“What a piece of work is a man” (*Hamlet* 2.2.), the line comes into the mind of Hamlet. It refers to the projection of human mind that keeps on changing simultaneously at several stages of life. It denotes the perception of man’s friendship, envy, grace, goodness, tenderness, harshness, and villainy in respect to his modern tendencies. Hamlet expresses his emotions through soliloquies. Claudius murders his elder brother (senior Hamlet) to become a king and rule over Denmark. In fact, Shakespeare unfolds multidimensional psychological attitude in order to highlight the troublesome relationship of men. Over ambition, passionate discernment, envy, pride, covetousness, anger, lead a man towards obliteration where he or she is circumscribed by isolation, alienation, dread, fear, angst, and ultimately one faces tragic end. Likewise, Siddhartha Sharma cites Dostoevsky’s character Roskolnikov, “Any man who has a conscience must pay the price if he is aware of his error. That is his punishment” (58).

Man is multidimensional creation of God who possesses intelligence, consciousness, and divine spark. Despite these factors, he has become a slave to the mechanism of temperament where he has forgotten the distinction from his own ‘self’. Consciousness is a state of being awareness of an external object or something within oneself. Man’s inner spirit operates each level of spontaneity and creativity inexplicable in terms of mechanical forces even in the lowest form of nature. In fact, mechanical and scientific keynote works on deeper level of man’s nature, whether it
would be his compulsion or necessity. Nevertheless, science has confused people and created the space of doubt in their mind for their own belief and values. After confronting the destruction of the World Wars human beings existence was in questions. Therefore, the younger generation revolted against tradition, philosophy, culture, and religious belief of the time. Consequently, the existential philosophy emerged at forefront. It paved the way of freedom and responsibility of man. From beginning to the end, the Western existential philosophy runs on the track of pessimistic approach while Indian existential philosophy ultimately leads men from pessimism to the optimism. Arun Joshi’s novels are the amalgamation of the Eastern and Western existential philosophy that he apparently delineates in his third novel, *The Apprentice*, that Shankar Kumar cites Thakur Guruprasad’s view in his book:

Ratan Rathor, the protagonist of the novel, conforms to the dot to the dictionary definition of “existential”: the doctrine that man forms his essence in the course of his life he chooses to lead. He is born a good man, the son of a martyr in the national movement. But when he goes out of his village to graduate in life of the crooked world, honesty does not get him even the lowest job and he makes his essence, as he goes choosing the life he leads. (125)

*The Apprentice*, Joshi’s third novel, is an exploration of individual identity of its protagonist Ratan Rathor. He becomes the victim of modern civilized and corrupted world that he himself builds. The novel, however, is an endeavour to the case study of various aspects of social and individual dimension of common people such as isolation, dread, fear, death, God, innocence, experience, idealism, shame,
humiliation, and meaningless life. Almost all the protagonists of Joshi’s novels suffer from the individual existence and their survivals and individual existence often become a question. The entire society seems them a gallery of hell where nothing is permanent, which is why, Billy Biswas, the protagonist of second novel hates the civilized world and in due course he takes shelter in the tribal world. On the other hand, Sindi Oberoi suffers from the problem of belongingness, for that reason he never gets peace and tranquillity in the Western world but as soon as he come in touch with the Eastern world a flam of hope burns in his heart.

The present novel, *The Apprentice*, is a journey of innocence to the experience that reaches a place at the corrupting world. In other words, it is the story of crime and punishment, sin and expiation and dislocation of individual identity that leads to an exploration of the crisis in the soul of an individual. One’s innocence of life entangles in the maze of contemporary materialistic world of confusion, hallucination, meaningless immorality and the anxiety. The novel is based on the harsh criticism of a rotten society, which is a delineation of the people who are always running after money, wealth, meaningless pursuits, sanctified values, and materialistic life, and selfish notion. Therefore, today people have lost their honesty, selfless service, love, emotion, honour, friendship, and relationship. Joshi, however, tries to render an individual’s approach through Ratan who suffers the pain of the soul not because of his rebellion and escapism but due to his conformity. He is entangled into the crooked and corrupted web of society. During a lecture at Dhvanyaloka, Lokesh Kumar quotes Joshi’s remarks in his book, *Arun Joshi’s Novels: His Vision of Life*, “The first three (novels), to me, seem concerned generally about questions of identity and, probably ethics. The protagonists feel truncated, unfulfilled in some way. There is a withdrawal
from the world, then a return to it, the process making them somewhat more whole” (66).

The novel is set up in an Indian middle class urban family where Ratan plays the role of both hero and anti-hero. Although he does not feel at home in the society yet does not leave it like Billy Biswas. As far as the form of novel is concerned, it has been written in dramatic monologue, which reminds Robert Browning’s poetic style. Ratan, the narrator of the novel, tells the story of his life from his childhood to his adulthood to a young college student of Punjab in a confessional monologue using flashback technique. Jasbir Jain cites Arun Joshi’s opinion on the structure of the novel in her book:

There have always been two strands in my writings. While Billy Biswas, Sindi (The Foreigner) and Som Bhaskar represent one, Ratan Rathor represents the other. As someone put it, he is Everyman- a contrast to the other protagonists in so far as his intellectual level is much lower. This novel with its cause-and-effect structure gave me the maximum trouble, especially where language was concerned. . . . I chose monologue- it is a difficult style. There were other things. I did not and still do not know. Say if a man takes bribes what effect does this have on his home life, children etc? These were issues that were not relevant in the context of the novel and I could skirt them. This novel still remains my favourite. What I am working on currently is similar in tone. (Jain 97)
The novel is the reflection of Ratan’s life whose only pursuit was to confess his guilt or sin, therefore the whole story exclusively concentrates on him. Structurally, the novel is analogous to Albert Camus’s *The Fall* on the basis of its dramatic monologue. Jean-Baptiste Clamence, the protagonist and narrator of *The Fall*, tells his life-tale to a French man in a bar, likewise Ancient Mariner in S. T. Coleridge’s poem “The Rime of Ancient Mariner” confesses his sin by telling a wedding Guest. Similarly, Ratan pours his life-tale before a nameless young student. The boy comes across with Ratan at the temple of Lord Krishna, but his role in the novel is almost passive. He just listens whatever is told by Ratan about his career of cowardice, corruption, hypocrisy, and debauchery. In fact, *The Apprentice* is a confessional tragic novel, which has been inter-woven in some gruesome details of his self-revelation. The book is considered as a mirror of the moral crisis not only of an individual but also of entire society that leaves a symptom of the failure of an entire generation to follow the moral responsibility.

