Arun Joshi came into the limelight with the publication of his very first novel. Like Mulk Raj Anand for Joshi, the fiction is neither a source of entertainment nor an instrument of publicizing some sets of the ideas. He does not use his genius for propagating any political or social creed. He is regarded the novelist of Indian social problems. He presents the Indian social tradition in the philosophical and religious values. He wrote in a letter as:

All my novels are essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and of myself …if I did not write, I imagine I would use some other medium to carry on my exploration.  

‘The Apprentice’ (1974) is a novel totally different in tone from all other novels and writings of Joshi. The story of this novel is cast in the form of a dramatic monologue. The protagonist of this novel Ratan Rathor is the narrator who represents the quintessence Everyman—a contrast to other protagonists, so far as his intellectual level is much lower. An unsophisticated youth, jobless, he comes to the city in search of a career; unscrupulous and ready to prostitute himself for professional advancement, seduced by
materialistic values, he takes a bribe to clear a lot of defective weapons. A consequence, a brigadier, who is also his friend, has to desert his post and, to escape ignominy, commit suicide. A penitent Rathor, avoids confessing his guilt, but tries to achieve redemption by cleaning the shoes of devotees, every morning at a temple. He presents the various aspects of the human life. This novel attacks the materialistic values but with a different strategy. Rathor wades through corruption to arrive an understanding of the life and its affirmations. According to The World Literature Today,

The novel is caste in a series of Browning – like monologues, to a boy to within the protagonist, burdened with sorrow of ‘a waste life,’ lays bare the motives, aspirations, dilemmas and frustration of his past. 2

Crisis is the soul of an individual, who is entangled in the maze of contemporary life with its confusion of values and moral anarchy, and his untiring quest for a remedy lie at the core of Joshi’s exploration of human reality in this novel. His first two novels also, in a way, focused on the identical theme of crisis of existence and quest for survival. Sindi Oberoi’s dilemma in ‘The Foreigner’ resulted from his evasion of life and its ineluctable problems. ‘The Strange Case of Billy Biswas’ dealt with Billy’s estrangement from a hostile and uncongenial reality that stifled his sensibility with its material concerns, lack of mystery, and cultural uprootedness. Billy was a survivor of the deluge of materialism that overtook the Post-Independence, anglicized
Indian society, and his survival took the form of a revolt against an individual who suffers the agony of the soul not due to his escapism or rebellion but due to his conformity to, and victimization by, a crooked and corrupt society. Indictment of materialism has already occurred in the first two novels. But in the third novel that this condemnation comes into importance giving the book a wider social relevance.

This novel is about a dark crisis in the human soul. It depicts the anguished attempt of a guilt-stricken person to retrieve his virtue and honour. It is a story of crime and chastisement, of dislocation and search. It portrays the efforts of ‘a man without honour…without shame… a man of our time’ (147) to impose meaning and order of his life which lacks them. At the same time the book contains a severe criticism of a rotten society with its meaningless pursuit of success and career, unscrupulous amassing of wealth in defiance of the sanctified values of its tradition like honesty, integrity of character, selfless service, and honour. Structurally the novel has much similarity with Albert Camus’ ‘The Fall.’ But it differs from the latter in its emotional weight and quality of vision. Here, too, Joshi narrates an essentially indigenous experience, and his Indian strain is evident in the transformation of his raw material in terms of fictional art. The influence of the Karmic Principle of the Gita and that of the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi are prominent in this novel.
The narrative consists of a long confessional monologue addressed to young college students from the Punjab (the place the narrator himself hails from) by a Government official named Rathor. Ratan relates to his students listener over a period of three months, the period that the student—a national cadet—spends in Delhi to rehearse for the N.C.C. Parade on the Republic Day, the reason behind his stringed apprenticeship as a shoe-shiner near the stairway of a Krishna temple. The novel is told through the reflections of man looking back on his past. In the retrospective account of his life, Ratan seeks to trace the root of his soul's sickness and the reason behind his fall from innocence which gives the novel at once its form and meaning. The use of the past tense, the story being told in retrospect, lends a peculiar objectivity to the tone of the narrative. The book concentrates exclusively on the central character-Ratan Rathor from whose point of view and his internal struggles is told. The action of the novel takes the form of a quest. The protagonist, Ratan, like Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,' and Jean-Baptiste Clamence in Albert Camus' 'The Fall,' buttonholes and the ordinary middleclass auditor and arouses his interest about his spiritual trials—in Ratan’s case about why he calls himself a 'apprentice.' In the course of his monologue, Ratan gradually strips himself of all protective pretences and reveals more and more of his hypocrisy, cowardice, corruption, debauchery and, finally, his great betrayal. The gruesome details of his self-revelation are as much important as the method in which this is done. By his skillfully
manipulated confession, interweaving what concerns him and what concerns others. Ratan builds up a portrait that becomes a mirror to this contemporary, ‘the image of all and of no one,’ (102) as Camus’ deceptive narrator calls it.

Despite the disclaimer of Joshi in the prefatory tone that all the characters in the novel including the narrator are fictitious bearing no resemblance to any living or dead person, one's final impression of the book is that it does mirror the moral crisis not only of an individual but also of an entire society. The book becomes “the aggregate of the vices of our whole generation in their fullest expression.” Although the novelist takes to keep his eye on the individual and the concrete, the book hardly fails to strike the point home that Ratan's failure to face his moral crisis becomes symptomatic of the general failure of an entire generation to accept moral responsibility. It is not for nothing that Ratan calls himself ‘a man of our times.’ It is, perhaps, in this sense that Joshi calls Ratan ‘Everyman.’

The confessional tone is present in Joshi’s first four novels, but it is only in The Apprentice that confession comes to acquire the hero's central concern. As Thakur Guru Prasad remarks: “the narrator in this novel is an insistent confessionalist; confession is a factor in his redemption.” (162) But no critic has attempted to examine the larger implications of this modes in Joshi’s fiction in general and in ‘The Apprentice’ in particular. The dislocation in the inner world of Rathor and his arduous quest for an order irrespective of any external force lead him to an intense self-examination. The exploration of
a guilt-stricken consciousness and the compulsive forces that lead to confession as well as the relevance of confession to the tormented and confused hero are the major concerns of modern confessional novel. Peter M. Axthelm defines the confessional novel as one, which “presents a hero, at some point in his life, examining his past as well as his innermost thoughts, in an effort to achieve some form of perception.” The confession serves a threefold purpose in Ratan’s case. First, the need for confession is an attribute of criminal consciousness. By compelling the young student to listen his grisly tale, Ratan regains some of the human converse of which his crime had robbed him. Secondly, it offers him the possibility of cleansing his soul of the layers of fifth piled upon it during his ‘successful’ career, as a Government official without any clean confession. As Gandhi writes, “A clean confession, combined with a promise never to commit the sin again, when offered before one who has the right to receive it, the purest type of repentance,” (41) Finally, through his confession he seeks to achieve a perception which is, however, deeply personal.

