The Apprentice

Like his previous novels, Arun Joshi’s third novel, *The Apprentice* (1974), also depicts the pitiable condition of contemporary man living in a norm-less and confused society. Written in confessional tone, this novel is totally different from all other novels and writings of Arun Joshi. Mr. Khemka of *The Foreigner* seems to be reincarnated in the form of Ratan Rathore, the son of a freedom fighter who represents the quintessence everyman - a contrast to other protagonists in so far as his intellectual level is much lower. He has received no higher education and has never crossed the international borders. An unsophisticated youth, jobless, he comes to the city in search of a career but the hollowness of his existence and problem to adjust himself with this materialistic and hypocrite society, make him unscrupulous and ready to prostitute himself for professional advancement. His personality exemplifies the juxtaposition of the contrasting values of pre-independence idealism and post-independence disillusionment. The novel attacks materialistic values but with a different strategy. Ratan Rathore is seduced by the materialistic values of society where he wades through corruption to arrive at an understanding of life and its affirmations. According to World Literature Today:

…the novel is cast in a series of Browning-like monologues, to a boy to whom the protagonist, burdened with sorrow of 'a wasted life', lays bare the motives, aspirations, dilemmas and frustrations of his past." (Online)

Ratan has an indistinct sense of values, a helpless self-deceptive effort to flout him for the sake of his career. He turns a fake, a sham, a corrupt official and an exhausted family man. His inside gets hollow and moth-eaten. In the beginning, problems arise not from the within like other heroes of Arun Joshi, but these are
from the outer world. Ratan is an educated individual seeking job and being "examined, interviewed, interrogated and rejected" (Joshi, 1974, 29) before he gets his selection at the temporary post of clerk in a government office. This job seeking practice is his first interaction with the modern world where he discovers that the old values of his father have no place and accordingly have been marginalized and the freedom means only the change of masters. He realizes that a change is necessary to adjust him with this pragmatic world. Thus, the novel prepares a background to show how an idealist changes into a practical man because man's existence into this world depends not only upon what he chooses to be but also upon the individuals and the things around him. Therefore, sometimes it is not possible to be your own master. Joshi observes:

To be your own master! That is easier said than done, my friend. It is easier certainly to be your own slave- or someone else's. And how was I going to be my own master when a system was master of me.” (62)

Joshi's heroes in his early novels are the masters of themselves but Ratan’s life is a see-saw battle between the opposite values represented by his father and the practical observations of his mother. His father abandoned his lawyer’s profession for the contemporary new ideal of Mahatma Gandhi. There was a set pattern of ideal code of conduct that Ratan learned from his father. His mother had a different set. She was a practical woman who has suffered all the time after his father was killed out of his patriotic fervor. Suffering of all the types - physical, mental and economic have made her cynical about money. She did not want her son to inherit her husband’s quixotic idealism. She has taught him brusquely: “Money made friends, money succeeded where all else failed. There were many laws, she said, but money was law unto itself” (19). When Ratan was left alone in
this world to seek a job and secure his place, he realized the difference between these two views. He badly needed money and this resulted in his being disintegrated and slave of money. He recalls:

   After my father's death, things were bleak. The three of us were left alone in that little house: I, my mother, and her illness. The people for whom my father had squandered a lifetime had forgotten him with the year—except for the Brigadier and his family. (16)

The story of this novel is a confession like the ancient mariner of Coleridge's poem, *The Rime of Ancient Mariner* where the consciousness of the old mariner exhorts him to reveal his story before a youth. When the novel opens, we find Ratan Rathore, a government officer in the Defence Ministry, busy with his apprenticeship of wiping out the shoes of the devotees every morning on the stairs of a temple at Delhi. One such day, an N.C.C. cadet, who has come to Delhi to rehearse the republic day parade, appears before him asking for the way to the parade ground. After satisfying him with his remarks "if you could wait a little, I shall drop you. I go the same way" (5), Ratan, pours out the details of his life. The teenager boy reminds Ratan his own story how once he had come to this city in pursuit of his career. He discloses his story of deception, hypocrisy and corruption and finally, repentance. The young cadet listens to Ratan's self-confession very passionately without asking any question. The background of his entire story leads us to the post-independence era with some reference of the British Rule. This novel also mentions the Chinese invasion of India. Commenting upon the various ‘stages’ of the development of Ratan’s story, Prasad observes:

   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 era of expiation, is the door to the purgatory. (60)

The narrative develops from the state of innocence to that of experience. Ratan recalls his days of innocence when his father, a lawyer by profession and a follower of Gandhi by thoughts, was shot dead by the British sergeant while leading a procession of freedom fighters and Ratan was left alone to fight with the cruelties of the world. Here he realized the value of money which was everything in the materialistic society where his father's thoughts had no values. His mother taught him that the soul of human existence in this society was based upon the value of money and money was everything. A man devoid of money has no future at all. His mother assured him: "Don't fool; yourself, son, she said. Man without money was a man without worth. Many things were great in life, but the greatest of them all was money" (19). In a world, where everything depends upon money, to follow behind idealism was a foolish act. Idealism and patriotism are sentimental aspects whereas practical life goes on the wages of money. His mother again convinces him: “It was not patriotism, but money, she said, that brought respect and security. Money succeeded where all else failed. There were many laws, but money was law unto itself” (19). This eye-opener truth of the "mystery of universe"(19) stunned Ratan in silence. He recaptures:

It was as though an oracle had spoken and revealed to me the mystery of the universe. I felt very sad and helpless. I felt as though I had lost all control over my destiny which from then on would be governed not by what I wanted for or how good I was but by some intricate laws of money of which I had no knowledge. (19)

He also remembers the call from Subhas Chandra Bose to join his army but Ratan could not. Torn between his mother's practical aspect towards life and his
father's patriotism, he was restless and "could neither sleep nor eat" (20). Ratan reveals all those happenings of his past days that have caused him to sit on the stairs of the temple. He tells the listener how he received his college education on loaned money. He came out of college and like any ordinary youth, joined the cut-throat competition for an employment. He reached Delhi to “make a mark on the world” (23) but he found nothing except endless suffering. His mother was suffering from tuberculosis but he had no money for her treatment. All these sufferings shatter his faith in the world and its order. He says:

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 not there. Or, you assume your life is faithful, your children love you, your boss fair, or that God exists. And then, someday proof comes along that nothing is so. This is what hurts (23).

While staying in a cheapest inn "with six men in a room not biggest than this kitchen" (25), he tried at his best to get a job in Delhi since he had little money at his disposal. Being "examined, interviewed, interrogated, and rejected (29) everywhere, he lost his hope in this social system. He tells: "there is nothing in the world as sad as the end of a hope. Not even death." (25). His own comparison with his room partners makes his apprehensive of his failure as "they worked, earned, spent, and I had no job. I, who was the most educated of them all, would soon be on streets, a failure, an incompetent, penniless fool" (25). In order to keep on his respect among his roommates, he beguiled them, another dimension to life: “I had become, at the age of twenty-one, a hypocrite and a liar; in short, a sham. I had been insecure before and full of strange fears..... I had become a master faker. An all this had happened within a period of six weeks” (27). His leasing is an aspect of
his self-respect which was to maintain his social status as well as an attempt to cope with the shattering paradigms of a noble life.

Due to this "humiliating experience" (29) of failure in every effort, he had a narrow escape from death after falling victim of sun-stroke but was helped by his roommate whom he did not like much. When he recovered, a chance introduction by a stenographer secured him a job of temporary clerk in a department for war purchases. Ratan hates the days when he was lodging in a cheapest inn. He even hates everything that belongs to his days of the struggle for an employment in the filthy social atmosphere. He did not care to wait to say good bye to those who helped him at the time of his need. He was a changed man. He recapitulates: "It was the fact that I was trying to put as great a distance between me and the inn. And considering the professional chasm that divided us it was not difficult (31). He has been changed into a practical man and a part of the ‘careers and bourgeois filth' (32) that his father used to ridicule. He remembers everything but also knows that ‘when the moment comes, we only remember what best grinds our axe’" (32).

It was the effort of Ratan to establish him in the job that he had secured after so many experiences and the only key to it was the superintendent who could better grind his axe. In those beginning days of his career, Ratan considered him as a ‘high priest of an exclusive creed’ (33) believing in survival through ability and he worked "harder than almost anybody in the department except the superintendent himself" (35). His work and docility help him to win the confidence of his boss who later on confirms his job. Thus he was ‘launched’ (39) on the ‘pursuit of a career’. He remarks:

I embarked upon the solemn and relentless pursuit of a career.
Bourgeois filth. Careers and Bourgeois filth. It is not only now that I have remembered the words. There have been moments in my life when I saw nothing but filth around me. At such times my
head would explode with violent, rebellious thoughts. But then I would always calm down, and ask myself: What can be done? Here I am. And here is the filth. (39)

Ratan has embarked on building a carrier and for the sake of better survival like a tiger; he agrees to marry with his boss’ niece. It is where his 'deals' begin and he knows that the world runs on the basis of deals and “If a man forgets how to make deals, the world would come to stop (48). He has become a modern man in true sense. Whenever he compares his life with the high ideals and patriotic feelings of his father, he becomes increasingly despondent. The novelist has presented so many occasions when Ratan finds himself a split-personality caught between the conflict of the higher ideals of his father and the practical wisdom of his mother and further, his instinct for survival in the modern world

Up to this point, we notice that Ratan was what he never wanted to be. He wanted to choose the right way of survival but the circumstances and the social conditions compel him to select any other path. He is neither a rebel like Billy Biswas of The Strange Case of Billy Biswas nor a rootless young man like Sindi Oberai of The Foreigner but on the contrary, he is a practical man whose inherited idealism has been shattered by the corrupt hands of society. His attempt is to adopt himself to the mysterious ways of the world. His course of life is running on the pattern of Sartre's idea of being. He has grasped the pulse of time which helps him to rise upward. His deals fructify and he becomes officer soon after his marriage with his boss’ daughter. He has every substance of luxury, a car, a flat of his own, a refrigerator and bank balance, but no peace of mind. He practices unfair means hence devoid of satisfaction. He has performed everything for the sake of earning money, for which he was never expected. Yet he feels emptiness in his life. He fails to enjoy life as he does not understand its meaning. He remembers:

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All that I could think of was my money and the fact that I was not enjoying life or what imagined "enjoying life meant. The more money I accumulated, the more I was dissatisfied, and the more I was determined to "enjoy" life. And all the time I thought of death.