The novel starts with a confessional note that Tapan Kumar Ghosh cites Thakur Guruprashad’s view in his book, “The narrator in this novel is an insistent confessionalist; confession is the factor in his redemption” (92). While narrating the story he says that he was very much innocent and loving to his parents even always remained devoid of the entire materialistic and corrupted world. It is generally considered that for a child mother is supposed to be the world of Nature while father represents society. The world of a child is full of love, innocence, imagination, selflessness and so on. But as soon as he grows up and comes in contact with society, he becomes selfish, rude, corrupt, irritating in nature and all the social vices make home in his heart and mind. It also happens with Ratan whose innocence and
unselfish attitude of his childhood changed into corrupted personality as soon as he comes in touch with the materialistic world. The story of the novel begins from the 1940s before independence when Ratan was only ten year old which finishes after the end of Indo-China War. Therefore, Siddhartha Sharma cites H. M. Prasad’s opinion regarding the form of the novel, which has been divided into three phases, “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 day light of experience, the inferno of corruption, the last part the area of expiation is the door of purgatory” (59).

Ratan’s father was a freedom fighter and under whose influence he chucked up his legal profession. However, by profession he was an advocate yet very idealistic in nature of Mahatma Gandhi and usually took part into Indian freedom movement. Under his father’s magic spell, Ratan becomes a man of selfless, idealistic and believer of non-violence. Thus, Ratan holds an inheritance the idealistic and patriotic nature of his father and worldly wisdom of his mother only at the age of ten. His father’s selfless sacrifice left such an indelible impression on his heart and mind that remained throughout his life. It was, in fact, his father’s impact that inspired him to think over confession of his guilt. His honourable personality inspired him to be like his father that he recalls, “There was a profession that for a time had thrilled my imagination. To be good! Respected! To be use!” (The Apprentice 18). On the contrary, his mother had practical approach; she knew all the necessities of life and its realistic approach to men. She, however, was suffering with Tuberculosis yet her husband was careless about it. While watching the inactive approach of her husband
toward her family, she tries to teach Ratan the value of money and its importance in
the materialistic world. She suggests him:

Don’t fool yourself; son . . . . Man without money was a man without
worth. Many things were great in life, but the greatest of them all was
money . . . that was the way the world was made . . . if I had everything
had no money I would be little better than a beggar’s shoes . . . . It was
not patriotism but money . . . that brought respect and bought security.
Money made friends. Money succeeded where all else failed. There
were many laws . . . but money was law unto itself.” (TA 19)

Ratan always becomes dumb on hearing the speech of his mother. He pays no heed to
his mother’s lesson but later on, he understands its value. He often participates in the
rallies where his senses were flickered by the slogan and songs of people, such as
“Inquilab Jindabad”, and “Sarfaroshi ki Tamanna” (TA 11). He brings to mind how
the cops before him beat many times his father and once he touches the feet of death
during a political rally. He recalls his father’s death:

There was blood in his hair and in his eyes and on his sleeves so that
from shoulder to the elbow they were soaked in blood. That was the
last time I saw him as I remember him well . . . . My father took
another step. Then, if you can believe it, my friend, they shot him.
They shot him in the chest and again, as he spun around, in the back.

(TA 12)

He was very much dauntless person who never yielded his head before the British
until the end of his life. Ratan tells the younger listener that his vision of life took its
new shape with his father’s death and for some times, he, too, joined Subhash Bose’s army for the struggle for freedom. But lack of courage, confidence even the exhausted notion leave him on the verge on nowhere place. He recalls, “Each succeeding mile my courage dropped another notch until finally, sweating, and exhausted, in sight of my destination, I sat in a mangrove and wept” (TA 21). Except Brigadier, no one comes in his support after his father’s death, who was his childhood friend. Brigadier was not a fair weather friend; he stands with him on his critical condition and helps whatever he could do.

Ratan’s honesty, idealism, and self-respect diminished as soon as he encounters the materialistic world. Sacrifice is replaced by self-interest; courage and honesty are superseded by fraud, cowardice, deceitful, and ideals by deal. His mother’s ideas prove a prophetic as soon as he watches the decline of moral values and disruption in goodness, virtues, truth, and rectitude in common persons. Speaking about the ubiquitous moral confusion in the country after the Independence, Tapan Kumar Ghosh cites M.K. Naik’s opinion in his book, “The most disturbing phenomenon on the socio-political scene has been steady erosion of the idealism of the days of the freedom struggle, the new gods of self-aggrandizement and affluence having rather too easily dethroned those of selfless service and dedication to a cause” (96). In search of a job, he reaches Delhi where he confronts with the reality of life and somehow manages to live there in a Sarai with others who help him in the hour of need. While passing his life in Sarai or inn he thinks that he would create a new world of idealism and goodness, and peaceful atmosphere. Nevertheless, very soon, he realizes that something is perishing all his dreams from its root; his hope is removing by some strange power. He describes it to the boy, “What hopes we start out in!
Beggars in princes’ garb. Heads bursting with dreams” (TA 23). He fails to realize that the modern city life is engulfing his feeling, emotion, imagination, dream, ideas, and a sense of Nihilistic, Kafkaesque, gruesome. The agnostic notion is making a strong place in his heart and mind that he could not realize. In search of job, he wanders so many places in that metropolitan city but does not get any, since he had not any pull with anyone. He gives an anguished outburst that, “There is nothing in the world as bad as the end of hope. Not even death . . . the slow leakage of hope does other things, thing corrosive and irreversible” (TA 25).