Like Raskolnikov in Dostevsky’s ‘Crime and Punishment,’ Ratan approaches the idea of confession for two reasons. A formal confession to the Superintendent of Police offers him the opportunity of alleviating the almost unbearable sense of guilt that follows his crime and of saving the Brigadier. But he could not muster up enough courage to make it. Secondly, an internal
confession offers him the hope of an answer to the perplexing question about what went wrong with his system.

The novel, like ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,’ has a cause and effect structure. But it is not rendered entirely in chronological fashion. There is a simple dislocation of the chronological order of events and a constant interlacing of the past and the present. The narrator represents those incidents in his life which highlight the nature of his guilt and which are important to his confession. The selective principle exercised by the narrator himself shows his detachment from the author. The authorial silence here, as in the other novels of Joshi, is remarkable.

The proximity of the Krishna temple where Ratan makes the first part of his confession, the last and the darkest part being made in the accuracy of a religious confession. But Ratan's companion, a representative of the external world to which he attempts to relate, is a confessor who cannot grant any absolution, a judge who cannot pass any judgment. He represents Ratan's own innocent youth as well as the future generation of the country that may learn a lesson from the loss and the failure of people like Ratan. At the very beginning, Ratan says to the auditor that the latter reminds him of his own father:

You look a little like him, if I may take the liberty of mentioning. Fifty years younger, of course, but grave and clear-eyed. Not a wash-out like me. (8)
The remark is significant insofar as it brings home the contrast between Ratan and his confessor. The latter is like his father-innocent, unpolluted, ‘grave’ and ‘clear-eyed’, and images that Ratan himself wanted to emulate in his prelapsarian days. Instead, he is now a ‘wash-out,’ exhausted under the burden of his indelible sin. As if, it is the image of his father that he is now narrating the story of his fall.

Two major narrative devices used by Joshi in ‘The Apprentice’ are (a) mirror and contrast, and (b) irony. The mirror symbol (an object in which is reflected the narrator’s own debased self) is employed to convey the hero's relation with others in terms of self-discovery. It reflects certain aspects of the hero’s nature and thereby accelerates his self-examination. He becomes more and more entangled in Ratan's struggle to understand him and leads him to his final horrible vision of himself. Ratan's department whom he maliciously outmaneuvers, are his contrasts. Together they comprise the measuring rod of his degradation. Irony is one of the controlling devices in the narrative employed to maintain the author’s detachment from his hero and to enable the hero to destroy self-delusion or any romantic notion, which might lure him away from the central purpose of his confession. It is the irony, directed at himself, and his self-mockery together with his uninhibited self-revelation that add a complex dimension to Ratan’s character.
Ratan's affirmation is a re-creation of his fall from the peak of innocence and glory to the nadir old squalor and shame. At the beginning, Ratan refers to an episode in his childhood that left and ineffectable impression on his mind that serves as a recurring distinguishes to his squalor throughout the novel. It was the heroic death of his patriotic father who had laid down his life for the emancipation of the country from British rule. Ratan was a child of the double inheritance, brought up in an atmosphere of antithetical philosophies of life. It was a time characterized by noble idealism and selfless service to the country.

It was the age of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian politics and Ratan's father was a champion of Gandhian values like simplicity, honesty, selfless service and non-violence. Under the magic spell of the Mahatma, the ‘man of suffering,’ (9) he, a successful lawyer, sacrificed his profession to plunge into the freedom movement. He had absolute faith in his cause and was prepared to suffer for it. The acute privation of the family, the complaints of his tubercular wife, who ‘spat blood…Every night, night after night (10) the future of his only son and the advice of his friends could not bring him back to what he called “careers and bourgeois filth.” (33) Ratan’s mother, on the contrary, had a pragmatic attitude to life and a sense of down-to-earth realism. She believed:
It was not patriotism but money…that brought respect and bought security. To her, a man without money was a man without worth…little better than a beggar’s shoe. (20)

She looked upon acquiring and possession money by fair means or foul as the *summum bonum* of life. It was this materialistic attitude to life that later came to influence Ratan as well as the post-Independence Indian society. The juxtaposition of these two contradictory values in the consciousness of the narrator heightens his moral tension and adds a seriousness of purpose to the narrative.

Ratan relates the circumstances that led to his father’s martyrdom an event whose meaning is still incomprehensible to him—in language that seems to verge on the melodramatic. But he brings in a timely check:

Pardon my sentimentality. I do get carried away! Moreover, such sentiment comes easy to the guilty. (11)

He tries to remain objective, and such well-timed checks prevent the narrative from falling into petty sentimentality. The procession, which his father led on that fateful day, exemplified the courage and heroism of the man and his co-fighters. It was their determination that transformed the almost non-descript crowd into ‘something grand, something more than what wretched of the earth are normally allowed to become.’ (11) While men and women, ‘somber or amused, onlookers… of an epoch they had no faith in,’ (12)
watched the procession of the satyagrahis, Ratan joined his father. He said nothing but ‘a momentary glint of pride flashed through his eyes.’ (12) The Police charged the crowd with tear gas and clubs to disperse it. Ratan’s father, wounded and bleeding profusely, tried in vain to bring them back. Suddenly, he turned back and walked towards the Police defying the order. Than a sergeant shot him in the chest. That unique moment of heroic and self-sacrifice was frozen in Ratan’s memory ‘as a moment of great silence.’ (13) Throughout his long and chequered career he would remember this momentous event as the watermark of his own cowardice and deviation from his father’s ideal.

Apart from his father, there was another person whose memory haunted Ratan throughout his life and who performed a pivotal role in his confession. It was his friend, the only friend in the wide world, the Brigadier. The evocation, in almost lyrical prose, of the memory of their boyhood escapades amid idyllic setting, the cross-country run they jointly undertook, is one of the positive aspects of his narrative skill. The incident in which the Brigadier saved Ratan’s life from the ambush of a group of miscreants, showed his selfless love for Ratan. It made Ratan feel, “I was not alone amidst the sugarcane, abandoned on the planet.” (17) At the same time it serves as another contrast to his life after the ‘fall’: “How distant they all from another life.” (18) It was this life that he dreamt of living before his graduation to the crooked society with its inescapable paraphernalia of lying, hypocrisy,
graft, womanizing and worse. And it is the memory of that life; of that possibility of being something different that makes his present so unbearably painful, but such thoughts gain significance only in retrospect. What is remarkable there is the note of remorse at the loss of innocence as:

The conduct of the contractor surprised me even more. He was a man of some reputation. He had at least three cars and possessed one of the finest bungalows in the newer part of the city. And almost overnight I saw him turn into a hysterical old man, disheveled and distracted, running from desk to desk, room-to-room, panicky beyond words. And one day one of his sons came to my room and offered me a thousand rupee if I were to change my noting. This he later raised to ten thousand. I refused. And, in doing so, felt both righteous and proud. 4 (42.)

