider”, Kafka’s is “under the trial”, Elison’s is “an Invisible Man”, Samuel Beckett’s is “absurd” and likewise in Indian English fiction Arun Joshi goes deep into the inner recesses of human psyche where he finds emotions impulses and instincts at work. Out of his five novels, the three

- The Foreigner (1968)
- The Apprentice (1974)
- The Last Labyrinth (1981)

are written in the confessional mode, having a schism in the soul, a split personality.

Chronologically, The Apprentice is the third novel by Arun Joshi and here the novelist probes deeper into the inner consciousness of the individual with a view to exploring, what Arun Joshi calls “that mysterious underworld which is the human soul.” The novel has been appreciated by various scholars and it has been analyzed from different
perspectives. D. R. Sharma observes The Apprentice “as study of the loss and the retrieval of one’s soul.” Mr. R. J. Das, justifies Ratan in “Moral dilemma in Arun Joshi’s The Apprentice” as a man who has, “at the core of higher self… an impassioned faith in the dignity of man, the holiness of feelings.” Mr. R. K. Dhawan find in Ratan “neither a rebel nor a dissident” but a “victim.” Thakur Guruprasad sees a “tragic flaw” in his “fear of failure.” In addition, Mr. H. M. Prasad writes in The Apprentice – “The tone is almost pascallian. Through self-mockery, he exposes the world. Self-remorse will rehabilitate him. The fall contains recovery.”

It is argued that The Apprentice is inspired by Albert Camus’s The Fall. Jean - Baptiste Clamence, a successful Paris barrister in The Fall appeared to himself and others as the very epitome of good citizenship and decent behaviour in the beginning. But suddenly he sees through the deep-seated hypocrisy of his existence to the condescension which motivates his action. He turns to debauchery, and finally settles in the fog-bound wilderness of Amsterdam where as self-styled ‘judge-penitent’ he describes his fall to a chance acquaintance. The monologue in The Apprentice as in The Fall holds a disquieting mirror up to modern morality.
Mr. Mukteshwar Pandey writes in *Arun Joshi: The Existentialist:*

**Element in His novel -**

“Ratan Rathor is neither a rebel like Billy Biswas nor a rootless foreigner like Sindi Oberoi. He is a practical man who, getting his idealism shattered in the corrupt society, proposes to survive by sycophancy and practically adopts himself to the mysterious ways of the world. The novel is both treatise on current social and political scene and a lament on a tormented soul.”

Hari Mohan Prasad in his book *Arun Joshi* opines,

“The novel enacts three stages in the human-divine comedy of Ratan. The Pre-independence period is the dawn; the period of idealism, the phase of innocence, the post-independence India is the broad daylight of experience, the inferno of corruption, the last part the area of expiation is the door to the purgatory.”

Thus, the novel stands as a psychological study into innocence, experience and expiation of the protagonist’s life history.

The novel is a confessional monologue told to a young college student. The protagonist Ratan, like Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner, and Jean-Baptiste in Camus’ *The Fall* button holes an ordinary middle class
auditor and arouses his interest about his spiritual trials. Ratan tells his student listener a national cadet who spends three months to Delhi to rehearse for the N.C.C. parade on the Republic Day. Ratan narrates the episodes ranging from his childhood to his apprenticeship as a Shoe shiner on the steps of a temple as a sort of expiation for his sins.

Ratan, the son of a freedom fighter, has been an eyewitness of his father being shot dead while leading a procession. Afterwards Ratan tries to mould himself after his father’s idealism becomes a misfit in the modern world so he has to abdicate his true self to fit in the corrupt society. He dreams of achieving material success and in the process he himself is victimized by the malevolent social forces. He experiences the pangs generated by the civilization that is essentially characterized by lust, self-centeredness and cross sensuality. He realizes the futility. Disorder in the inner world of Ratan Rathor and his quest for an order irrespective of any external force, leads him to an intense self-examination. Therefore, The Apprentice extends the modes and means of the confessional narrative.
The confession of the protagonist brings the psychoanalysis of the character. In fact, the very word “confession” demands psychological interpretation.

Often, when we lie or we know we have done something against our own morals, our body language betrays us. We often think that we hide our secrets, but secrets hide us. Various modern day problems like stress, heart diseases and hypertension originate from one source and that is hiding your sins and secrets. The more we hide the more our subconscious mind fight and our body shows it through perspiration and stress.

The human heart is an ocean of secrets. Each of us has our own set of secrets, troubles or skeletons, which we have buried and have been forced into hiding. We need to consider our sins and our dark secrets as a part of our life stories and ourselves. To be accepted by the society the way we are, is everyone’s psychological need.