For Ratan, life was a land of dream. Though he wanted to pass it on the basis of honour, self-respect, and in peaceful atmosphere but the circumstances do not allow him to do so. Despite all his attempt to get a job, he started feeling very tired, even the world seemed him, “. . . a bundle of mirrors, tempting and somehow held together but on the brink always of falling apart or, like a boat managed by incompetent hands, a boat that could any moment overturn and drawn its riders” (TA 17). While for his friend, Brigadier, “The world was a beautiful whore- to be assaulted and taken” (TA 17). Within a week, the impact of city life appears on his nature and he becomes a master of forgery and learns the ways of the transgressor and unscrupulous world. This harsh interaction changes his attitude and thinking for the world so he becomes a cheater, hypocrite, and fraud. He accepts it, “I had added a new dimension to my life. I had become, at the age of twenty-one, a hypocrite and liars; in short, a sham. I had become a master faker. And all this had happened within a period of six weeks” (TA 27). In fact, his future was based on the security of that he fails to get it for a month. Consequently, a sense of negative idea starts generating in his mind. He recalls his father’s sacrifice, “What hurts is the collapse of the faith that
they destroy. You believe there is justice in the world . . . . And justice is just not there. Or you assume your wife is faithful, your children love you, your boss fair, or that God exists. And, then, some day proof comes along that nothing is so. This is what hurts” (TA 23). Ultimately, after three months, he secures the job of a temporary clerk in the Ministry of Defence. He forgets his old roommates who helped in his critical condition and gets marry and settles down there.

Ratan’s jovial life begins when he joins as a clerk in the department of war purchasing materials. In beginning, he tries to acclimatize and negotiate with this new and strange world. Very soon, modern social vices start making room in him and his ambitions and perceptions keep him away from the appreciative allowance to others. His ambition of life becomes over ambitious that leads him toward the tragic mess of life. However, he achieves success in establishing himself in the crowded world, but fails to realize his self, which is in actual sense is his own authenticity that Sartre proposes in his Being and Nothingness. Joshi probably tries to deliver a message that in this modern age one should try to raise one’s consciousness, which leads man towards the path of spirituality. Due to the lack of perception, self-awareness, sentience and sapience, man’s spiritual approach of life has gone down. Therefore, consciousness is indispensable for a harmonious life for everyone. There comes a dramatic change in Ratan’s life when he whole-heartedly devotes himself in works to impress his boss, superintendent so that he could keep him as a permanent employee. The pragmatic impact of his mother works over him that he accepts before the boy of its Bacon like Aphorism, “Some survive through defiance, others through ability, still others through obedience, by becoming servants to the powers of the world. They are like those heavenly bodies that in themselves are nothing but reflect only the superior
and more powerful light” (TA 33). He obeys all the advice of his seniors and tries to make them happy by his flattery, which is completely different from Romi, the narrator of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. Ratan learns the secret of a successful career by using flattery, boasting, showiness, and making others happy.

Ratan starts trying to climb the ladder of triumph and by and by, he becomes senior officer. With the passage of time he becomes immoral insensitive and hypocrite even nothing seems him meaningful and eternal. An exhausted look appears on his face all the time whether in morning, noon, evening, or in night. Almost all his colleagues consider him a branded whore since he has become a shameless person. Further, he confesses that he was living in Machiavellian society where people did not care anyone in the race of life. His head explodes with violence and rebellious thought and finds nothing except filth around his surroundings. He always tries to take the advantage of time in which he finds success. Slowly and slowly, he becomes a corrupted person and starts taking bribe, meeting contractors and illegal works only to hoard money.

Although Ratan had not belief in God, yet he was afraid of Him during greasing his palm. Once taking ten thousand rupees as a bribe from a bankrupt, he looks puzzled and upset even if his consciousness does not allow him to do so. He thinks God, who is omnipresent, is watching us, which refers that we are under surveillance. Even a single work cannot be concealed from Him. Therefore, Ratan goes to the superintendent for consulting it, who says, “You know, Ratan, nothing but exists. You can be certain only of Him . . . there was no point in looking for truths aside from the truth of God. Money in this always changed hands; God was only
concerned with what one did with the money. Did a man for example, use it for good purpose?” (TA 42-43). Ratan becomes much more confused than earlier on the logic and suggestion of the Superintendant. He finds no way to come out from this perplexity. Dilemma, hallucination, and confusion have made firm place in his daily routine of life. Therefore, he analyses Superintendant’s view: Did he mean that it was the way you used the money that God was watching and not how you got it? Was graft, in his eyes, the same as any other money?” (TA 43).

Ratan was not sure about his job therefore he marries Superintendant’s niece only to secure himself in job, which was something like a deal. Consequently, he recognizes slowly and slowly that everything is only a deal. This world is running on the track of deal where there is no place of subjective look and individual identity. He thinks that his job, relationship, even marriage are merely a contract and deal that could be broken down anytime. He realizes it:

Deals, deals, deals, my friend, that is what the world runs on, what it is all about. If men forgot how to make deals, the world would come to a stop. It would lose its propelling power. Men would not know what to do with themselves. They would lose interest. It is not atom or the sun or God or sex that lies at the heart of the universe; it is DEALS DEALS. It is a bit like my mother’s prophecy, about money. It is not whether you like making deals or you like money. They are simply there, like air. (TA 48)

He recalls that the nation, for which his father had fought and sacrificed himself for its boost up and betterment, is now moving toward great disaster and disturbance. The
Gandhian purity of ‘means’ is being replaced by Machiavellian ideas in people’s mind. The western outlook is spreading its claw over the common people therefore people are becoming the victim of frustration, anxiety, dread, confusing mixture of errors, enigma, negativity and pessimism.