Innate cowardice was the greatest flaw in Ratan’s personality. Early in the book Ratan still young, energetic and native-toyed with the idea of following his father’s example. But the Delphic utterances of his mother about the necessity of learning the ‘intricate laws of money (21) to unravel the mystery of the universe dampened his enthusiasm. Ratan, after all, did not have his father’s courage. This evident from the episode in which he left his home to join Subhash Bose’s army. It is an extremely ironic situation; even the language itself is tinged with irony:

I am very excited. I am on my way to greatness... about to lay the “felt the elevation that we feel the elevation that we feel when
something within us, some vital essence, manages to break out and lose itself in objects that are bigger and beyond us.  

This ironic reversal of the situation indicative of Ratan’s timidity-predicted his even burrowed in his soul like wriggling maggots constantly mocking him. He struggled desperately to forget that shameful evening. Notwithstanding his cowardice and his mother’s contempt for idealism which, she believed, counted nothing in a world governed by the inexorable laws of money, Ratan, too, wanted to be something different: “To be good! Respected! To be of use!” (19) Like his father, had also wanted to make a mark upon the world. But all his idealism and dreams were shattered very soon. His faith in an expectation of a just social order was belied by the new system ushered in by the country’s freedom. To his horror Ratan found that the martyrs like his father and the people soon forgot the values for which they had sacrificed their lives. A new set of values befitting the mood and nature of the people emerged. Sacrifice was replaced by self-interest; courage and honesty were replaced by cowardice, fraud and deception, and ideals by deals.

The country presented a picture of complete moral anarchy and steady decline of values in which his mother’s words about money proved to prophetic. Freedom brought with it no elevation of the spirit that the great leaders had hoped for. Instead, there was only ubiquitous corruption, which, like a canker, came to erode the very foundation of the society. Speaking
about the prevalent moral confusion in the country in the years following the
Independence, M.K. Naik writes:

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 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. 6 (1982:189)

It became a lawless, unprincipled country devoid of any distinct code of
conduct. The terrible shock of the people like Ratan received by awakening,
at the dawn of Independence in a no-man’s land of values where people lived
by opportunism, treachery, cowardice, hypocrisy and wit stunned them. They
lost all convictions and their moral inertia gave them all the grandeur and all
the emptiness of a hypnotized people. To Ratan, the country, for which his
father had squandered his life, appeared to be ‘a nation of dreamers, awaiting
their doom,’ (73) a nation “of frustrated men sailing about in a confused
society, a society without norms, without direction, without even, perhaps, a
purpose,” (74) It was that society degenerate Ratan, suffering from a sense of
insecurity in a fatherless world, started his apprenticeship. But what is
remarkable here is Joshi’s unique narrative skill, which has wonderfully
blended the microcosm and the macrocosm. The degeneration of the
individual and that of the nation are highlighted simultaneously without
hampering the artistic integrity of the book. Never for a moment not even in
the severest indictment of the society, does the story lapse into journalistic reports sociological documentation. The novelist weaves the two levels the individual and the larger social of the narrative into a wonderful synthesis, keeping the main narrative thrust clear and alive.

The nightmarish experience of futile job-hunting in an alien and insensitive city contributed to a large extent to the shattering of Ratan’s hope and idealism. Ratan describes the period: “What hopes we start out in! Beggars in prince’ garb. Heads bursting with dreams.” (24) But the humiliation, insult, starvation and the trauma of physical breakdown drained his reservoir of hope and brought him the verge of collapse of faith in a just and ordered world. The “frantic thrashing of the great sea of indifference that surrounded [him] and that showed every inclination of drowning [him]” (27) wiped the laughter off his face. In a striking image of disintegration Ratan sums up his position: “To me, alas, it [the world] appeared as a bundle of mirrors, tempting and somehow held together, but on the brink always of falling apart.” (18)

In one of his platitudinous but anguished outbursts, Ratan tells his young and still unpolluted confessor: “There is nothing in the world as sad as the end of hope. Not even death.” (26) This slow leakage of hope together with his growing sense of failure old ‘things corrosive and irreversible’ (26) to his soul. Within weeks of his arrival in Delhi he became a master faker and learnt the ways of the crooked and unscrupulous age of twenty-one, a
hypocrite and a liar; in short, a sham.” (28) That doubt “if there was something drastically wrong with [him] or [his] notion of the world” (29) were followed by a loss of identity. The hostile city engulfed him and he began to forget who he really was. And it was the time “when all started to crumble.” (28)

An important aspect of Ratan’s character, as that of his confession, is his candour and sincerity. He never dithers of mention the basest motives behind his acts and never tries to avoid blame, even when it appears that someone of something else might actually be at fault. The tremendous pressure of external forces notwithstanding, Ratan never shirks personal responsibility. Srinath rightly observes:

The apprentice shows a remarkable self-awareness in ruthlessly exposing his over-sub-treaties, fads, self-deceptions, preoccupations, ego and boredom of the dark phase of his life. It is this long with his present strength to laugh at his meaningless past that gives a kind of complexity to the character of Ratan.

Ratan himself says to his listener that in spite of the burden of guilt and suffering of his soul and the great anguish that his confession causes him, he must “tell all. All or nothing. What use is a confession, if not total? And where else am I going to confess.” (87-88) This ingenuousness distinguishes Ratan from the confessional hero of Camus’ ‘The Fall’ with whom he is often compared. Clamence’s interior monologue clearly reveals his duplicity including, among other things, deliberate distortion. He is quite explicit about
his dishonesty: “it’s very hard to disentangle the true from the false in what I’m saying.” (1963:83) incidentally, one of Camus' major concerns in ‘The Fall’ is the problem of honesty, or rather honesty in confession. Axthelm observes that Baptiste Clamence is a typical anti-hero of the confessional novel that represents the negative aspects of true and sincere confession. (86) Clamence, whose trade-sign is “a double face, a charming Janus” with the motto “Don’t rely on it,” (1963:36) is, however, deliberately deceptive. Because, the ‘very truth about human beings which he is exploring is that they are full of duplicity.’ And Camus conveys the grim message of Clamence's confession through the deceptive and ‘unreliable narration’ of the hero. But, inspite of his first insincere and abortive attempt at confession to the S.P., Ratan final confession is agonizingly frank and unflinchingly honest in its self-revelation. He attempts neither to dodge his personal responsibility nor, like Clamence, to incriminate his auditor and the readers; on the contrary, he advises them to take lessons from his experience. The honesty is a measure of the changed that comes over Ratan in the wake of his self-realization.