However, to be accepted, we need to accept ourselves and for that, we need to confess!
Confession is the means to address the shame and guilt that can negatively affect your self-esteem, relationships and day-to-day activities. Confession is just half the job. Often when we are stressed and burdened with negative thoughts, then communicating our feelings and seeking spiritual advice or seeking a guiding light from our spiritual fathers can show us the right path, right thing to do and leave us reenergized to live life again.

In the Journal of *Religion and Health*, Elizabeth Todd writes in “The value of Confession and Forgiveness”. According to Jung, “Confession is one of those difficult subjects. It is often a painful one as well, because it infers that one has done something wrong. Connected to the idea of confession is the idea of forgiveness. Forgiveness is as comforting and pleasant as confession is difficult and painful. The process is something like this: an individual commits a wrong of some kind, guilt emerges, he feels uncomfortable and alienated from self and significant others, and he confesses the wrong and seeks forgiveness in order to achieve reconciliation. As one theologian stated “confessing one’s guilt is an archetypal experience, one so deeply anchored in the very structure of the human psyche that the need for it will never disappear.”
The idea of confession and forgiveness is located in that place where psychology and religion meet – guilt, priests, ministers, and rabbis, as well as psychotherapists and counselors, can attest to the prevalence and universality of this richly human phenomenon.”

Seen in this context The Apprentice is about a dark crisis in the Human Soul.

Tapan Kumar Ghosh writes in his book Arun Joshi’s fiction The Labyrinth of life –

“In The Apprentice Joshi presents an individual who suffers the agony of the soul not due to his escapism or rebellion but due to his conformity to, and victimization by, a crooked and corrupt society. It depicts the anguished attempt of a guilt stricken individual to retrieve his innocence and honour. It is a story of crime and punishment, of dislocation and search. It portrays the effort of ‘a man without honour… without shame… a man of our times’ to impose meaning and order on his life which lacks them.”

In this novel, the protagonist Ratan relates to his student listener over a period of three months, the period that the student – a national cadet spends in Delhi to rehearse for the N.C.C parade on the Republic Day.
The novel is told through the reflections of a man looking back on his past. In the retrospective account of his life, Ratan seeks to trace the root of his soul’s sickness and the reason behind his fall from innocence. It is from Ratan’s point of view the narrative is told – and his internal struggle.

At the beginning, Ratan refers to an incident in his childhood that left an ineffaceable impression on his mind and that serves as a recurring contrast to his degradation throughout the novel. It was the age of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian Politics and Ratan’s father was a champion of Gandhian values like simplicity, honesty, selfless service and non-violence. Under the magic spell of Mahatma his father abandons his practice as a lawyer, gives away most of his wealth to join the revolutionaries. He overlooked his ailing tubercular wife and future of his only son. His father was a leading a procession against the British. The police lathi charged and used tear-gas to disperse the crowd. Ratan’s father walked towards police defying the order. The police shot him in the chest. That moment of heroic courage and self-sacrifice was frozen in Ratan’s memory: “as a memory of great silence.”
In the beginning, Ratan thinks of following his father’s example. He follows the principles of his father above everything else. He wanted to be something different: “To be good! Respected. To be of use!” Like his father, he also wanted to make a mark upon the world. But the world around him is dissolute and deviated. It is a world of licentiousness and socio-political exploitation. People have forgotten the ideals and values of the martyrs like his father who sacrificed their lives. Sacrifice now was replaced by self-interest, courage and honesty was by cowardice, deception, and ideals by deals.

Moreover, Ratan does not have the courage of his father to implement the ideals of his father. C. N. Srinath truly says that “The Apprentice is a tale of a conscience torn man… with a deep awareness of the conflict between life and living.” This is evident from the episode in which he left his home to join Subhash Bose’s army. It is an extremely ironic situation. He says, - “I am very excited. I am on my way to greatness… about to lay the foundations of a glorious future.” But this ‘pilgrimage’ in which he “felt the elevation that we feel when something within us, some vital essence, manages to break out and lose itself in objects that are bigger and beyond us” ended suddenly. With each succeeding mile, his courage oozed away and he came to realize that he could not go through with it.
This ironical reversal of the situation indicative of Ratan’s timidity – predicted his even greater failure in the future.

On the other side, Ratan loves his mother too who is disillusioned about the sacrifices made by patriots during the freedom struggle. A woman suffering all the time physically, mentally and economically becomes almost cynical about money. She keeps on persuading him not to be influenced by his father’s crazy ideas of his joining the freedom struggle. She wants him to be pragmatic and to realize the importance of money. She says, “Man without money was a man without worth. Many things were great in life, but the greatest of them all was money.” She exhorted Ratan of this pragmatism. It was not patriotism but money, she said, that brought respect and bought security. Money made friends. Money succeeded where all else failed. There were many laws, she said, but money was low “unto itself.”