(85)

Contrary to such a stand in his life, Ratan feels strongly for his motherland when the Indo-China war starts. He frequently recollects his father’s ideals and calls his behavior at his moment exemplary. He sees problems everywhere around him and tries to have a solution and after much deliberation he concludes that it is the rapid fall in the character of individual that our motherland is facing. He gets his ideas published in the form of essay in which he hits the corruption in the society and describes Indian people as “inglorious monument in ruin, a monument of which even the foundations had caught canker” (50). The people around him fail to understand him and they mock him as ‘Mr. Crisis of character’ (57) instead but this does not weaken his enthusiasm. He is restless in this corrupt atmosphere where he “has been gradually sinking into the abyss of darkness of corruption, exploitation and bourgeois filth (Das: 41) but above all he has satisfaction of swimming, not sinking.

In between, Ratan meets Himmat Singh, the Sheikh who offers him a big bribe for the supply of defective war materials to the army. Ratan refuses to do so realizing the fact that it is related to the security of the country but he derives courage from his day to day observations that everyone is busy with amassing wealth by exploiting the opportunities thrown out by the war. The Sheikh had ‘a perfect system’ which he explained to him and for some obscure reasons Ratan accepted to take the bribe and accordingly approves the defective war material which results in the death of his only friend, the Brigadier. Later on he laments: “What happened to me during that time and again without getting an answer (59)
and “how could the possible change so suddenly” (62). He blames the social structure and his atmosphere for his corruption. It is the corrupt system where men were weighed in money or power limiting his option. The individual freedom seems to be a deception because one is not master of one's own destiny but a puppet in the hands of this system. He justifies his action in the manner as one swallow does not make summer:

If I had taken a bribe I belonged rather to the rule than the exception. Peons were frequently taking bribes. So were government officials and traffic policemen and railway conductors. A bribe could get you a bed in the hospital, a place to burn your dead. Doctors had a fee to give false certificates, magistrates for false judgments. For a sum of money policemen changed their sides..... And now if I had happened to have accidentally indulged in a little slip-up, the sky was not going to fall. (108-09)

Ratan becomes infatuated with wealth and sacrifices the principles that have governed him during adolescence; a complete diversion from his ideals and his actions. He loses his character and his purpose of life and is confused to behold the contradiction between his high ideals and his practical life. Virtually, he loses his identity:

It hurts to talk of it but it was there all right. And it was this: I knew that, when the cards were down, I was a nobody. A NOBODY. Deep down I was convinced that I had lost significance: As an official; as a citizen; as a man. (70)

But this realization is fleeting. He performs the same practice again and again when he goes to Bombay to sign the agreement related to the defective war materials. He forgets his ideals in front of wine and women. The acquisition of
wealth has dazzled his eyes and he accepts shamefully: “I was in fact, at the peak of dung heap that I had been climbing all my life. (82)

Ratan visits Bombay and has some more facts about this phony society where everybody is worried about his own welfare. Nobody has a single concern about the result of the war upon society. Even a Member of Parliament, "a trustee of the republic" (86) says that nobody lost a war these days. There were always compromises. To be candid, he whispered, who cared for the wilderness that we were quarrelling over. He was very much surprised to see those who believe only in destruction and Sheikh was one of them who find pleasure in destroying. When Ratan hesitates to sign the deal, Sheikh tells him openly that only fools like him believe that there is any rule made by God to govern this society. He tells: "There was no such law book, Rathore.... What existed was not written by God but by a silly society that would do anything for money" (72). He tells again:

This country had two kinds of people, the rulers and the ruled. The rulers were a fraud, phony people who know only how to make speeches, be cruel and feather their nests, and who made a mess of things, then went off without knowing how to clean it u The ruled were brainless (80).

All these thinking disturb the inner feeling of Ratan and the question of repentance rises from the core of his heart "why did I take the bribe" (61). His repentance reminds us Camus's Jean-Baptiste-Clamence when he says: "Yet I was unhappy about this as if I had violated the code of honour" (Camus , 47).

Ratan's experience in Bombay had made him cadaverous in the 'bourgeois filth' without a chance to return. When he thinks about himself, he becomes "restless, depressed, and uncomfortable" (66). His idealist life reduces to shreds and he loses his standards. He recalls: "Many things disturbed me but where I had expected new achievements, new standards, there were no standards. No standards
at all" (63). Now he was puppet in the hands of a corrupt system constituted with certain people like Himmat Singh that have only one idea in their life - how to make money. Ratan is sad whenever he compares his present position with the ideals of his father:

I was no fornicator. I was the son of a revolutionary born to lead revolution. If not lead them, at least to be part of them. I came from a race of men who had, over thousand years, battled for honor. I was expected to make sacrifices. If required, give up my life for a noble cause. In all this I had obviously failed. (85)

Ratan's contrast with his father, with the superintendent and sometimes with the Brigadier disturbs him at the deep and he feels himself used to the system. He says: “The best men in my life- my father, the Superintendent, The Brigadier had possessed a physical briskness that had marked them out from the crowd, a briskness that I had envied and emulated. Not without success”. (63-64)