Despite his temporary feeling of estrangement from the society that held out no hope and promise for him, Ratan, unlike Billy Biswas, gradually acclimatized himself to it. Once he managed to procure with the help of a fellow in-dweller, he never looked back. He devoted himself wholeheartedly to the advancement of his career in utter defiance of the basic human values. He soon forgot his friends considering himself their better “in education, in polish,
in even intelligence.” (27) He convinced himself that “the disastrous three months’ spell... was only a temporary set-back!” (32) The secret of Ratan's successful career as a government official was not so much diligence and efficiency as his instinctive ability for survival and his docility that verged on sycophancy. From the beginning of his apprenticeship, he devoted himself to the secret of career under the tutorship of the Superintendent, “the high priest of an exclusive creed, whose mystery he was at once an inheritor and a trustee.” (34) The words of his father—“Careers and bourgeois filth” (33)—came to his mind. But bent as he was not the relentless pursuit of a career, it seemed more profitable to him to follow the zeitgeist than the idealism of his father that could bring him no material gain.

As he admits, “remembering is not believing...or, believing, doing. When the moment comes we only remember what best grinds our axe.” (33) And what ground he axes best was shameless sucking up to his bosses. It became the ‘single driving force’ (36) in his life. Ratan frankly confesses: “Some survived through defiance, other through ability. Still others through obedience, by becoming servants to the powers of the world.” (35) This docility was not put-on affair with him. It came to him naturally like breathing; it was as effortless as his father’s rebellion. He thinks:

But my thoughts were full of other things. Aside from the women I was engrossed in fantasies of pleasures that awaited me in Bombay. I have, after all traveled very little. The very idea of
Bombay filled my head, after all brand-new enjoyment. If the idea of a possible war at all entered them it only filled me with a bravado that was not very different from the undefined excitement that I generally felt. This excitement was to last me for some time except at one point during the flight when it so unexpectedly paled. (74)

Gripped as Ratan was by the panic generated by the thought of probable retrenchment at the end of the war, a panic ‘flapping its gray wings, darkening the sky, blocking the sun,’ (47) his residual idealism and honesty were atrophied. The basis human elements in him were smothered in the rat-race for success, which never failed to extract its pound of conscience from him. The more the idea of a career took a powerful and ominous shape in him, the more he felt an inner hardening. He did not hesitate to betray his colleagues for a promise of confirmation from his bosses. The insults of the colleagues whom he had let down, made no difference to him. He simply could not careless: “One day they refused my tea. It was a considerable snub as such things go but, to my surprise, I discovered that it made no difference to me.” (42) It marked a definite degeneration in him. The higher he soared in his career, the lower he fell within himself.

Billy Biswas was estranged from the civilized society, which was hooked on the pegs of money, due to his non-conformity and spirit of rebellion. Sindi Oberoi suffered from alienation due to his withdrawal from the ineluctable
problems of life and living. But in Ratan's case, conformity to the counterfeit values of a corrupt society resulted in his authentic self. By his conformity as well as multiple bargains with life, scrupulous, insensitive and calculating man of ambition:

I felt as though some tender surface beneath my skin was congealing, hardening into cartilage and bone, forming the shell against which all future messages, advice or recrimination, well-meaning or foolish, would merely bounce off leaving me untouched, free to pursue my ends without distraction. (52)

As he cultivated the mystique of the cult of career under the Superintendent's training, the distinction between right and wrong, good and evil, was blurred:

The right or the wrong of the side one took was not in question, nor were there couchstones by which one chose. No morals were involved. It was the skill in manoeuvre that mattered. Which more or less was end in itself. One was like a sailor on a lake, concerned not with the destination but only with manipulation of sails, the riding of the wind. (43)

The Gandhian purity of 'mean,' which his father believed in, was replaced by an almost Machiavellian dedication to the 'end'. Ratan's experience, in the course of his tortuous progression through life, involves a confusing mixture of error incomprehensibility and frustration. The extravagant
enthusiasm of a novice that he had felt at the beginning gradually faded away. But he never forgot his first thrust of power that had almost driven a contractor bankrupt. Ratan was offered a bribe of ten thousand rupees to change his note on the file. But he turned down the proposal at a time when he actually needed the money and felt proud and self-righteous for his refusal. It was then Ratan came face to face with the anarchy of the world, ‘a place without law, a planet turning in the happening around him only contributed to his moral confusion. He was amazed by the absurd servility of the same world, which had almost crushed him by an unjust thrashing. This vision of the world, hitherto unknown to him, fed his vanity and at the same time left him shaken. In utter perplexity Ratan confided his doubts and fears to the Superintendent, his mentor. But instead of clearing up his doubts, the enigmatic reply of the Superintendent only intensifed them: “You know, Rathor, he said, nothing but God exists. You can be certain only of Him.” (45) What he meant was that “there was no point in looking for truths aside from the truth of God. Money in the world always changed hands. God piously could not accept such an explanation, which took no cognizance of the means of getting that money and the consequences of one’s action. His perplexity found expression in a series of questions:

Did he mean that it was the way you used the money that God was watching and not how you go it? Was graft, in His eyes, the same as any other money? And what about the consequences,
consequence for what was termed as the ‘character’ of the giver and the taker? Or, was ‘character’ just a myth that I had somehow picked up? (45)

Influenced by the Gandhian system of ethics, Joshi believes that the sanctity of means in all-important in achieving to an end. But in the Superintendent's world, the means had lost its validity. Nor did this world recognize the consequences of one's action. Central to Joshi's world-view is his conviction as:

Individual actions have effects on others and oneself. So one cannot afford to continue with an irresponsible existence but has to commit oneself at some point. 8

This was one of the lessons that Ratan learnt at the end. For the moment, he was struck dumb by the amorality of the world, which shook his conviction to its innards. In retrospect, however, he finds nothing surprising in the reply of the Superintendent, a man of the world:

What is easier, after all, than to accept a God who wishes only to be acknowledged and could not be bothered with the details of one's actions, directed at good or at evil, as long as the allegiance to Him is duly renewed. (46)

Ratan's words are bitter indictment of the materialistic society governed by the law of ‘quid pro quo,’ and its attitude to God. Everywhere the question
of utility, of transaction came uppermost. Morality, distinction between good and evil, integrity of character were all set aside. Amidst this all-pervasive erosion of values in the wake of the deluge of materialism in post-Independence India, Joshi's protagonist would chalk out his destiny on the basis of his karma, or action, which was bound to bear fruits here on this earth, in this very life. Since the Superintendent's God did not bother about good and evil and the consequences of one's action. He would be of little help to Ratan in his moment of crisis. Ratan would shun the shrine of God, which, too, was not exempt from corruption. Instead, he would delve into his soul in search of light and truth. It was in the dark labyrinth of his soul that Ratan would ultimately find the answers to the overwhelming questions posed by his existence.