Therefore, his mother is alert to the demands of her time to lead a cozy, comfortable and successful life, with a conspicuous social status. She does not want her son to a victim of idealism or abstract ethereal
concerns. She knows the chemistry of her son too well to let fall a prey to shallow morality or honesty.

Ratan is caught in the dilemma of these two contradictory values, and philosophies – one held by his father another by his mother. So here, he is in a fix regarding his choice between the two conflicting philosophies. On a psychological level his higher self favours the idealism of his father but his lower self is dictating him for the pursuit of career in life. Here he becomes a split personality.

His higher self asks him to join the army raised by Subhash Chandra Bose and feels that he should “set out to prove something.”

Mukteshwar Pandey writes in *Arun Joshi: The Existentialist Element in His Novels*

“Being a selfless idealist like his father, he holds his ideals above everything else. He feels deeply shocked at the atrocities committed by the British and holds himself somehow or other responsible. “Month after month young men were sucked into the turbulence – to be imprisoned or shot down or disappear underground. Every now and then someone I knew was imprisoned
maimed, or killed and for days afterwards I felt burdened as though in some way I had been responsible for the killing.” He feels and “upliftment” an “Elevation” for some “vital essence” and seems to believe that he is ready to sacrifice all without promise of reward or of success.”

But suddenly he falls a prey to his lower self. After the death of his father Ratan, starts his futile exercise of job - hunting in an alien city. He comes to Delhi “a city of opportunities.” He soon realizes that to be the son of a martyr is of no earthly use in getting a job. He is let down by well-wishers and cut off by acquaintances. In his search for employment he realizes that though the posts are advertised, most of them are “filled by people, who had, in some manner, been pre-selected.”

Ignorant of the ways of the world, Ratan hoped that with the help of the people he knew in Delhi he would be able to “make a mark on the world, a mark as visible and striking as fathers”. However, he is disillusioned and he says in a tone of self-mockery, “what hopes we start out in! Beggars in princes’ grab. Heads bursting with dreams.”
Tapan Kumar Ghosh writes in *Crisis and Confession: The Apprentice* –

“In a striking image of disintegration Ratan sums up his position: “To me alas, it (the world) appeared as a bundle of mirrors, tempting and somehow held together, but on the brink always of falling apart!” In one of his platitudinous but anguished outbursts, Ratan tells his young and still unpolluted confessor, “There is nothing in the world as sad as the end of hope. Not even death.” This slow leakage of hope together with his growing sense of failure did “things corrosive and irreversible,” to his soul.”

Therefore, he meets frustration everywhere. He finds himself miserable alone, disheartened and disillusioned. While making a search for a job his “back had nearly been broken by the world’s unjust thrashing.” The world appears to him “petrified and frozen”, “as a bundle of mirrors, tempting and somehow held together but all the brink always of falling apart!”

His faith in the positive values of goodness, virtue, humanity and sympathy is broken. He is convinced that chaos, absurdity, brutality, insensitivity, hypocrisy, fear and restlessness are but different aspects of
life in the so-called civilized world. He says “And so I redoubled my efforts or rather the frantic thrashing” of the great sea of indifference that surrounded me and that showed every inclination of drowning me. My struggle, I imagine acquired the form of a frenzy. When he enters this strange world of material values, he is “Struck dumbly by its other face....”

Just as Shakespeare’s Hamlet is disillusioned by knowing the reality of his father’s death, Ratan too, is disillusioned. Hamlet laments –

“How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world
Fie on’t! O, fie! ’tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed, things rank and grows in nature
Possess it merely.”

Therefore, like Hamlet, Ratan also laments over the nightmarish experiences in the insensitive city. Within weeks of his arrival in Delhi he became a master faker and learnt the ways of the crooked and unscrupulous world. He says, “I had added a new dimension to my life. I had become, at the age of twenty one, a hypocrite and a liar, in a short a
sham.” This is the beginning of his degeneration. The hostile city engulfed him and he began to forget who he really was.

During his stay in Delhi Ratan gets shelter in an inn beside a mosque where several others also occupy the same room with him. A stenographer living at the same inn manages a job for him in a government office, dealing with war purchase. Thus begins Ratan’s life as an apprentice clerk. Ratan keeps his eyes upon careerism despised by his father as bourgeois filth. However, Ratan ignores this and works hard to please his superintendent.