One thing is important here that Ratan is conscious what he is doing, should not be done and he is guilty of his self and thus feels self-deceived in the hands of the system. He has lost his moral, his very essence of being and has been left to "the status of those leaves of autumn that are blown here and there, at the mercy of the wind" (69). He was tormented by the question "What else can I tell you that would explain my act, why I took the bribe? (69). His dilemma is that of the modern man fed up with the hypocrite, deceitful and corrupt system that makes him a totally isolated and detached which further gives birth to anxiety and existential despair with a feeling of nausea. Ratan observes:

How, all these years, I have been alone, so horribly alone in my anger, in my failures, carrying them in secret, like a thief, close to my heart, until their blazes have turned upon me and turned me to ashes. (71)
This description is the proof of protagonist's moral degradation and isolation. He is disturbed and lost in spite of having all means of luxury. Ratan is his own villain. He poses a split personality. From one hand, he justifies his action of taking bribes but on the other, he cries out of despair "What had I done what had I done" (69).

After the Bombay episode, we find Brigadier return from the fighting fronts of Indo-China war. He is suffering from a nervous breakdown. When Ratan goes to visit him, he finds him shocked. Ratan remembers: "The man whom, I always looked up to and who had been the nicest to me was in panic, sacred out of his wits" (90). When Brigadier is hospitalized, Ratan remembers how the Brigadier has once saved Ratan's life when he was attacked by a group of hooligans. Unfortunately, Ratan finds himself responsible for untimely death of his friend. He remembers:

I watched him in a sense of doom. And watching him I remembered the autumn evening on an authentic field and in the growing dusk the cry of the nightingale... It was the second time in my life that I had felt the pain of another as my own, the first being the time when my father was shot... And standing there by the glass window I felt as though it was not the Brigadier but I who was rocking through some dark dungeons of the world. (100)

When the matter is investigated, Ratan deceives the superintendent of police that he is not aware of the clearance of the defective war materials which caused the loss of several hundred lives. His reaction is full of surprise and great indignation. He answers every question asked by police like a professional liar. They confirm him about his hands into clearance of those defective war materials and put him in custody. It was the worst of the pragmatic ideals that have only
value for money. Its experience is amazing and Ratan thinks many things at the same time:

I watched the disappearing back in a daze of disbelief. Was it a dream, a nightmare, hallucination caused by some poisonous drug? Or, was I not Ratan Rathor, an official of the Government of India but someone else, someone born of criminal parents dragged out of the slums of the old city? If I was not Ratan Rathor, what was I? Was I a thief? A scoundrel? Was I the murderer, they said I was.

(106)

Ratan feels great conflict in his conscience whether he should confess or deny his allegations. He thinks of the moral values, the honour, Dharma and Maryada but finally does not confess his crime and the police set him free because they have no valid proof of accusation. Although he refuses to accept the charge, but in his mind's eyes he finds himself a guilty. He is completely broken at the point that the burden to save Brigadier's life has fallen on his own shoulders. He goes on thinking about the situation and has lost the peace of his mind. He recapitulates:

For twenty years I had lived in this city and for twenty years, it seemed to me, there had been nothing but night, nothing but darkness. And I had tried to find home in that darkness. I had stampeded about, lured on by carrots regulated by sticks, running here and there without knowing what I sought. (116)

Ratan goes to the temple in order to seek a moral courage to confess his charge. He reaches at the time of Aarati and prays to Lord Krishna to give him strength to confess his crime. He remembers: "I cried. Help me, O God, help me. I am in trouble and I have come to your door. Give me courage. Just for a day lend me your courage. Help me "(118). Here it is obvious that Ratan was trapped in the
existential duplicity and deception. He was victim of immortality and his presence in the temple is the ultimate hope that a deceived individual possesses. He realizes his sin and returns from the temple and writes an affirmation but again he fails to submit his letter before the police. In the meanwhile he comes to know about the suicide of his Brigadier friend in the utter confusion.

Death is the great eye-opener in Arun Joshi's novels as an important structure of human existence. The feeling of death decides the existential situation of his protagonists. In *The Foreigner* it's Babu's death that makes Sindi to feel the futility of life and the authenticity of existence and here it is Brigadier's death that shakes Ratan to his roots. It is so because death is a definite future of existence. As individual's existence is his own, death is also his own. Nobody can die another's death. The very thought of death brings fear, the existential fear, as it helps the individual to look into his own being. Ratan records:

> I felt a fear. A fear let me say, that I was going mad. Do you see what I mean? As the night advanced-ah, those ling winter nights-as the night advanced my fear deepened. It was only with the arrival of dawn-the newspaper to be precise-that I found relief. (124)

Death of the Brigadier has reverted Ratan's life. He begins to think over the entire affair and finds it is Himmat Singh behind all these tragic events. He proceeds to the house of Himmat Singh to take revenge by killing him and thus redeem his and his dead friend's honour. Himmats Singh retorts him on his foolishness and being his "bogus from top to bottom". He further says: "your work, your religion, your friendship your honour, nothing but a pile of dung" (131). He says Ratan not to blame others for his own actions. He also explains that Ratan alone was not responsible behind the entire incident. But there is a chain of corrupt system in which the Minister and the Secretary have also played their parts. Again
he blames his society that has made his mother a whore and his sister a vagrant and has forced him to adopt the wrong way. These revelations make Ratan understand the absurdity of existence. He reflects his situation:

I could see myself as I had not for twenty years. What was more; I could see myself with detachment. Well, that is boasting again. Let us just say that I saw more of myself than I had seen before. I did not yet know what had happened to me but one thing was clear: My life had been a great, great waste.(135)

Ratan's visit to the temple explores him that even the place of God is not free from the hands of corruption. The priest is ready to pay Ratan a big amount if he saves his imprisoned son. Joshi reflects through Ratan: " that for two decades, I had lived only in smog: confused, exploited, exploiting, deceiving, and now deceived. Deceived beyond my imagination"(133). Ratan comes to the conclusion that there is no limit to human deprivation. The Brigadier's vision haunts him everywhere he goes. In an endless remorse and the pricking of conscience, Ratan alienates himself from the society which is meaningless.

Although Ratan has sought for solace from the annals of corruption at every stage, he had put up an initial resistance but his efforts have been totally futile. He selects and plans to follow the right path but invariably distracts into a reprehensible preposition. He confesses how:

Many things disturbed me but what disturbed me the most was the fact that where I had expected new achievements, new standards, there were no standards. No standards at all. Anything went, so long as it was backed by sufficient power. It was this that made me the most uncomfortable. (62)
Ratan finds it is the lack of responsibility behind the prevailing corruption in the society. Each act should be done with a sense of responsibility along with a deep urge to undergo penance and affirmation. Ratan undergoes this sternest form of affirmation at the lowest by dusting the shoes of the congregation outside the temple every morning on his way to office. Only remedy for the haunting soul is to be of some use to others without "vanity and without expectations and also without cleverness" (143). This realization is the situation before the young man that to have a fresh start. He tells:

Consider me an apprentice and you will perhaps understand. Each morning, before I go to work, I come here. I sit on the steps of the temple and while they prey I wipe the shoes of the congregation. Then, when they are gone, I stand in the doorway. (142)

The dilemma about God adds another existential aspect to Ratan's experience. Himmat Singh is good to view his existence from a new angle when he tells Ratan: "My soul was killed you put yours to pawn. But souls that were pawned could perhaps be retained" (146). Ratan's decision is to retrieve his pawned soul by putting himself to use in a spiritual humility. This is the only remedy to the existential problems within the reach of a common man. For Ratan, life is not necessarily purposelessness. He finds affirmation in his apprenticeship, wiping out the shoes of the congregation in the front of the temple because his father has once told him "whatever you do touches someone somewhere" (143). Ratan's way to achieve affirmation by polishing the shoes outside the temple signifies his devotion which is also his adoration of the remaining values that he has neglected in his past. It is the recovery of a lost self through an act of penitence. It is Ratan's regeneration where the novel ends.
Thus, we have seen that Arun Joshi's *The Apprentice* is an existential instance of modern individual. It tells the story of an individual who fails to maintain a proper balance between the high idealism of his ancestors and the corrupt society he is living in. Only due to lack of a balance between these two, the son of a freedom fighter was turned into a ‘master faker’, ‘a sham’, ‘a whore’, a ‘scoundrel’, a fool or ‘a great hypocrite’ because there was a “betrayal of the spirit” (137). This diversion of individual's behavior is the result of his confrontation between his ideals and practical life.

Ratan's problems can be understood in terms of Jean-Paul-Sartre's concern of man’s happiness and unhappiness, his ethical problems, purpose and conduct which was expressed largely in his literary works before they appeared in his *Being and Nothingness*. Of these works, *Nausea* (1937) has a prominent place which is the richest in his philosophical concern. The full exposition of its meaning can be traced in *Being and nothingness*. In fact, Ratan's realization of the futility of life and the contingency of existence, gratuitousness, unjust and the idea that life is essentially absurd, reminds the realization of Roquentin of *Nausea* that shows how the ‘being’ in general and the individual in particular are *de trop* and there is no reason for existence, no outside purpose to give meaning, no direction. Being is there and outside of it- nothing. Roquentine realizes that since he is an existential being, he cannot escape this original contingency, this obscene superfluity. He says "I too was *de troped*. Even my death would have been *de trop*, my corpse, my blood on these stones, between these plants, at the back of the smiling garden..." (172-173)

This idea is again echoed in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* where he uses almost the same words to describe being-it-self.