If Billy Biswas was rebel, Ratan Rathor was a victim of the deceitful society that impelled him too makes a compromise with it. He came to realize that it “is not the atom or the sun or God or sex that lies at the heart of the universe; it is deals. DEALS.” (51) One such deal that he made his marriage with the niece of the Superintendent:

In his own inimitable way he had set the equations. If I married his niece. I would stay in job; he would see to that. If I didn’t, he could not possibly be expected to help, which was as good as being thrown out. (49).
Ratan married his niece and soon after that he was made an officer. In a mocking tone he adds, “The nation for which my father had given his life was moving and so, I thought, was I.” (53) But, in retrospect, he comes to know that his idea of getting ahead was nothing but self-deception, an illusion created by him to calm his disturbed conscience. He seems to be aware of the futility of it at all, the utter futility of the retrace for success. It is a very difficult task involving luck and a lifetime’s effort. But at the end death wipes out all, the slate and the equations. With each shift in his life, the void in his soul, like ‘the void of the winter sky,’ (50) widened. His new vision of life ‘did something fundamental to the arrangement of things, which a man is made of.’ (52) And Ratan Rathor, now a hardened man of ambition, ‘felt ashamed and, in a way, frightened… of that part [himself] which kept pushing [him], making these strange bargains with the world. (52)

By a typical use of irony, Joshi injects the reality of Ratan’s position into the episode of his serio-comic article on the ‘Crisis of Character.’ The document began with quotations from Mahatma Gandhi and the Bhagavad-Gita and consisted of a general review of the glorious past of the country, which Ratan had stolen from third-rate history books and tourists’ pamphlets. Making a brief survey of the “blossoming of the Indian heritage” (58) from the civilizations of Harappa and Mohanjedaro to King Ashoka’s conquest of Kalinga and his subsequent renunciation, he wrote that in Indian history “Truth had always prevailed over False-hood; dharma over adharma; love over
hate.” (58) After Independence the people saw ‘a display of greed before which the plunderings of a Ghaznavi paled.’ (59) With ‘scintillating examples’ Ratan described the corruption in national life and came to the conclusion that ‘the Indian people were a glorious monument in ruin.’ (59) He diagnosed the plight of the Indian people as the ‘crisis of character,’ (57)

This theory of character, which Ratan took great trouble to formulate but which was never published, together with his conduct during the Indo-Chinese war—which was ‘nothing if not exemplary’ (54) only served to inflate his sense of superiority. All his concerns for the moral degradation of the nation, his ‘immediate love’ for his motherland ‘trampled under the boots of a barbarian enemy,’ his well-meaning acts and gestures like donating blood and subscribing to the war funds and, finally, his feeling of love for his fellow citizens that bound them together ‘in a common peril,’ (54) brought out his capacity for play-acting. The very language in this section of the book is tinged with irony and the serio-comic tone lays bare the hollowness of the speaker’s claim. Like Macbeth, Ratan learnt to ‘beguile the time.’ What is significant in this article on the crisis of character and the gradual regression of the Indian people is shocking, anti-climactic personal revelation.

A month before the Chinese invasion Ratan cleared a huge pile of useless military materials lying in Bombay. He was offered a bribe for this which, ‘for some obscure reasons,’ (60) he accepted. Himmat Singh, popularly known as the Sheikh, masterminds the entire deal. Himmat Singh, a don of
the underworld having much clout with the power that be, bribed Ratan at the instance of the Minister and the Secretary of his department. This incident marked the lowest point of Ratan's downward movement and in describing it feels awful and panic.” (60) He feels hemmed in and suffocated by the memory of that crime which still haunts him like the dead albatross.

The uncertainty of the motive behind his gruesome act is indicative of his moral confusion, of the whirlpool of contradictory values and standards that life had come to signify to him. It is redolent of a similar uncertainty of motive behind ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’s killing of the innocent albatross or of Raskolnikov's murder of the pawnbroker’s widow he had taken the bribe was very difficult for him: “The fact is, I do not know.” (61) But a man, who is determined to probe the clue to his soul him terribly to plumb his soul where the truth is hidden, he decides to make this exploration. One thing was certain that he did not need the money for either survival or happiness. In fact, if he had ever needed the money, it was when he had been offered it the first time by the contractor; and he had refused it.

His refusal then and his acceptance now marked a great change in him: “What happened to me during that time and this?” (62) Ratan makes a sincere scrutiny to his career as an apprentice to the profligate society and tries to understand when and how things began to change. In the process, he looks into his hypocrisy, cowardice, docility into the utter vacuity of his existence. This change in him corresponds to the change that took place in the life of the
nation. In the process of recounting the circumstances that led him to commit the nefarious act, Ratan produces an aural image of the time with all its sickness and anarchy. He begins with the days after the country’s ‘tryst with destiny.’ (62)

The mood of elation that freedom had generated in the people was soon replaced by a feeling of disappointment. Gradually, ‘the gears to slip,’ (62) things and people began to change. In the corridors of power rumours were heard; in the press strange and unbelievable stories were published. The sanctified values were flouted; even the ministers gave false and misleading statements in the Parliament. A new hierarchy of rulers appeared on the stage:

So, they had appeared again. That is if they had ever left the scene in the first place. There was the public and there were they. (63)

Freedom came to mean only the replacement of Englishmen by brown sahibs: “We thought we were free. What we had, in fact, was a new slavery.” (63) Freedom meant freedom from right and wrong, decency and restraint. Men were weighted in terms of money and power. Every other consideration paled into insignificance before the craze for money and power. It was, in short, “a free-for all. A great darkness. Blinding us. And blind following the blind. And everybody lying.” (70) With a rare deftness Joshi provides brilliant
insight into the country’s degeneration. What saves the novel from being merely a socio-political treatise on Post-Independence India is the author’s sense of the concrete and his eye on situation and character.