The Superintendent always gives him a maxim to survive in the world, “Keep your ears open…but never let them know that you know. And don’t take to heart what you hear. Never forget. Strike, if you must strike, at the moment of your choosing. Above all, don’t take things to heart” (TA 47). He was very experienced person in the mess of modern civilized world who knew the importance of time very well. Ratan entangles in the mess of the materialistic world and finds no way to realize his inner desire and voice of his soul. He loses his intuition, which he used to employ in taking any judgment in his childhood. Although his devotion and artisanship in work makes his life easier but he fails to confront his ‘self’. He becomes cold, calculated and harsh in nature and slowly and slowly finds that he has become the part of money hunting society. Apart from works, he used to write socio-comic articles on the ‘crisis of character’ but that could not publish it. Being the son of a patriot, he has great interest in Indian philosophy and Mahatma Gandhi’s ideas.

Besides the philosophy of the world, Joshi also discusses the history of India in which he delineates how truth always prevailed over falsehood, dharma over adharma, and love over hate. Ratan considers that people are living in the Dark Age where they are giving money the supreme value that he confesses to the boy:

This Dark Age, I say, was a kind of night, a night that fell upon our country when the sun of dharma has set-I am not one to be a short of
simile whatever the occasion! I pursue the metaphor further. The setting sun I write, strew our horizon with bloody carnage. Blood of king and of beggar’s war shed alike. Man went wild with greed: money was the only God . . . Next followed night, as dark as the night of amavas, as long as the span of twenty generations, a night that led us into slavery and ended only with the dawn of independence. (TA 56)

He writes that the spirits of great leaders is going beyond men’s approach and a corrupted notion has made deeper place in them. Ratan himself has followed the stream of corruption, oddities, deceiving, responsibilities and immoralities.

Before the war between India and China, Ratan’s approach reached to the Underworld, in due course he meets an Underworld Don Himmat Singh, known as Shiekh. Shiekh himself comes to meet him only to clarify the rejected materials of war for which he offers him the handsome money or bribe. They destroy all the evidence of its documents. Ratan did not know that the sign that he was confirming with Shiekh would one day destroy his close friends’ happy life. This sign sometimes reminds Dr. Faustus’ sign with Satan that leads him on the tragic terrain for which he also has to suffer. He was ignorant of the result of the sign. After his marriage, he calls his mother to the city where she analyses that her own son has already indulged into the absurd world. She died within a year but she tells him before her death, “This city will not spare you” (TA 61). After his mother’s death, he becomes very lonely and finds himself slave of rubbish system of the society. He finds himself helpless that he confesses, “And how was I going to be my own master when a system was master the master of me. And how was I to throw off the system and still pursue a
career . . . I had a shaky start and a shaky man is like a blotting paper . . . in any event, I have been a good bit of both, the weather vane and the blotting paper” (TA 62-63).

However, since its beginning the Western Existential philosophy merely focuses on subjectivity and individual existence that stand against the traditional philosophy. Ratan fails to understand the authenticity or originality of human existence and only believes that the whole world is roaming around money, saying it, “In money’s kingdom, my friend, only money is king. All others are slaves. And none a greater slave than its ground possessor” (TA73). As soon as he gets higher place in the office his nature and behavior becomes totally changed. He starts coming late to office, stops reading, waking late night, and too much gossip with the neighbour. He became almost indifferent toward everything and everyone. Even those who come in his office to meet have to wait for long hours on a filthy bench. He merely spends his time in gossip. Usually in the morning, he starts feeling very tired and anguished. Even nothing seemed him meaningful. He tells the boy, “I noticed how I felt tired when I woke up in the mornings. For a while, I assumed that I was physically run down... I went to the extent of seeing the doctor at the dispensary who gave me a handful of pills” (TA 64). A feeling of nothingness generates in him, when he visits to the doctors who called him in mocking, “Used up, Rathor, used up, he laughed. Who did not feel used-up, he said. But, he said, there was no cure for feeling used-up. When you felt used-up, you were used-up” (TA 64). The feeling of used-up kills his ambition. Hence, he starts thinking that there is no importance to live in this world. Psychologically, he becomes very sick, and his daily life starts passing in frustration, exasperation, vexation, bitterness, depression, dissatisfaction and aggravation.
Ratan becomes a scoundrel and a liar, and never leaves anyone in cheating and forging. He becomes the time’s fool. He feels that in the beginning, his life was just like a blank paper, but now it had been filled up with multiple colours of corrupted ideas. Everything looks him full of illusion often in taking decision he took too much time, nevertheless find himself fail in that. He accepts it to the boy,

The feeling generated in me a great confusion. What had I done, what had I done which I should not have? What was right, what was wrong? What was 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 the autumn that are blown here and there, at the mercy of the world. Why be surprised if one of them falls into the sewer. (TA 69)

He loses the significance of being an official, a citizen, and human being. He considers that he is a man of “NOBODY” (TA 48) Every day and night a sense of nobody pinches him that gives a great pain to his heart and soul. He once expresses, “Of God, I am out of breath. I must not get excited. It is not good for me” (TA 71). Often he finds unsatisfied with himself, and looks very much afraid of his true self. He was lost in the labyrinth of life and in the state of inner turmoil. He often greases his palm, by suppressing his self and soul. Joshi also delves on the shed of freedom in the novel on the basis of right and wrong, decency and restraint. As far as Ratan’s crisis of identity is concerned, it has two folds, first one is his true self and other one is social, in which he struggles. Therefore, Shankar Kumar cites V. Gopal Reddy’s opinion in his book, “Ratan begins his life with high ambitions and deals to be honest,
true to his self and make a mark in the world like his father. But he finds himself a misfit in the modern world. He had to abdicate his true self to fit in the corrupt society and eke out a living. He is thus alienated from his true self in the process” (Kumar 21).