Being -it- self is never either possible or impossible, it is. This is what consciousness expresses in anthromorphoric terms by saying
that being de trop- that is that consciousness absolutely cannot derive being from anything, either from another being, or from a possibility, or from a necessary law. On created without any connection with another being, being-it-self is de trop for serenity. (Sartre, LXVIII)

More or less the same feeling takes place when Ratan accepts that "for two decades, I had lived only in smog: confused, exploited, exploiting, deceiving, and now deceived. Deceived beyond my imagination... twenty years and nothing gained. An empty lifetime". (133)

For Sartre, the human existence is his consciousness being which is described as being-for-itself. In the primary consciousness of his existence Ratan finds himself in a situation where the world rests upon the wages of money. The other two dimensions of human existence have been designated by Sartre as being-it-self (the world and its things) and being-for-others (a third entity). Human existence is the interrelation with these dimensions. The very presence of worldly unconscious being (being-it-self) interrupts the freedom of the individual so that he moulds his plans only to adjust with this interruption. Commenting upon the true nature of being, S. Radhakrishanan also writes:

Man is a complex multi-dimensional being, including within him different elements of matter, life, consciousness, intelligence, and the divine spark. He is free when he acts from the highest level and uses the other elements for the realization of his purpose. But when he is on the level of objective nature, when he does not recognize his distinction from not-self, he becomes a slave to the mechanism of nature. But even when he falsely identifies himself with the objective universe, and feels that he is subjected to the necessities of nature, he is not without hope, for One Spirit operates at all levels of being.(46)
Ratan's case is an excellent example. He was a pure conscious being in the beginning but as soon as he came into contact of this world, he was victim of many other mental dispositions because of the non-realization of his true nature of being. To him "it appeared as a bundle of mirrors, tempting and somehow held together, but on the brink always of falling apart"(17).

For Sartre, the feeling of human existence in the world is the feeling of loneliness because he is ‘thrown’ into the world along with certain other objects where everything depends upon his own choice, hence he is condemned to be free and choose. It means that only the individual is responsible for his plans and actions. Sartre writes:

We are left alone, without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet he is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does." (Sartre, E as H, 345)

In The Apprentice, it is the matter of existential choice upon which the apprenticeship of Ratan is tested. In the words of VVN Rajendra Prasad, "The Apprentice elaborates the theme of corruption of the self in the society which is itself corrupt" (211)

This feeling generates some dispositions coming out as important parts of individual's existence. The concept of nausea is such a disposition which has been called as the ‘test of fact’, a fact of inescapable connection with being-in-itself. Some other dispositions are anxiety, anguish and despair. Most of the individuals think these dispositions as hindrance in their life but, in fact, these are the inevitable part of the conscious being, the being-for-itself. To exist means to exist with these feelings. For Sartre, These are not pessimistic dispositions because the
unique form of human existence generates from these dispositions. To be human is to live with this. In this sense, Arun Joshi's protagonist in *The Apprentice* is leading an authentic life where Brigadier's existence cannot be said authentic as he failed to cope with such dispositions. Brigadier and Sheikh both failed to find out meaning of their beings. They could not overcome their situations. The disruptive tendency of society has turned Sheikh's mother into a whore, and it is Sheikh's own kind of revenge that he transforms history for his kind of wild justice. Again, the Brigadier is too sensitive to overcome these dispositions and he is the softest victim and pays its price with his life.

For Sartre, searching for a way to escape these dispositions is to escape with individual's own humanity. The Hero of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, is an example. He tried to escape from his own being-for-itself. Sartre calls this escape as 'bad faith' and 'self lying'. Such individual is not trying to hide the truth from others, but from himself. On the contrary, Ratan decides to live in that society whatsoever, not away from it. He describes life in terms of algebra with a subtle difference:

Life more than ever, reminds me of those complex sums in algebra that we do in high schools, sums involving equations, all directed at discovering the missing x with which they are in some way related. But they are also related among them, acting upon themselves, holding each other up, at times destroying each other and, in the process, the mysterious x. And, at times, they are wrongly set up so that the mysterious x is never found, or they are short by one or two and there can be no question of finding x, try as you might. (49)

Ratan is successful to find out this missing 'x' (which is the purpose of existence itself) at the price of the sacrifice of his beloved friend. Brigadier's
sacrifice serves mainly two purposes in Ratan's life - (i) it made Ratan to overcome his confusion and helped to select the right choice of his existence leading to an authentic life and (ii) it illustrates that suicide can never be a right choice for our existential problems. We also remember that Samuel Beckett's characters in *Waiting for Godot* always fail to commit suicide. Here also we find that Ratan thinks of every option except destroying himself. The dismal abyss of life inspires nausea in him who thinks of bringing about a change in the existing set up and his article "Crisis of character" is a sufficient example. But he could not escape and while trying to adjust himself with the existing social setup, he was sucked in the vortex of bureaucratic corruption. The whole business was so much muddled and confused that he failed to have a right choice and distinguish what is right and what is wrong. He recapitulates:

> The feeling generated in me a great confusion. What had I done what had I done which I should not have done? What was right, what was wrong? What was the measure for doing things or not doing them? Where were the dividing lines: between success and failure, loyalty and betrayal, love and hate? The confusion reduced me to the status of those leaves of autumn that are blown here and there, at the mercy of the wind.(69)

When he became aware of his true self and the right option, he found himself in bad faith, a betrayed individual whose soul was ‘pawned’ and thus he was confused enough to select the right path of his soul, his self, his authentic existence. He compares his situation with those travelers "who always get on the wrong train without any intention of catching the right ones. Always planning, never doing:” (137)

Ratan comes out as victorious in the struggle of his existence. He quests for something meaningful, which he attains. All that was done was only due to his
innocence to understand the absurd servility of the same world which had almost crushed him by an unjust thrashing. This has created only ethical confusion in him. Therefore, he is the guilty of himself and goes to punish him by his own methods. His non-acceptance of his crime before the Superintendent indicates that he does not think himself as a guilty of society where even the house of God is not free from the hands of corruption. This corrupt system has no moral right to punish him. But he is the guilty of his consciousness. Fyodor Dostoyevsky in his Crime and Punishment writes:

If one has a conscience, he will suffer for his mistake. That will be his punishment—as well as a prison… Pain and sufferings are always inevitable for a large intelligence and a deep heart. The really great men must, I think, have great sadness on earth. (257)

Ratan's choice to wipe out the shoes of the people sitting outside the temple is his own method to expiate his sin and the strongest way to tear down the silly ostentation. This is an attempt to cover up his self evasion and vanity, self-condemnation and humility. He tells the listener: "I stand at the doorstep and I fold my hands, my hands smelling of leather, and I say things. Be good, I tell myself. Be good, be decent. Be of use." (143).

In this way, Arun Joshi's The Apprentice can be said having various themes such as crisis and confession, crime and punishment, of right existential choice and of dislocation and search. The individual is dazzled because the world before him (Sartre calls being-in-itself) appears with many potentialities and he is an innocent victim of the situations. When the innocence matures into experience, he also becomes a part of this system because of his failure to do right choice. Every existing phenomenon in the world follows the same path. From Sartre's viewpoint, the individual who is subject for himself is, at the same time, an object for other
individuals. He explains this in terms of 'us-subject' and 'we subject'. In *The Apprentice*, it is more surprising to note that the Sheikh, the tempter who cleverly changes even the course of Ratan's life, is himself undergoing the similar journey from evil to good as revealed by him to Ratan at the end. He is the tempter and tempted- a penetrating insight into the ineffective nature of the evil. Ironically, it is the tempter himself who shows Ratan Rathore the path of atonement-"try to put yourself to use". It is like his rebirth. In this way, the whole story is the analysis of existence-consciousness.

We find that the subject turns into object for other's consciousness. Here God can be explained in the terms of Sartre. When mind gets complicated in certain emotions, it thinks there is a seer who is not the subject of anybody. He looks at all but nobody can look him. This is the thought of God. It is the third entity whose physical presence is not necessary. Even his absence is a form of his presence. Since the individual cannot look at God, he cannot be able to constitute him as his object. He is beyond and above.

From Sartre's point of view, Ratan is apprenticed to madness. It is the basic failure of his inter-subjectivity that washes out his mind and kills the seeds of integrity and moral behavior. This fear of madness is the posture of his own possibility of being. Ratan comes to madness beneath this posture, madness nourished by his own humanity:

There is no fear like the fear of madness. All other fears are common to men and can, if you have the luck, be shared. Those who descend into madness descend alone. Immobilized, fuddled, tongue less, understood, and laughed at. Thus I sank. Like a stone.(20)

Once he had maintained the absolute integrity of character believing that "character is our fate" (35) and working “harder than anybody in the department”
because it was only way to survive. It is neither the trick, nor the deals but his own hard working with dedication that enables him to climb the ladder of bureaucracy. But gradually his "back had nearly been broken by the world's unjust thrashing" (42). This is his failure that makes him a two-faced character and a condemnation to society. In this sense he is not the centre of the novel since he detaches himself from his own fate but one who needs to go through the whole of the novel to clear away this halo of mystery. His detachment is different from the detachment of Sindi of The Foreigner. Here it has become the knife of self-dissection.

For the Western existential philosophers, there is no remedy of the absurdity of life. It should be accepted as it is. But Ratan says: "life might well be a zero, for all I know, but it seems to me that it need not be negative. And it becomes negative when you take out of it your sense of shame, your honour" (142). His soul will rest in peace only if he has confession and forgiveness:

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. (143)

This is the burden of moral responsibility and the dilemma about God adds further aspect to human existence. He gets an answer when Himmat Singh talks of the God's darkness:

If it was God's darkness, he asked, what was the cure? What was the cure of a crooked world? None, perhaps. Revolution, perhaps, Or perhaps...perhaps...he seemed to hesitate a long time...perhaps God himself. God alone perhaps could remove His darkness…But
where was God, he cried out again, suddenly excited, his voice
ringing with despair. *What* was God? and *where*? (140)

These words turn Ratan's existence to a new angle. According to Sheikh’s suggestions, Ratan's goal of life has been decided to retrieve his pawned soul which was a remedy to his existential questions.

Here is the contrast with other existential writers like Doestovesky, Camus and Graham Green. For Western existential writers, revolution is the remedy to get rid of the crookedness of being. Joshi analyses these:

The crookedness of the world; the crookedness of oneself. How to get rid of it? Revolution of God? the Sheikh had said. But what do I know of either of them, my friend? Of Revolution; or of God? I know nothing. That is the long and the short of it. The Superintendent's God is no use. Of that I am sure. Whose God then? The God of Kurukshetra... And whose Revolution? The Russian? The Chinese? The American?...Coinciding at some point, I get very confused, as you can see. And I do not know what to do, where to begin. But time is short and one must begin somewhere...