This state of Ratan can be interpreted in terms of Freud’s Id, ego and Super ego. Ratan’s Id wants success, money and status and that too within short time. As Freud states that, the Id does not care about reality. It is the raw material out of which human functioning develops. He believes that id is driven by the pleasure principle, which strives for immediate gratification of all desire. But the role of the ego is to meet the needs of the id, while taking into consideration the reality of the situation. It is task is to find a balance primitive drives, morals and reality while satisfying the id and the Super ego. But when the anxiety becomes
overwhelming, the ego must defend itself. It does so by unconsciously blocking the impulses or distorting them into a more acceptable, less threatening form. This technique is called the ego defence mechanisms. One of the forms of Ego defence is Reaction formation. Reaction formation takes place when a person takes the opposite approach consciously compared to what that person wants unconscious.

Reaction formation is similar to sublimation, another form of Ego defence in its external manifestations. One’s choice of a profession may be motivated by either one of these defenses. It is observed that we choose a profession because it somehow satisfies our some unconscious desires. We know that both in reality and in fantasies children take pleasure and can be cruel in inflicting pain on others and torturing animals. A surgeon cuts people and does surgery but he does it to relieve pain and to cure. Sublimation should eliminate anxiety, yet there are few surgeons, who can work without anxiety, because surgery comes too close to their original impulses. Therefore, the choice of this profession can represent either sublimation or reaction formation.
Reaction formation explains the violence with which some anti-vivisectionists oppose the use of animals for research. Most of them have never witnessed any research but they have wild and destructive fantasies about what the research must be like.

And same in above context, the character of Ratan after the death of his father and his futile hunting for job shows his Ego defence – Reaction formation. He wanted “to be good! Respected! To be of use” like his father but his realization that to be the son of a martyr is of no use in getting a job changes his direction of life. He visits office after office to be, examined, interviewed, interrogated and rejected. He comes to know that disorder hypocrisy and brutality are order of the modern society. He is so disillusioned that he laments – “What hurts is the collapse of the faith that they destroy. You believe there is justice in the world. You go about the world for fifty years, this belief sitting in your heart. Then something happens and you go seeking justice. And justice is just not there. Or, you assume your wife is faithful, your children love you your boss is fair or that God exists. And then someday proof comes along that nothing is so. This is what hurts.”
So, he takes the opposite approach consciously, psychologically known as Reaction Formation. He chooses and behaves in his profession in such a way, which satisfies his some unconscious desires – the insults, humiliations that he faced in getting job. His sincerity honesty was not counted in getting job so when he gets a job he behaves in an opposite way. He learns the importance of sycophancy. It is this quality which makes him successful. He becomes expert in obedience, servility, flattery and cunningness. Ratan confesses frankly –

“Some survive through defiance, others through ability, still others through obedience, by becoming servants to the powers of the world.”

Here he resemble with Shakespeare’s Iago of Othello. Iago, too while serving Othello proclaims like Ratan. Iago says,

“I follow him to serve my turn upon him
We cannot all be masters, nor all masters
Cannot be truly follow’d.”

Ratan, too like Iago realizes that we cannot all be masters nor can all masters be faithfully served. With pretended service to their masters, they
batten on their masters and when they have accumulated money, they become themselves masters. This is how Ratan’s ego by taking the form of Reaction formation satisfies his need of Id.

Ratan works hard to please his superintendent. The first thing that he does after employment is that he leaves the inn to settle elsewhere and even tries to keep away from the stenographer who had given him job. He works “harder than almost anybody in the department except the superintendent himself.” He develops “reflexes” which cumulative acquired the compulsion of an instinct and help him in rising in his career. The docile, “yes sir, no sir”, “pretending” and “practical” Ratan learns the value of obedience, docility, flattery and cunningness. –

“The mechanisms of the great machine” which become natural with him “like breathing.” He thinks himself of as a dark horse who has yet to show every promise of becoming an officer. He turns to be a black sheep in the meeting of his colleagues. His colleagues call him “a whore”, “an upstart” but he does not care anymore. He is out and out a man of the world now he admits – “I am a thick-skin now, a thick-skin and washout but, believe me, my friend, and I too have had thoughts such as these. But
what was to be done? One had to live. And to live, one had to make a living. And, how was living to be made except through careers.” Therefore, he becomes purely “a man of ambition” and needs only what suits his ends. He becomes fully a man of modern times – cunning, deceptive, selfish and easy-going. He marries the cousin of his superintendent only to please him and in return, he gets confirmed in the service. Even he is promoted with a dozen clerks working under him. He realizes –

“If men forgot how to make deals the world would come to stop . . . It is not the atom or the sun or God or sex that lies at the heart of the universe, it is deals” and his own marriage is a “deal” for his career. But it should be remembered that he always faces dilemma. Under circumstantial compulsion, he agrees to marry the cousin of his boss. Actually, he is not happy.