The meeting between Ratan and Himmat Singh is held in Mumbai, by that time they give the final touch of their deal. Here Ratan observes Himmat Singh is not a person of money minded at all, there was a thunder and anger running in his heart to take revenge from the society. He has anger of annihilating all the social institutions and destroys it from its top to bottom. While Ratan has nothing to do with that except deal. Joshi portrays certain aspects of Dostoevskian ‘mirror’ in Ratan’s figure and exposes that he was afraid and ashamed of his works. Having seen his deceitful, cowardice, vanity and self-delusive nature, Sheikh taunts him harshly by calling him a fool.

Both Ratan and Sheikh was the product of corrupted and insensitive society. Sheikh was an outsider who was careless and indifferent about anything happening in the society. Even the war between two countries does not affect him. Sheikh reveals some incidents of his life, as how his mother was transformed into a whore by this well-known civilized society. She was leading the life of dead person. No one came to help her in her critical situation. Ratan expects that the war between Indian and China would not take place. While Sheikh already knew that, that would definitely take place because he had relationship with other countries. Ratan looks motionless like a dead man on various occasions. Once he harks back how an old man cries to help him, “Help me, the old cried, help me, but I stood frozen. Suddenly he put his hands
upon my shoulders. I broke into sweat and, then, gathering strength, in cold panic, I
turned and fled as fast as my legs would carry” (TA 83). He turns into an irresponsible
person, who deceives his own consciousness where his lot seems thoroughly
existentialist. He looks unmoved on watching pitiable and critical condition of
anyone. As Siddhartha Sharma refers to R. G. Das’s opinion in his book:

Arun Joshi appears very close to Joseph Conrad, Graham Greene and
William Golding in the sense that the act of treachery inflicts an
irresponsible injury upon the moral nature of man, and that a guilty
Ratan lives inescapably in the presence of his conscience. He too
realizes as Razumov does in Conrad’s Under Western Eyes, that all a
man can destroy is his conscience. (67)

The story of the novel takes a new shape at the last phase of the novel, in
which Ratan tells the boy that war between India and China occurs in which India has
to face defeat consequently hundreds of the soldiers die in the battlefield. People start
organizing rallies to cover up national shame. The political leaders start delivering
emotional speeches denouncing Chinese perfidy to defend the honour of the country.
His close friend Brigadier returns from the war and suffers a nervous breakdown
where he visits many time the Army hospital to meet him by calling him his close
friend yet not allowed to meet. The infuriated guards harshly reply, “Great friends . . .
were usually the most harmful” (TA 92). It was difficult condition of his life that he
remembers, “Those were the days when I first started to lost sleep. I would lie awake
most nights, while my wife snored, unable to shake off the impressions of the day”
(TA 94). He startles having watched the groaned soldiers. Many of them have lost
their legs, hands and some other parts of their bodies. Once he has become too much amazed and afraid when an injured soldier reached out and caught him by the leg, he realized that his grip on his leg was piercing. Everything that he observes the whole day in the hospital hovers in his mind but he did not know that all that happened was due to his rubbish deal.

The novel has also the resemblance of Joseph Conrad’s *Nostramo* and *The Secret Agent* in respect to its evil boomerang on the evil doer. As Nostramo an Italian sailor betrays his own self during coming into the grip of temptation. When he was given the responsibility to keep safe Charles Gould’s Silver by that time his greediness overwhelmed his conscience and his evil boomeranged on him that leads him on the tragic brink. In respect to modern man’s tendency T. S. Eliot had wider interest in religion and spiritualism, commenting on modern man he writes, “I see the path of progress for modern man in his occupation with his own self, with his inner being” (WEB).

Unexpectedly, on the next day he is summoned to the Police station for an investigation that he was unknown. Before facing the interrogation, many questions run in his mind, that he accepts, “I wondered why they had summoned me. I wondered what questions they would ask me and who would ask them and what I would say in reply. Was torture still permitted? Would it be better to resist them tooth and nail or should I acknowledge my guilt straightway, whatever it might be, and beg forgiveness?” (*TA* 102). When he reaches the police station, S. P. and Army intelligence investigate his involvement in the scandal. In fact, they had not proper evidence to prove him guilty therefore, they ask him politely so that he could confess
his guilt of clarifying the defective war material that resulted piles of death. In response Ratan confidently rejects all the blame of its clarifying the defective materials, on this S. P. harshly remarks, “You are lying, Mr. Rathor, he spat out, and leaned back in his chair.” and calls him, “As crooked a liar” (TA 105). Then on the basis of suspicion he puts him behind the bars. The humiliated Ratan fails to reach any decision. He finds himself helpless and very weak. A strange debate starts within him. His inner self was aware of his guilt but he was unable to get courage to face the society, family particularly his own wife and daughter. He tries to suppress his consciousness to confess. His condition becomes like Shakespeare’s Hamlet of his, “to be or not to be” (Hamlet 3.1.) In the lock-up, he thinks deeply over the confession, “The men who have died have died. Moreover, even if it were to do good, why should I go and confess . . . why should I confess? What right had they to persecute me like that? It was not as though I was the only one in the history of India who had ever taken a bribe” (TA 107). Sitting in the jail, he thinks a lot over it and finds himself very much in strain. There was no one around him to help so he find himself very alone and isolated. While sitting in the dark room he analyses over taking the bribe, he tries to console himself by recalling that others also take bribe then what is wrong with them, he confesses to the boy:

> If I had taken a bribe I belong to rather to the rule than the exception. Peons were frequently taking bribes. So were government officials and traffic police men and railway conductors. A bribe could get you a bed you in the hospital, a place to bury your dead. Doctors had a fee to give false certificates, magistrates for a false judgment. For a sum of money politicians changed sides. For a larger sum they declared wars. Bribery
was accepted by nurses, priests and chartered accountants; by all those who facilitate the seduction of their wives; women for seduction of other women. All this I know and had known for twenty years. (TA 108-109)

Ratan had trustworthy contact with various persons, but could not get courage to spread his hand before others just because of the fear of shame. Then his conscience leads him to think over I, “Honour, Dharma, Maryada…pleaded the poor voice” (TA107). For the sake of money, he crosses every limit, and responsibility of life. He brings into the mind that only Sheikh is a person who can help him. Again, S.P. asks to accept his gilt otherwise, his own close friend, Brigadier who is suffering from the nervous breakdown would very soon be court-martialed. He clarifies that authority’s investigation tells that due to failure of sub-standard material, the tragic incident took place.