Consider me an apprentice and you will perhaps understand (142)

The novelist presents two options to overcome the existential problem of the individual, revolt or God. Camus suggests in his famous *Myth of Sisyphus*, revolt as an option which consists of merely three steps: acknowledgement, acceptance and accomplishment. But in Ratan’s case, the individual in master of his own destiny and it is his sole responsibility to retrieve his ‘pawned’ soul which becomes an attitude, an inner change that cannot be possessed, thought or brought, but achieved only through the revolt of the inner self against the absurdity of existence. Joshi’s is a different solution which is most practical and beneficial to the human race. Ratan’s apprenticeship shows his revolt of the inner self, an affirmation to
‘the pursuit of goodness’ because he has realized that life might be zero but need not be negative. He chooses apprenticeship for his affirmation and purification of his soul. This is achieved not by rituals but by practical life, by dogmas, and his "polishing of shoes of the devotees by cleanses there filth enveloping his soul.

Ratan’s earlier aesthetic attitude towards life is gone and in the last, he comes to believe that only God can help him. His sitting in front of a temple also signifies his bhakti (devotion) in which the devotee can appease his God just by praying to him meekly. Radhakrishnan observes that “the Gita lays stress on the individual's freedom of choice and the way he exercises it”(61), Ratan is an apprentice to the Lord because he has realized that “life runs on approximations and if an approximation will do, you could say that I am learning to be of use. I know it is late in the day. But one must try and not lose heart, not yield, at any cost, to despair”. (143)

Thus the experience of absurd proves to be the starting point towards affirmation. To quote:

A stage comes in your evolution when you can do without rules, but you must have a tremendous self control... there is a long journey before you can reach that stage so that only few people are inclined to do that. There will be a time again when people will turn towards the divine and want to become instrument of God, rather than living for themselves. (Piciucco: 93)

Rathore, a sinner at least partially redeemed, is an apprentice to the Lord, but in his turn, he also has an apprentice, the youthful listener to whom he delivers his long monologue. The distinction between this blundering apprentice and a redeemed sinner tends to become distorted. Many are the ways to God head. This seems to be one of the major affirmations of the apprentice, while through a sordid tale of corruption and sin, ends with Ratan's monologue to the boy against the
suggestive background of a new dawn breaking over. His learning ‘to be of use’ is a mode of his devotion and absolute meekness to God. "The devotee has a sense of utter humility. In the presence of the ideal, he feels that he is nothing. God loves meekness, the utter prostration of the self (Radhakrishnan, 61)

Thus we notice that Arun Joshi has successfully projected the individual problem of being in the modern world which is absurd, purposeless but not without hope. He seems to be thinking on the lines of both the existential philosophers like Jean-Paul-Sartre and the ancient oriental philosophy concluded by Lord Krishna in The Gita. There is a new beginning of the protagonist who has realized the absurdity of being and is finally converted to faith and devotion to the service of mankind. The whole story is a spiritual journey from the innocent dawn to another wiser one after having undergone the stages of temptation, confusion, corruption and repentance emerging purified, cleaned of all his sins. In fact the protagonist, burdened with the sorrows of a wasted life was never entirely lost to evil, but was always, as he says "dancing in the shadows of truth (100) and feeling deep down, very deep down, that not being a good man was not all right by me" (141).

The fictional technique adopted by Arun Joshi is "a fictional experiment- a confessional novel which employs psycho-narration (Prasad: 21). The story is narrated to an unknown listener by using flash-back technique. The dialogues between the orator and the listener are purely imaginary where the novel presents an illusion of monologue as it records only the voice of the narrator. We only know that the listener is a young, well mannered, sensitive, genius, idealistic and proud of being a national cadet. He pays great attention to every detail of the story and if Ratan gets confused while digressing and forgets what he was relating, he helps him to find out the threads of his thoughts again. His questions are wise and sharp so that he at times impersonates the role of the inquisitor and at the times, he
patiently waits for Ratan to conclude the episode he was relating. He is an ideal listener.

The protagonist has a good orating skill. He is able to pour out the heavy burden on his mind through his skill. Like the old man in Coleridge's *The Rime of ancient mariner*, he badly needs a public face to convey his message of sound moral conduct and the consequence of corruption extensive in the society. We hardly know about this situation unless his predicament is fully exposed at the end of the novel. His story is a confession of his wrongdoings and also an advice for the uncontaminated youth in order to prevent him from committing similar misdeeds.

To conclude, we can say that *The Apprentice* is operative chiefly on personal level but clearly indicates that the crisis of character is dominant everywhere in the administrative world having two inter-related dimensions, the political ambience and the supportive ethical foundation. The individual's mind is thus an arena for the interplay of these forces leading him to self effacement. The novelist shows that the sense of nothingness in his beleaguered and benighted world and the concomitant sense of unspeakable agony can be transcended through a desire to rejuvenate life by means of affirmation through devotion and he is successful to recognize a reality beyond a mere phenomenal world by giving a consistent form to the shapeless facts of human existence. It is Joshi’s balanced experience and aspiration for transcendence that accounts for a difference from existential writers of the west. His *The Apprentice* depicts modern man’s crisis of faith in an ordered universe and in the transcendence. The crisis of faith in the modern society is sought to be resolved here and Joshi will shift his focus on the crisis of faith in the transcendence in his fourth novel *The Last Labyrinth* in the succeeding chapter.
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