His self is divide. Mr. Mukteshwar Pandey in his book Arun Joshi: The Existentialist Element in His Novels writes –

“Under the predominance of his lower self, he as a free individual exercise his ‘choice’ to pursue his material ends.
He becomes an officer and advances in life through corrupt practices. He readily accepts bribes. He writes, “The more money I accumulated, the more I was dissatisfied and the more I was determined to enjoy life.”

Ratan’s higher self, his conscience is totally not dead and visits him frequently. Under its influence, he recollects his father’s ideals often. During the war, he becomes conspicuously patriotic. He talks about the miserable condition of the country. He not only gives many generous donations to the war front but suddenly becomes the greatest patriot of India. He makes everyone work extra time as part of the war effort takes his duties very seriously and becomes very vocal about his love for his motherland at informal parties and formal meetings. He talks about his willingness to be deputed to any dangerous assignment as a service to the motherland. With a view to bringing about a change in the existing set up, he also writes an article entitled “Crisis of Character”, in which he holds the Indian character mainly responsible for the downfall and decay of the country. He resorts to all sorts of corruption prevailing in our society and describes the Indian people as “a glorious monument in ruin, a monument of which even the foundation had caught canker.” In spite of his
promotion and material gains he does not feel at home in this corrupt society.

It is his Super ego, which for a while awakens him. In order to feed the needs of his Id he has adopted wrong path of life but now his Super ego tries to pacify him because, generally Super ego is not a born faculty but it develops slowly and gradually. It is related more to the human conscience than to human psyche. It makes a person feel worthy of high standard, satisfied and adds to a person’s self-confidence.

It is under the influence of his Super ego that he emerges as the most willing and enthusiastic donor of blood in his locality and when no newspaper publish his pedantic article on the fall of moral standards in post – independence India, he gets copies of it cyclostyled and gets them distributed all over the town. Ratan calls his essay a “comic document” but tragic too. He begins it with a quotation from Mahatma Gandhi, borrowed from a book on him and followed by one from The Bhagwad Gita.
Ratan paints in it the golden history of India’s past. To do it he refers to the landmarks of the ancient Indian civilization such as Harappa and Mohenjodaro, the conquests of Kalinga by Ashoka and the rule of dharma and truth. Then he describes the dark ages of the country when with the falling night the sun of dharma set. This was followed by a twilight in which what hope was left dwindled. This was again followed by the night like that of “amavas” which lasted the span of twenty generations a night that led us into slavery and ended only with the dawn of Independence. But the crisis of Indian character comes to the forefront even after Independence. Freedom did not bring that elevation of the spirit that the great leaders had hoped for. He shows this article to so many of his colleagues and that they nickname him Mr. Crisis of character. Yet this moralization ends and he confesses–

“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 an enormous bribe. No more, no less.”

Ratan explains how he had to accept the bribe. The situation now shifts to the freedom struggle and to the time of the Chinese invasion. Ratan receives a huge bribe for clearing a huge pile of useless military materials lying in Bombay before Chinese invasion. The entire deal is master-minded by Himmat Singh, popularly known as the Sheikh. Himmat Singh
bribes Ratan at the instance of the minister and Secretary of his department. The height of hypocrisy is to be found in his lashing at corruption in India while all the time he is trying to sort out in his mind his reasons for accepting the huge bribe. He has no answer to give for his refusing the bribe offered by the contractor’s son when he really needed the money. He tries to pacify himself by saying that it is like his taking a third cup of tea or no real head but because it is offered and other people are drinking too. He justifies –

“If I had taken a bribe I belonged rather to the rule than the exception. Peons were frequently taking bribes. So were government official and traffic policemen and railway conductors. A bribe could get you a bed in a hospital, a place to burn you’re dead. Doctors had a fee to give false certificates, magistrates for false judgments. For a sum of money politicians changed sides. For a large sum they declared wars. Bribery was accepted by factory inspectors, bank agents and college professors, by nurses priests . . . At this I knew and had known for twenty years.”

This is a fine justification of why Ratan starts taking bribes though he does not need the money for any one of his needs. With the riches, Ratan also invites vices such as wine and woman. He ogles at the women
around. “I felt bold, unfiltered. I started at them, the women openly willfully. He even visits prostitutes freely, frankly and fearlessly.

He says:

“I had merely walked into brothel hounded by a strange disturbance. All that I could think of was my money and the fact that I was not enjoying life or what I imagined enjoying life meant. The more money I accumulated, the more I was dissatisfied and the more I was determined to enjoy life.”