Ratan is more interested in what happened to him, ‘not to the wide out:
“But how can one separate the two. The wide world took me in its wake, overwhelmed me and smothered me.” (65) Ratan had tried to be something different like his father, his own master. But becoming one’s master and still pursuing a career in a corrupt society were not compatible with each other: “And how was I going to be my own master when a system was the master of me. And how was I to throw off the system and still pursue a career.” (65)

Moreover, it was difficult for a coward and a conformist like him to be different. The courage and self-confidence, which could enable him, like Billy, to rise against the tide, were absent in Ratan. He had become the time’s fool, ‘a weather vane turning its head where the wind blows’ or a ‘blotting paper’ (66) that changes its colour with the change of the choked him. But, unlike his father who took up cudgels and tore down what disturbed him, Ratan threw in the sponge and swam with the current. Consequently, the feeling of restlessness wore itself out and was replaced by an apathy which grew upon him and inside him, ‘like a boil. Like leprosy,’ (66) He had grown pompous and conceited, “And all the time, inside, there was no revolution at all. Only boredom and discontent that burst periodically into panic.
It turned him into a sycophant, a manipulator and a liar. In vain he tried what he did was the order of the day: “believe me, we were all like that. I was not the only one. Please believe me.” (70) Because he knew in his heart that he could never evade his personal responsibility and that he had consciously cast off his priceless jewel to secure a sty of contentment and material pleasure. Despite its compelling force and debasing influence, the society produced honest and sincere men like the young officer in his department whom Ratan harassed and outmaneuvered to secure his own promotion. Before his departure, the anguished officer said to Ratan: “my first impression of you was that you were a bit like me. But I was obviously mistaken.”(72)

The series of compromises Ratan had made with the decadent values of the unprincipled society, his ever-increasing sense of discontent as well as the whole business of living in muddle generated confusion in him. He was reduced ‘to the status of those leaves of autumn that are blown here and there, at the mercy of the wind. Why be surprised if one of them falls into the sewer?’ (73) Apart from this inner confusion, there were two other reasons why he had committed the crime for his complacency and his sense of insignificance. Like most of his countrymen, who fed on the dreams lead out by ivory tower politicians, Ratan believed that China would keep faith and that there would be no war? Even if, by any chance, a war broke out, India would never be defeated because Indians ‘were a chosen people...immune to defeat and humiliation. (73) Moreover, he looked upon himself as an
insignificant element in the giant government machinery where his small act would in no way change the course of things:

And if there was to be defeat, I had thought, and then it was bound to be so irrespective of what I did or did not do. How could my little act matter one-way or another...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. (73)

He had become a paltry, little servant of the new masters and all the time he 'had to flick their boots, put on smiles for their pleasure.' (74) Ratan's sense of insignificance and consequential anguish resulted from his estrangement from his own true self his failure to measure up to the stature of his possibilities and his absorption into the impersonal collectivism of the instrumental or functional world. He was not himself but simply a cipher in the mass existence of the crowd, a cog in the social mechanism. The sterility of the soul could go no further. He was lost in the labyrinth of life and had seen his 'soul turn to ashes.' (75) It was in such a state of turmoil Ratan accepted the bribe.

First of all, I did not need the money. I am quite sure of that. I needed it no more than sitting here, after two cups of tea. I need a third. I may drink it because others do, or because it is offered free, but I need it for neither survival nor happiness. In this poor land I can be called comfortable, even well – off. I have a car, a flat, a concrete roof, running water, I have a refrigerator. My wife
is not swimming in saris, but she does not even use what she has. My daughter has all the money she needs, for college, clothes and the cinema. We eat as much as a human being can possibly eat. The Government looks after our health. There are delays no doubt but with a bit of telephoning – I have a telephone which is not common. (58-59)

A striking aspect of this novel, as of Joshi’s fiction in general, is the portrayal of the disintegrated world of his lonely protagonist through imagery and symbols. Like many confessional novelists of the West, Joshi employs images and symbols not simply to complement or adorn the story of his hero. He also wants to “portray a mind gone beyond conventional limits, a mind which cannot be comprehended in the context of objective reality, but is so unique that only its own strange creations can properly reflect it. The images are the ‘objective correlative’ of the disturbed vision and the distorted consciousness of his heroes. The purpose of these images some of which have already been referred is to produce.

The world that Joshi’s protagonist encounters is replete with these evils. In such a diseased world devoid of any definite value system as well as any principle of conduct, the efforts of the lost, lonely individual to understand the meaning and purpose of his existence take on the proportion of tragedy. One of redeeming features of Ratan’s character is his ever-alert conscience. All along the chequered path, which he had traversed in the course of his
graduation from the jobless village boy to a member of the urban elite, this conscience pricked him. It was smothered sometimes but was never silent. Even during his journey to Bombay to finalize the shady deal this ‘squeaky voice’ (110) reminded him of his glorious heritage and urged him to turn back. It suddenly struck Ratan that he was a Rathor and his ancestors were men of honour and courage who had fought in the wilderness of the granite and the steep ravines against the foreigners.

He had a strange feeling, “all of them were waiting for me down there… I could hear the voices of their spirits. And I knew what they wanted. They wanted me to turn back.” (79) So degraded and hardened he had grown that even the thought of his glorious ancestry failed to restrain him. His cocky self only drew a shade between him and his knowledge. And he missed another chance to turn back, to rise above the dunghill of his life and to re-integrate his crumbling world.

The disintegration of Ratan is not a static condition. He has experienced a sublime past characterized by innocence, honour, courage as well as integrity of character. And he suffers from a loss of these values rather than from a total absence of them. So long as this past exists as a glaring contrast to his ignoble present, Ratan’s bleakest vision of disintegration becomes only a downward movement, a grim re-creation of man’s archetypal fall from paradise innocence.
Himmat Singh accelerated the process of Ratan's self-perception to a large extent. Like a Dostevskian ‘mirror’ he reflected certain aspects of Ratan’s character and exposed that degenerate part of him, which he was afraid and ashamed of. The Sheikh expanded Ratan's awareness beyond the crime the latter had committed to an even more painful perception of all the shameful and meaningless elements in his life. Ratan acknowledges the similarity between them: “It was perhaps something of me that I saw in him. And vice versa.” (81) He was with an almost “demoniac twist” he laid bare Ratan’s deceitfulness, cowardice, vanity and self-delusion. When Ratan, afraid to exposure and of the possible consequences of the graft, expressed his apprehension, the Sheikh taunted him: “You are a fool, he said…people thought there was a law book laid down by God which they must follow… There was no such law book, Rathor, he said. What existed, he said, was not written by God but by a silly society that would do anything for money.” (76)

Himmat Singh was a strange character. Always immaculately dressed, he was club-footed and was addicted to drop. Ratan recognized the oddness of the Sheikh: “Yes, he too was a man out of the ordinary. Not in the same sense as my father, of course, in a different sense my father, he said once, “were the two ends of the scale on which humanity's music was played.” (76) It was in Bombay that Ratan came to notice some of the oddities of this underground man. With his extra-large cigarette, his perpetual goggles, twisted lips and his rough, sarcastic voice which constantly mocked the world,
Himmat Singh was a man of extraordinary intelligence. The intelligence, made perverse by unknown suffering, ‘whipped out views that were at times shattering like lightning on a dark night.’ (81) He was a puzzle to Ratan who ‘never really got to know him.’