Although Ratan is shocked after, hearing his friends’ condition yet rejects his involvement in it. The police leave him due to lack of evidence but as soon as he, leaves the police station the face of Brigadier flashes before him that shakes the root of his heart. He feels very restless during returning home, as a stupid person, he could not mold his mind and heart to confess his deed. As a confessional novel, it is centered on sin and expiation, Ratan’s only one-step of wrongdoing destroys the life of his close friend. The thunder of questions within him stops his life. He thinks how tragic it is that, he himself destroyed his friend’s life. He could not sleep the whole night, even night seemed him too much heavy. He imagines as if the princes of the night are trying to wake him that they sent him out tonight-in search of his self. Fear
and dread strike him therefore in the mid-night; he awoke and thought that what would happen with Brigadier if he did not confess. Did they harshly court marshaled him—how tragic it would be for him. He finds that darkness is holding him tightly, like a dumb person he is unable to decide what to do and started behaving in an abnormal way. In the state of depression he behaves abnormally that appears in the mid-night, “My wife was sleeping with her face toward me. I called out her name. She did not stir. I called out her name again wake up, I said, I have something to tell you. Then I realized that I had not been speaking at all, that. In fact, I had been unable to speak” (TA 114). His condition becomes like Prufrock who also could not get courage to propose to his beloved. Joshi like Eliot also tries to delineate that it has become the nature of modern men to live in dilemma. They have lost the courage to face the reality of life. Ratan analyzes how these twenty years of city life have killed his self.

While confessing, he says, “For twenty years I had made bargains with life, taken a bribe, lied, debouched, and yet I considered myself as good as the best! I behaved as though all those had been peripheral romps little adulteries of the soul that did not count” (TA 113). He considers that he has wasted his whole life in negative works like taking bribe, telling lies, deceiving, in hoarding money. Sometimes he looks like a Machiavellian character that even does not leave his friend only to fulfil his desire and leaves him on his humiliated deathbed. His mind filled with fevered thought that in fact ravaged his skull. As soon as he tries to peep into his past life, it seems him as if the alternative blasts of bravado and cold fear shot through him like electric shock. His dream collapse down just in a single sock, a battle of acceptance and denial goes on in his heart. He does not find the light of knowledge, hope, and light in the gloomy world. Then he thinks, “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” (TA 116).

The life of Ratan had become like a pendulum of watch, who was moving from one edge to another at a certain point. His conscience warned him to confess his crime; therefore, he goes ahead to writes a confession letter and starts taking sleeping pills. In his life, he never used to visit to the temple, but a sudden change appears in him when in the next morning he goes to lord Krishna’s temple to get courage to face the absurdity of life. He speaks, “... the God of the hide merchant and the owners of the imported cars” (TA 117). Nevertheless, he yielded before God to help him and prays, “Help me, O God, help me. I am in trouble and I have come to your door. Give me refuge. Give me courage. Just for a day, lend me your courage. Help me” (TA118). As soon as he comes up, finds that even the religious shrine is not exempted from the corruption, wrong doers and is not left from the dark eyes of Satan. He meets a priest of the temple and stuns after getting the priest himself is indulged in corruption. The priest offers him bribe to save his son, a contractor, is facing the trail of mixing too much sand in the mortar. Ultimately, he rewrites the confession letter keeping in his mind the absurd condition of Brigadier. Somehow, he writes the letter but unable to get courage to deliver that. Consequently, his delay in action and procrastination takes Brigadier to his tragic end. Brigadier commits suicide, which has been unbearable for Ratan. Really, it is irony of the fate that Ratan who was the close friend of Brigadier becomes responsible of his death. The incident reminds Arthur Miller’s play All My Sons, in which Joe Keller supplies defective gas-cylinders that resulted the death of his two sons in an incident.
Brigadier’s death shakes the root of Ratan’s conscience. Everything seems him absurd, as if life has stopped at a wasteland where there are no rays of hope and light in his life. With Brigadier’s death, a feeling of loneliness and rootlessness, alienation and nothingness take place in him. He becomes like a stone where nothing seems him alive as if he is living on the piles of death. He recalls some pleasant moments of his childhood with Brigadier and after his father’s death; he was supported by him in the critical situation. He directly goes to see him where he sees the ravaged skull of Brigadier. The horrible death reminds the death of Babu in *The Foreigner*. The death of Brigadier leads him toward madness; therefore, he finds no way to control over his mind. Nothing looks him real and alive as he confesses to the young boy, “No occurrence, no conversation, no visit of either friend or foe, no sleep, in spite of the sleeping pills that good doctor gave me, no relief, no response from the hands that pulled me steadily down towards those caverns where, I felt certain, the Brigadier had gone” (*TA* 125). Under the state of madness, he fails to understand what he is doing, his body starts shivering under the impact of fear. He starts working abnormal thing like speaking to himself, watching the things for a long time, careless to everything, even does not respond to anyone. He confesses to the boy, “That this happened, and this happened, and then this happened and the Brigadier killed himself and now I was losing my mind. When I thought about it like this it seemed nothing but ludicrous, a sign almost that I had already gone mad” (*TA* 125). Fear, dread, madness, alienation, anguish, anxiety rapidly attack him together just after the death of his friend. He starts passing every steps of his life under the fear of death, and madness. Further, he confesses, “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 alone Immobilized, fuddled, tongueless, misunderstood, laughed at. Thus I sank. Like a stone” (TA 124). He realizes that even God is also mocking at his condition of the fear of madness. He thinks Brigadier died once but he is dying thousands of time in this condition.