Therefore, he watches that everyone is collecting wealth by exploiting the opportunities provided by war. Even a member of parliament, “a trustee of the Republic” is not worried at all about the fate of war. Ratan is surprised to know that the Sheikh conducts his operations for neither money nor power but in order only to destroy and desires sadistic pleasure in destroying “Everything from top to bottom, from one end of the continent to the other.”

Therefore, Ratan finds solace in the fact that he is not alone in his pursuit of career through dubious means. He goes on keeping a record of several cases of corruption where the guilty have got scot-free. He says:
“I thought with satisfaction of a recent fraud executed by the scion of one of the country’s first families, the arrest of an Inspector – General of police for accepting the bribe from a racketeer, recall of an ambassador who had exchanged his country’s secrets for a mistress.”

This tendency of Ratan can be called as Freud’s conception of Ego defence – especially the form of ego defence – Rationalization. It is the cognitive distortion of the facts to make an event or an impulse less threatening. We do it often enough on a fairly conscious level when one provide ourselves with excuses. But for many people, with sensitive ego making excuses comes so easy that they never are truly aware of it. In other words many of us are quite prepared to believe our lies. When a person does something of which moral Super ego disapproves, then the ego seeks to defend itself by adding reasons that make the action acceptable, to the superego.

Therefore, Ratan, too indulges in rationalism and he offers his own reason for taking bribe to clear the sub-standard war material.

He says:
“And if there was to be defeat I had thought then it was bound to be so irrespective of what I did not do. How could my little act matter one way or another.”

Once, fallen from the human heights he ravels in the mire of humiliations and ironically considers his allegiance, his compromises as the needs of time. Lost in the labyrinth of time, he would go to any extent to gratify his fallen, lost and faceless self.

The war (Indo-China) is lost. Hundreds of soldiers lost their lives in the battlefield. Rallies were organized to cover up the national shame, the political leaders made emotional speeches denouncing the Chinese perfidy. The Brigadier, Ratan’s friend had returned from the war and suffered a nervous breakdown. Ratan went to visit him on New Year’s Day. He was in great Panic, “scared out of his wills.” Brigadier was hospitalized.
Mr. Tapan kumar Ghosh writes in *Crisis and Confession: The Apprentice* –

“Ratan was not allowed to see him. “Great friends, they told, were usually the most harmful.” His consecutive visits to the hospital and his encounter with the nameless multitude of maimed soldiers, “for whom the war had not ended and whose claim on a respectable existence, on love, on life itself, hung by a single thread that might only moment snap,” brought to Ratan the first glimpse of his crime. Once a dying soldier, groaning deliriously, caught hold of his leg and the awestruck Ratan felt “as though it was my father and not a soldier that held my leg, that it was my father dying all over again.” But the greatest blow came, when he met the Brigadier. He seemed to Ratan to be “a caged, demented animal.” It was the second time in his life after his father’s death when he suffered the pain of another person as his own. Recognition of the hell he had created for his friend horrified Ratan and led him to pray, not to God, but to himself - “I shall be good, I shall not be greedy. I shall not be afraid, I shall be decent.””

However, before that he was summoned to the Police Station for interrogation in connection with the supply of defective war materials that
had cost hundreds of lives and was arrested on suspicion. The S. P. accused him that he had cleared those materials and had taken a bribe in return. He thought of confessing and facing the result of his crime. But soon doubts comes and he thinks, “Think before you act or you will end up doing something foolish.” A strange debate started within him between conscience that was aware of his guilt and was ready to suffer and his sly, cocky self that was afraid of the consequences and was not yet prepared to accept responsibility. He says – “What good would the confession do? The men who have died have died. And even if it were to do good, why should I go and I confess… What right had they to persecute me like that.” This debate, symptomatic of Ratan’s inner schism, manifests the archetypal patterns of conflict between good and evil which is typical Indian. But his cowardice won at last suppressing the murmur of his conscience and Ratan convinced himself that “there was no point in confessing.” Instead, he started recalling the recent scandals of the country and sought consolation from those “annals of corruption.” He thinks how to get out of the dark cell. He cannot think of any friend or relative who can help him to come out of the disgraceful situation. While sitting in the darkening cell he thinks, in this great city, where he had spent 20 years of his life, there was none whom he could trust, confide in and ask for help, “I was, I now knew, alone.” However, with the help of Sheikh at last he was released.
The S. P. was sure of Ratan’s involvement and informed him that his friend, the Brigadier, was on the verge of madness because he had been accused of deserting the camp and was expected to be court-martialled any day. The reason of his desertion was that at the last moment his equipment, supplied by no other person than Ratan himself, had failed. The S. P. requested Ratan to stop play-acting and confess his crime to save his friend. Unless he confessed, there was no hope for the Brigadier.