Yet, this man who was, to all outward appearances, evil possessed the power of drawing one out—as he did Ratan—‘as the so-called saints never could. (81) With a malignant fury in him, the Sheikh conducted his clandestine operations not to earn money or power but to destroy ‘everything from top to bottom, from one end of the continent to the other.’ (81) He was interested in Ratan’s life particularly his childhood. ‘Was it not intriguing,’ he asked Ratan, ‘that the son of a revolutionary should be doing what [he] was doing?’ (82) Something in the Sheikh’s voice touched Ratan and made him talk, in spite of himself, about his childhood, the Brigadier, his patriotic father and his martyrdom. He talked at length as if he was talking ‘to an old friend or, even, an older brother.’ (82) The heroic death of his mind and had transformed him into ‘a man of courage.’ Even before Ratan could finish, the Sheikh broke in and said in a jeering tone:

You are a fool, Ratan Rathor, he said, a fool or a great hypocrite. Why did I not admit, he said, that my father’s death had meant nothing to me? It might have shaken me up…It certainly had not meant to me what I said. (83)
The darkest and the most crucial part of Ratan’s confession, which deals with, the consequences of his crime for himself and for others-is made at the night before the Republic Day. Dogged by a sense darker than the darkness of the night.’ (100) For forty years he has kept ‘dancing in the shadows of truth, beating about the bush.’ (100) Now he is prepared to face the truth with all it horror and pain. With a mind ‘forgiver than a kettle full of steam,’ (101) Ratan makes the last part of his confession of the young man who listens silently and holds judgment.

The war was allowed to be lost. Hundreds of soldiers lost their lives in the battle-field. Rallies were organized to cover up the national shame: the political leaders made emotional speeches denouncing the Chinese perfidy and expressing their determination to defend the honour of the country. The Brigadier had returned from the war and suffered a nervous breakdown. Ratan went to visit his friend on New Year’s Day. He had spent the previous night in a house of ill-fame. Pleasantly drained of his passions, he ‘felt the need to redress the balance of [his] virtue.’ (101) But he was driven out of this self-complacent mood by the shock that awaited him in the Brigadier’s house. The man was in great panic, ‘scared out of his wits,’ (94) and was taken to the hospital. Ratan was not allowed to see him. ‘Great friends, they told [him], were usually the most harmful.’ (95)

His consecutive visits to the hospital and his encounter with the nameless multitude of maimed soldiers ‘for whom the war had not ended and
whose claim on a respectable existence, on love, on life itself, hung by a 
single thread that might any moment snap,’ (96) brought to Ratan the first 
glimpse of crime and its wider implications. The anonymous soldiers reminded 
Ratan of him: “like me, they did not understand what had happened to them.” 
(96) Once a dying soldier, groaning deliriously, caught hold of his leg and the 
awestruck Ratan felt ‘as thought it were my father and not a soldier that held 
my leg, that it was my father dying all over again.’” (97) But the greatest blow 
came when he met the Brigadier.

He seemed to Ratan to be ‘a caged, demented animal,’ (129) a 
rudderless ship moving on high seas. As he watched, ‘with a sense of doom,’ 
(103) the sick man taking leave of his sense, Ratan felt that ‘something, some 
priceless essence that [he] had known and honest moment in his life when his 
knowledge of the impending doom was mixed with the memory of his innocent 
youth, of the ‘autumn evening on an athletic field and in the growing dusk the 
cry of the nightingale.’” (103) It was the second time in his life after his father’s 
death when he suffered the pain of another person as his own. Recognition of 
the hell he had created for his friend horrified Ratan and led him not to spoken 
in a long time,’ “I shall be good. I shall not be greedy. I shall not be afraid. I 
shall be decent,” (103) he said to himself. It was like a bargain and Ratan was 
prepared to make any sacrifice for his best friend. But, ironically, when his 
prayer was granted and the opportunity to make amends came, he failed to 
avail himself of it.
The very next morning Ratan was summoned to the Police Station for interrogation in connection with the supply of defective war materials that had cost hundreds of lives, and was arrested on suspicion. All his self-righteous indignation and ‘arsenal of dissimulation’ (107) proved to be ineffectual when the S.P. stopped him and called him ‘a crooked liar.’ (108) Ratan had cleared those materials and had taken a bribe in return. Ratan's first reaction was the dread of humiliation and shame that any possible exposure of his arrest might cause him.

He thought of confessing and facing the consequences of his crime. But soon doubts assailed him: “Think, I told myself. Think before you act or you will end up doing something foolish. Why should you confess... How do you know he is not trying to frame you?” (110) A strange debate started within him between his conscience that was aware of his guilt and was ready to suffer and his sly, cocky self that was afraid of the consequences and was no yet prepared to accept responsibility: “What good would be confession do? The men who have died. And even if it were to do well, why should I go and 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. What were they able to do with the thousands who thieved, raped and murdered and got away? But his cowardice won at last suppressing the murmur of his conscience and Ratan convinced himself that “there was no point in confessing.’ (111) Instead, he started recalling the recent scandals of the
country and sought consolation from ‘annals of corruption.’ He assured himself: ‘If I had taken a bribe I belonged rather to the rule than the exception.’ (112) His next thought in the dark cell was, therefore, how to get out. All possible escape routes appeared to be blocked.

He could not think of any friend or relative who might help him to come out of the disgraceful situation. While sitting in the darkening cell with a steady decline of his hope, it dawned on him that in the great city, where he had spent twenty years of his life, there was none whom he could trust, confide in, and ask for help: “I was, I now knew, alone.” (114) But thanks to the powerful connections of the Sheikh whom Ratan telephoned at last, he was released.

Once out of the clutches of law, Ratan again fell back upon smugness, vanity and self-delusion. He was puffed up with the thought of his impending martyrdom for his friend who had once saved his life. He thought that he was not a petty criminal but a noble martyr who was ‘expected to make amends, to redress the terrible wrong that he had in flicked on so many men.’ (118) In retrospect, he realizes the insolence and stupidity of it all and says to his confessor, “There is no end to human vanity, my friend, or, that matter, to our stupidity.’ (117) For twenty years he had made bargains with life and had given himself over to bribery, lying and, even worse, debauchery.

Yet he behaved “as though all those had been peripheral romps, little adulteries of the soul that did not count.”(117) But soon his self-satisfaction and feeling of exultation disappeared and, as high advanced, the panic
returned. Fear stricken and restless, he woke his sleeping wife up and tried to speak about his confession showed his estrangement from his wife about failure of communication that, he now realized, he did not know much: “that night, afraid and uncertain, as I stared at her shapeless figure, I thought I looked at a stranger.” (119) With excruciating loneliness in his guilt-racked soul, Ratan spent the sleepless night as ‘the alternating blasts of bravado and cold fear’ (119) ravaged his soul. And all the while the squeaky voice hysterically egged him on.