Ratan accuses Himmat Singh of persuading him to take bribe first time in his life, which increases with the passage of the time. O.P. Bhatanagar points out in his book The Art and Vision of Arun Joshi, “In Ratan Rathor, Arun Joshi has presented a brilliant Pascalian image of self-deception and self-love in which he holds himself innocent and runs to accuse others for his misdeeds”(62). Thus in the state of madness he decides to take revenge by killing Sheikh but finds that he was already dying. He makes him understand that the mastermind behind it is ministers and Secretary. He becomes a scapegoat for no reason and again entangles in the trap of dilemma and illusion. Sheikh assesses his personality and tells in harsh tone, “You are bogus, Ratan Rathor . . . Bogus. From top to bottom. Your work, your religion, your friendships, your honour; nothing but a pile of dung. Nothing, he said, but poses a bundle of shames” (TA131). Sheikh rebukes him harshly and makes him realize about hope and meaning of life.

Thus probably through the character of Sheikh, Joshi tries to show the mirror of Ratan’s life. In the mean time, he hears the voice that comes from his inner soul, “Whatever else the issue you are not a good man” (TA 135). He becomes very much puzzled when he again listen the same voice, “I was not a good man” (TA 137). A sense of realization generates in him and he recalls the ideas of his father and Mahatma Gandhi. He thinks that he has committed sin for which he has to expiate.
While watching the condition of Ratan, Tapan Kumar Ghosh quotes R.W.B. Lewis’ opinion in his book, in confrontation with death he offers the heroes of many contemporary novels and opportunity of, “getting at an honest and even positive estimate of life” (111). Similarly in Camus’ The Stranger, the protagonist Meursault comes to realize the absurdity of life and of the universe only after the confrontation of death. The ending of the novel is very much akin to The Foreigner where Sindi also understands the meaning of life not through away from the reality but to face it. While in the present novel, Himmat Singh gives him suggestion to think over his father’s ideas and his idealistic approach that he had forgotten, “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” (TA 141).

Ratan learns the Karmic theory that whatever one does in this world, has to pay accordingly. He is very shocked when he tries to count his wrong doings and lies in these twenty years of his career of the materialistic world. Life seemed him full of hollowness and nothingness. While perceiving hollowness and meaningless life, he goes on to analyze that it is useless to live such a life where there is nothing like fertility, goodness, joy, peace, and delight. He confesses to the young boy, “So you see, my friend, here I am, a man without honour; a man without shame . . . Anyway, here I am, middle tagged man without shame or honour. Soon I shall be an old man and then of course, I shall be dead . . . . To die, at best, is difficult. Death, in the knowledge of one’s shame, in the knowledge that are has made a hash of life’s purposes, is unbearable” (TA 141-42).
Ratan knew that his wife and daughter would not understand his agony, fear of life and death that is why he always remains silent before them. He feels much humiliated and disgraceful before them. Furthermore, gradually his anguish goes on deeper and deeper with the passage of time. His extreme helplessness, his ineffable agony and loneliness are also a reminiscent of those of the Ancient Mariner:

Alone, alone, all, all alone, /Alone on a wide sea!

And never a saint took pity on,/ My soul in agony.

(Fifteen Poets232-35. 264)

Probably Joshi believes that man’s transformation lies in his self. As Tapan Kumar Ghosh quotes Mahatma Gandhi’s view in his book, “The salvation of the people depends upon themselves, upon their capacity for suffering and sacrifice” (114). The two things work over Ratan’s realization of his self: one is self-realization and other Shiekh’s advice. However, in Ratan’s case, shame was keynote to moral awakening. He goes to ahead to expiate and sincere repentance to find out the way of salvation. In both Indian and Christian religion, there has been one belief that one can either redeem from one’s sin by accepting his/her guilt or expiate for that. Jasbir Jain quotes Joshi’s opinion that he speaks in an interview with Mrs. Bannerji, “There are two things that I have consciously tried to convey. I strongly believe that individual actions have effects on others and oneself. So one cannot afford to continue irresponsible existence but has to commit oneself at some point” (97-98). Ratan’s case was horrifying, his heart filled with Sheikh’s suggestions yet finds little bit confused that he expresses:

Ratan’s realization of his sin and expiation for it sometimes recalls T.S. Eliot’s play *The Family Reunion*, in which Harry expiates for committing a crime of killing his wife whether in hallucination or in reality. Although his mother always convinces him that it was not his fault but Harry’s conscience does not allow. He realizes that his family is under a curse; therefore, he must suffer and expiate to redeem. He recalls how he used to love Mary and after marrying they went to a comfortable life but all of a sudden, she died falling from a deck into the sea. With her, he starts living under the depression and horror as something is haunting over him and his family that he expresses to Violet,

You don’t understand me,

You can’t understand me. It’s not being alone

That is the horror- to be alone with the horror.

What matter is the filthiness? I can clean my skin,

Purify my life, void my mind
But always the filthiness, that lies a little deeper…”

(The Family Reunion 2.1.)

As it has been already mentioned in The Bible, that one has to definitely suffer for one’s sin otherwise it passes through generation to generation until someone expiate for that. Ratan’s sin also reminds the original sin of our first ancestors Adam and Eve for which they had to leave Eaden Garden until one greater man came and restore the blissful seat in heaven. Siddhartha Sharma quotes Mahatma Gandhi’s point of view in his book, “A clean confession, combined with a promise never to commit the sin again, when offered before one who has the right to receive it, is the purest type of repentance” (58).