As night advances, he becomes restless and he woke his sleeping wife up and tried to speak about his confession but could not bring himself to say anything. This failure of communication showed his estrangement from his wife about whom, he now realized he did not know much. He says - “that night, afraid and uncertain as I stared at her shapeless figure, I thought at a stranger.” Tapan kumar Gosh writes, “With excruciating loneliness in his guilt-racked soul, Ratan spent sleepless night as “the alternating blasts of bravado and cold fear” ravaged his skull. And all the while the squeaky voice hysterically egged him on.” The brief episode at the temple where Ratan went to seek help and courage in the crisis of his life, shows his rejection of religion as a remedy for his malaise. Even the religious shrines were not exempt from corruption. The priest, the agent of God, offered him bribe to save his son, a dishonest contractor, who
was facing trial for mixing too much same in the mortar. Ultimately, Ratan wrote down the confession. However, the way he modified it, toning down every insinuation of his personal guilt and finally pocketed it without sending it to the authority at the appointed hour. It proves Ratan’s cowardice and self-delusion, which he passed for martyrdom and innocence by turns. The failure to make confession and accept the moral responsibility of his crime only delayed his self-realization and resulted in the ultimate tragedy. The Brigadier could not wait for Ratan’s martyrdom and he committed suicide.

Ratan realized that “something had gone seriously wrong with (his) life.” The sight of the shattered skull of the Brigadier at the morgue struck him “as the vision of the vast pit at the bottom of which life crawled like a worm.” The soldiers, like the Brigadier had been the victims of the treachery of older men like Ratan.

The Brigadier’s death served as a catalyst that shocked Ratan out of his moral inertia and initiated the process of inner transformation in him. He was jerked out his self – complacency, pseudo – security and illusions and was confronted with the responsibility of his gruesome crime. He was
afraid that he was going mad. This condition of Ratan reflects – his psychological pressure known as Moral anxiety. According to Freud ego sits at the centre of some powerful forces like reality, society as represented by the superego when these make conflicting demands upon the poor ego it understandable if it feels threatened. This feeling is called anxiety, and it serves as a signal to the ego that its survival and with it the survival of the whole organism is in jeopardy. Freud mentions three kinds of anxieties -

1) **Realistic anxiety**

2) **Moral anxiety**

3) **Neurotic anxiety.**

Ratan suffers from Moral anxiety. It is what one feels when threat comes not from the outer physical world but from the internalized social world of the superego. It is in fact just another word for feeling like shame, guilt and fear of punishment.

Ratan also suffers from shame, guilt and fear of punishment after the Brigadier’s suicide for which he is fully responsible. He feels completely shaken and restless. A strange fear of death haunts him all the time. He understands the gravity and weight of his ingratitude and sin. The dead
Brigadier’s vision traits him wherever he goes. His confessional dramatic monologues lay out the horrors harbouring his soul. This fear in his tragic flaw that leads him to the final catastrophe. He knows that there is no fear like the fear of madness. All other fears are common to man and can, if you have the luck be shared. Those who descend into madness descend alone. This is “the apex of existential wisdom.” With a troubled conscience and a suffering soul, he goes from place to place without finding any peace worth the name. He holds himself responsible for the betrayal of his spirit.

This way after Brigadier’s death, he suffers from moral anxiety which offers psychoanalysis of his character. Although he did not give up his play-acting and went on keeping up appearances, he felt alone and friendless in office and at home. He could not communicate his agony even to his wife and to his daughter for the fear that they would not understand him. So “the silence remained. The panic remained. And I remained alone.” Mr. Tapankumar Ghosh compares this condition of Ratan with the hero of Crime and Punishment Raskolnikov who also cut himself off from everything and everybody. Ratan’s extreme helplessness, his ineffable agony and solitude are also reminiscent of those of the Ancient Mariner -
“Alone, alone, all, all alone
Alone, on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.”

This is the anguish of a man when he finds himself alone and robbed of all familiar ties and is faced with the emptiness and darkness of his guilt-tormented soul. Ratan went through terrible days and nights devoid of peace, sleep and consolation. He reflects, “No occurrence, no conversation, no visit of either friend or foe no sleep, in spite of the sleeping pills that our good doctor gave me, no relief, no respite from the hands that pulled me steadily down towards those caverns. Where, I felt certain, the Brigadier had gone.” Therefore, the pangs of conscience had, thus, begun to rack him and his grief-crazed soul suffered inconsolably.