The brief episode at the temple, where Ratan went to seek help and courage in the crisis of his life, shows his rejection of religion as a remedy for his malaise. Even the religious shrines were not exempt from corruption. The priest, the agent of God, offered him bribe to save his son, a dishonest contractor, who was facing trial for mixing too much sand in the mortar, toning down every insinuation of his personal guilt and leaving ‘escape routes...to wriggle out of the net,’ (125) and finally pocketed it without sending it to the authority at the appointed hour, proved Ratan’s cowardice and self-delusion which he passed for martyrdom and innocence by turns.

This failure to make confession and accept the moral responsibility of his crime only delayed his self-realization and resulted in the ultimate tragedy. The Brigadier could not wait for Ratan’s martyrdom: he committed suicide. According to R.W.B. Lewis, confrontation with death offers the heroes of many contemporary novels and opportunity of “getting at an honest and even a
positive estimate of life: (73) Meursault in ‘The Outsider’ came to realize the absurdity of his life and of the universe only after his dramatic confrontation with death. Clamence in ‘The Fall’ heard the insidious laughter behind him when he fled in panic from the drowning girl. It led him to recognize the deep-seated hypocrisy of his existence and to take on the role of the “judge-penitent.” Sindi’s self examination began after his encounter with death: that of Babu and June. And standing face to face with the grim vision of death Ratan realized that ‘something had gone seriously wrong with [his] life.’ (127)

The sight of the shattered skull of the Brigadier at the morgue struck him “as the vision of the vast pit at the bottom of which [his] life crawled. Like a worm,” (128) the vision extended beyond himself and included the entire generation, ‘a generation of cowards.’(129) It was a generation of men who had failed to uphold their honour and that of their country. The soldiers, like the Brigadier, had been the victims of the treachery of older men like Ratan. The Brigadier’s death served as a catalyst that shocked Ratan out of his moral inertia and initiated the process of inner responsibility of his gruesome crime.

A terrible fear ‘sent by someone, who had spoken to [him] earlier’ gripped him. He was afraid that he was going mad. Despite his ignorance and distrust of religion he came to learn: “God is not mocked…He has got a stick all right and not mocked sooner or later, some place or another, he still rap your knuckles.” (129)
Although he did not give up his play-acting and went on keeping up appearances, he felt alone and friendless in office and at home. He could not communicate his agony even to his wife and to his daughter for the fear that they would not understand him. So, “the silence remained. The panic remained. And I remained alone.” (130) A gloomy sense of painful and boundless isolation welled up in him and he felt, like Raskolnikov, that he had cut himself off from everything and everybody else. Ratan’s extreme helpless, his ineffable agony and solitude are also reminiscent of those of the ‘Ancient Mariner’:

   Alone, alone, all, all alone,
   Alone on a wide wide sea!
   And never a saint took pity on
   My soul in agony. ⁸ (II 232-35)

     This is the anguish of a man when he finds himself alone and robbed of all familiar ties and faced with the emptiness and darkness of his guilt-tormented soul. Ratan went through terrible days and nights devoid of peace, sleep and consolation: “no occurrence, no conversation, no visit of either friend or foe, no sleep, in spite of the sleeping pills that our good doctor gave me, no relief, no respite from the hands that pulled me steadily down towards those caverns where, I felt certain, the Brigadier had gone.” (130) The pangs of conscience had, thus, begun to rack him and his grief-crazed soul suffered inconsolably.
In desperation Ratan decided to take revenge, to redeem his honour and that of his dead friend. He rushed with a gun to kill the Sheikh whom he considered at that moment to be the villain of the peace and the root of his suffering. In the dramatic encounter that followed, the Sheikh’s role as Ratan’s mirror became clear once more. Infect of Ratan’s melodramatic threat to kill him, the Sheikh, his ‘scapegoat,’ (133) informed Ratan who was dying. The terribly sick man writhing in death agony told Ratan that he had come to the wrong place in search of the villain. Ratan had been ‘the victim of the most ancient of jokes that man has ever played upon other men.’ He had been ‘sold over, double-crossed’ (135) by none other than the Secretary himself. The whole idea of clearing the defective consignments had originated not with Himmat Singh but with the Minister and the Secretary. As they wanted a paw or an instrument, Ratan was picked on because he was a ‘spineless flunkey.’ (136) In a bantering tone Himmat Singh laid bare Ratan’s hypocrisy and self-delusion: “You are bogus, Ratan Rathor…from top to bottom. Your work, your religion, your friendships, your honour, nothing but a pile of dung. Nothing… but poses, a bundle of shams.” (137) At the end of this novel we find the real picture of Ratan who tells his friend as:

So, you see my friend here I am, a man without honor, a man without shame. Perhaps a man of our times.’ But there I go again. When we are pleased with ourselves we are ‘in advance of our times.’ ‘Pioneers of the age.’ When not pleased we are men of our times as though a criminal is any the less a criminal for being
chained to twenty others. To be a man of your times is a shrug, my friend, a shrug after which one may proceed to resume whatever rackets one is occupied with. (147)

The impact of Ratan's fall from innocence and virtues on his psyche had been devastating. But the experience had enlightened enriched and humanized him. The sense of the nothingness in the beleaguered and benighted by a desire to rejuvenate life. Joshi's heroes are impelled by some inner voice to search for light, for a way out of life's intricate labyrinth. He never gave the struggle there is a balance in his novels and it gave him the new identity to his heroes. This novel depicts, in a sense, modern man's crisis is sought to be resolved. Joshi is highly praised for his contribution and his novel 'The Apprentice' as:

Arun Joshi's is a peculiar talent and connoisseurs of style will have many things to say about The Apprentice'...there is the promise of new and vigorous personality in Indian English fiction.  

Thus, we find that the metaphysical speculations are absent in this novel, yet the concerns are related. Hari Mohan Prasad comments: Joshi develops a philosophy that works in practical life and is an offshoot of the doctrine of ‘Karma.’ the solution of the problems are not far away from the spiritual limits. Ratan could well have chosen a different place to begin his
apprenticeship other than the doorway of the temple. He is an apprenticeship to God as much as to men. He is just beginning his lesson from God.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Reply to Mr. Dua, dated September 3, 1971.


3 Arun Joshi, *The Foreigner*, Oriental Paperbacks, A division of Publication And distributors, New Delhi, 1974. p. 8. All the lines from the original text are used in this chapter for this research work.

4 Ibid., p. 42.

5 Ibid., p. 22.


9 Tribune, Calcutta printing Press, West Bangol, November 1975,