The present novel also could not remain affected from the philosophy of Buddhism. Joshi adds the concept of ‘Shunyata’ or ‘zero’ at the end of the novel, as Ratan believes,

Life is zero, he would say, and he would add, you can take nothing away from zero…. You see, you can take things out of zero! You can make it negative. And if my colleague ware alive today I should ask him this: would he prefer a negative to a zero. Life might well be a zero, for all know, but it seems to me that if it need not be negative. And it becomes negative when you take out of it your sense of shame, your honour. (TA142)

Ratan thinks that life is constructed on the base of nothingness, emptiness and zero. Joshi probably tries to add the concept of Buddha’s emptiness, zero, voidness,
openness in respect to Ratan who becomes the spoke mouth of him. In Buddhism, the term ‘Shunyata’, the key term in Mahayana of Buddhism, had already influence Medieval Hinduism. Etymologically ‘Shunya’ comes from the root ‘svi’ meaning ‘hollow’, plus- ‘ta’- ness therefore it is considered hollowness or voidness. Buddha’s concepts of emptiness, voidness, zero or shunyata was developed by the profounder of Mahayana’s Nagarjuna and Madhyamaka. In the doctrine of Pali the term emptiness comes in three ways. Regarding the question of emptiness by one of the attendants’ lord Buddha replies him, “In so far as it is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self: Thus it is said, Ananda, that the world is empty” (WEB). Thus, Buddha tries to relate the emptiness of world with man’s emptiness from his self. According to Thanissaro Bhikku:

Emptiness as a quality of dharmas, in the early cannons of means simply that one cannot identify them as one’s own self or having anything pertaining to one’s own self . . . Emptiness as a mental state, in the early canons, means, a mode of perception on which one neither adds anything to nor takes anything to nor takes anything away from what is present, nothing simply; there is this, “This mode is achieved through a process of intense, concentration, coupled with the insight that notes more and more subtle levels of the presence and absence of disturbance.” (WEB)

It seems very tragic while looking on man’s perception regarding the realization of one’s self that has become a comic thing for the modern youth because they have
held the hand of science. As in this modern materialistic world, philosophers relate ‘zero’ emptiness with Nihilistic notion while Buddha takes it in positive approach.

At the last stage, Ratan follows the path of realization and expiation, his conscience calls him, “Be good, I tell myself. Be good. Be decent. Be of use. They I beg forgiveness” (TA 143). By that time, the images of his father, mother, and Brigadier flash before him, and he opts the way of expiation and salvation so that he could purge his heart and consciousness. He adopts the selfless service of Mahatma Gandhi moreover, he regards it the greatest religion of man. Both Sindi and Ratan have a contrast in each other. Sindi depends on the philosophy of non-involvement while Ratan holds on to his involvement. Sindi’s ultimate realization works on his learning that the real detachment lies in involvement, in the same way Ratan learns that humanism and religion is the path of man’s freedom from the corrupted world. He finally realizes that one’s life cannot be performed in isolation and without consequences. Man’s each work should be performed with the sense of responsibility, if anyone goes against it, tragedy will occur surely with him. While confessing his crime he tells the boy that he comes here at the temple and shines shoes of the devotees with the aim of that reducing his sin and finding the path of salvation. He tells the boy that he is really an innocent apprentice who is still learning the meaning of life. As he tells to the boy, “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” (TA 143). His spiritual penance opens a path of salvation. His expiation sometimes leads the reader towards Indian Philosophy of Bhagavad-Gita, where lord Krishna preaches Arjun about the sacrifice, is means to mental control and discipline, where one strives to make knowledge penetrate one’s whole being. He preaches:
Sarvanindriyakarmani, pranakarmani capare

Atmasamayasmayogagnau, juhvati jnanadipite.

Some again after all the works of their senses and the works of the vital force into the fire of the yoga of self-control, kindled by knowledge.

(Radhakrishnan194 Chapt. 4, 27)

Thus, it appears that Ratan was such an apprentice who learnt the meaning of life through painful experience who is considered now a man without shame and honour. According to O.P. Bhatnagar, “The fall of Ratan is an act of purification and he accepts his responsibility to himself to regain his innocence and purity” (62).

In consequence, it becomes visible that The Apprentice is the fusion of idealism and docility, sin and expiation, and conflict between life and living. The novel has also resemblance of Joseph Conrad’s Lord Jim, in which Jim, the protagonist of the novel fights against bourgeois idealism under its suppression loses his honour and dignity. Later on following the path of suffering and expiation regains his real self. Therefore, Ratan’s journey starts from innocence vie idealism, expiation to salvation. In addition to Indian philosophy Lokesh Kumar cites Joy Abraham’s remarks in his book, Arun Joshi’s Novels: His Vision of Life: “The novelist’s vision of life, his compassion and sensibility are manifested in the archetypal patterns of conflict between good and evil which is typical Indian” (84). The novel ends significantly with the hope, “It is a cold dawn. But no matter. A dawn, after all, is a dawn” (TA 144). While giving his remark of Ratan’s spiritual change, Lokesh Kumar cites O.P. Mathur’s view, “Ratan Rathor’s penance is not physical but spiritual. He is willing to pay the price by suffering humiliation” (85).
Thus, Ratan’s devastated materialistic life is revamp through suffering and penance which is probably the vision of the philosophy of whole world. In a sense, the novel portrays the modern man’s crisis of faith in arranged universe and in God, where there is no perfection in human beings. As a tormented and confused hero, he does not confess his guilt before S.P. that formulates the novel very tragic. His confession remarks, a sense of recreation of his fall from the zenith of innocence and glory to the nadir of degradation and shame. Therefore, H.M. Prasad remarks that the novel is a sort of the threnody of a tormented soul. Whereas Tapan Kumar Ghosh cites Srinath’s opinion regarding the novel, “The Apprentice shows a remarkable self-awareness in ruthlessly exposing his over-subtleties; fads, self-deceptions, preoccupations, ego and boredom of the dark phase of his life. it is this along with his present strength to laugh at his meaningless past that gives a kind of complexity to the character of Ratan”(97-98). The characterization of Ratan’s journey from materialism to spiritualism explores Joshi’s vision of life. Thus, through the novel Joshi probably tries to draw the line between materialistic and spiritual life. He also tries to suggest following the mid path of materialism and spirituality for the sake of one’s existence and survival.
Work Cited