In desperation, Ratan decided to take revenge to redeem his honour and that of his honour and that of his dead friend. He rushed with a gun to kill the sheikh whom he considered at that moment to be the villain of the piece and the root of his suffering. But Sheikh informs Ratan that he is dying and he has not betrayed him. He tells Ratan that he alone is not responsible for the deal. The minister and the Secretary the same
Secretary whom everyone considers as a model of upright conduct— are the instigators of the plot to make fast money out of the arms deal. They both wanted scapegoat. They picked Ratan because he was a “spineless flunkey.” Ratan is further unnerved to discover that it is the Secretary himself who in order to ward off suspicion from himself, cunningly tips off the police about Ratan’s possible involvement in the plot. Ratan is overcome by feeling of utter weariness; he tries to conjure up before his eyes a picture of his past twenty years of life and the futility of his endeavours. He cries out in agony – “Father, Father, what I have done?” He finds himself isolated and this acute sense of alienation and the shock of dispossession hits him very hard.

The same night the Sheikh takes Ratan to a shack, where he had been born and where his mother, a whore, had sold herself night after night. He tells Ratan of his childhood days, of poverty and privation, of his sisters, and his own life taking up a variety of odd jobs to make both ends meet. Regarding his present occupation of a racketeer, he expresses total satisfaction as it gives him an outlet for his hatred against the society. With each success, his confidence grows. There is no escape from darkness. He is also lost in the crooked ways of the world. In great anguish Sheikh cries –
“But if it was God’s darkness… what was the cure of a crooked world. None, perhaps, revolution perhaps… perhaps God himself. God alone perhaps could remove his darkness. But where was God? ... What was God? … And where?”

Ratan’s word explains the existential dilemma of the entire generation. Sheikh also remind Ratan his father and successful past. He says –

“Try to put yourself to use, Ratan Rathor… It might be too late. You have been too long the slave . . . But give it a try. One lost nothing.”

These words of Sheikh have a profound impact on Ratan and are largely responsible for a change in his outlook on life. Ratan’s earlier confusion about good and evil is now cleared. He reminds the advice of his father who used to tell him, “Be good, Be decent. Be of use”

He chooses to expiate his sin by putting himself and his soul to use. At first he was confused about the ways and means of his spiritual rehabilitation and of getting rid of the crookedness of the world. Ratan
seeks the remedy for his soul’s malaise neither in flight from the treacherous society nor in detachment. He remained in the profligate society of which he was a part and learnt to be of use of others. The choice was entirely his own taken by himself without any external aid. The means he adopted was selfless service which is according to Gandhi, the greatest religion of man. Thus began Ratan’s strange apprenticeship. He does penance for his misdeeds by going to the temple every morning on his way to the office and wiping the shoes left near the threshold by the devotees who have gone into pray. He reflects –

“Each morning before I go to work, I come here. I sit on the steps of the temple and while they pray, I wipe the shoes of the congregation. Then, when they are gone, I stand in the doorway. I never enter the temple. I am not concerned with what goes in there. I stand at the doorstep and I hold my hands, my hands smelling of leather and I say things. Be good. Be decent. Be of use. 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.”
Even the memory of these shoes, according to Ratan, acts as a check on
his lapsing back into his old ways. His grateful reference to the talismanic
effect of his memory is worth nothing.

“And during the day whenever I find myself getting to be clever,
lazy, vain, indifferent, I put my hands to my face and there is the
smell of a hundred feet that must at that moment be toiling
somewhere and I am put in my place.”

This change in Ratan is evaluated on a psychological level. It is the
example of Undoing – one of the forms of ego defence. The Undoing is
more conscious and the person engages in an act of atonement for some
behavior or formally ask for forgiveness.

Ratan wants to make a second start as it is not late to do so. A positive
thinking and realization dawns on him. It gives a new turn to his life. He
learns through his painful experience with life the meaning of his father’s
advice –

“Whatever you do touches someone somewhere.”
Ratan finds his genuine self in the religion of service humility, humanism and sense of responsibility towards one and all. It is revealed to him that the redemptive possibilities are inextricably linked with human dignity.

At the end, Ratan, a man without shame and honour – “perhaps a man of our times” – tells his young and still unpolluted listener that though the present is dismal and the future uncertain, there is still a ray of hope. He pins his hope on the youth of the country who are “willing to learn from the follies of their elders. Willing to learn and sacrifice willing to pay the price.” It is people like the young student who can hold back the tide of this “frozen, petrified civilization.” The novel significantly ends at dawn “It is a cold dawn. But no matter a dawn, after all, is a dawn.”

Ratan, has lost his self and felt the anguish of lose. His existential decision to recover the lost self through an act of penitence reveals the need to realize and prize one’s integrity.