Chapter – 4

The Inner Awareness of the Human Soul

A Study of The Apprentice
The Apprentice (1974) Arun Joshi’s third novel explores deeper into the inner awareness of the human soul. It depicts the tormented attempt of a guilt-stricken individual to retrieve his innocence and honour. In all his novels, Joshi describes the painful predicament of his protagonists. In his first novel The Foreigner the protagonist Sindi Oberoi, an alienated rootless young man searches for his identity and roots, withdraws himself from all humankind. Finally, when his vision is clear, he returns to the human world from detachment to attachment, “Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved.” The Second novel The Strange Case of Billy Biswas, describes the withdrawal of Billy Biswas the protagonist, from the civilized society and emotionally dehydrated “upper-upper crust of Indian Society” which he belongs to. He finds himself the primitive society of the tribals into which Billy vanishes deliberately. And in The Apprentice (1974) Arun Joshi depicts the protagonist, Ratan Rathor, estranged from his unpolluted self and as a victim of money-minded corrupt society. Finally, he tries his amendment through humility and penance by wiping the shoes of the temple-visitors daily. In The Apprentice Joshi exposes 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. The novel is structurally similar to that of Albert Camus’ The Fall, which also depicts the pitiable plight of the contemporary man “sailing about in
a confused society without norms, without direction, without even perhaps, a purpose”^85 (TA 74)

*The Apprentice* is a confessional novel wherein the narrator-protagonist unfolds the story of his life in the form of an internal monologue. Ratan Rathor, who is both the hero and the antihero of the novel, probes into his inner life and exposes the perfidy, chicanery, cowardice and corruption of his own character in the mock-heroic novel. He is neither a rebel like Billy Biswas nor a rootless foreigner like Sindi Oberoi. He is a practical man who, getting his idealism shattered in the corrupt society, proposes to survive by sycophancy and practically adapts himself to the mysterious ways of the world. The novel is both a treatise on current social and political scene and lament of a distressed soul. The novel reminds us of Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times*. Here the social reality becomes the nucleus of the novel wherein Ratan, like Sindi and Billy, comes out yet another reflective introvert whose life corresponds to bitter social norms and consequently undergoes suffering and, of course, salvation towards the end. 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-independent India is the broad daylight of experience, the inferno of corruption, and the last part is the area of expiation, and is the door to the purgatory. Thus, the novel stands as psychological study of innocence, experience and expiation of the protagonist’s life.
The title of the novel, seemingly ordinary, in fact affords a clue to its nature and significance. *The Apprentice* deepens the meaning of the familiar world ‘apprentice’ to cover the entire effort of the protagonist to learn how to live a life both meaningful and purposeful, in the best sense of the term, in a society where all values seem to have been lost and there is actually none to guide, no master to whom one can attach himself for his guidance and a sense of direction. An apprentice is “a person who works for an employer for a fixed period of time in order to learn the particular skills needed in their job,” “a beginner, a novice.” He is essentially a diligent learner of a skill, craft, or trade leading to a vocation in the sense of a profession, a means of livelihood. But to a serious learner, whether of a craft or art, the process of learning can be never-ending. No one with any conscience can ever say that he as fully mastered what he set out of to learn. In this sense he remains a beginner, a novice who has miles to go. For such a person learning itself becomes a vocation, an all absorbing activity which gives meaning and significance to his life. Joshi employs the world ‘apprentice’ in this broadened sense of the term in the novel.

Ratan the apprentice of the novel himself explains in what sense he regards himself an apprentice in his middle age, and the nature, purpose and goal of the apprenticeship he has been piously pursing:

What am I apprenticed to? If I only exactly knew! Or if I could put into words what I do know. But life runs on
approximations and if an approximation will do, you could say that I am learning to be of use. I know it is late in the day. But one must try and not lose heart, not yield, at any cost, to despair. - - - what is to be of use? - - - I have only rough answer again - - - I would be happy if I could do what I do as best as I can. Without vanity and without expectations and also without cleverness. (TA 143)

Though we see the confessional note in Joshi’s other novels here it is only the central concern of the protagonist. What he chooses to do as best he can is to “learn to wipe the shoes well” (TA 144) of the visitors to the temple everyday. He is fully aware how hardship and humiliating this exercise. This unusual apprenticeship is not only not going to be easy but its results, which are expected to be mental, moral and spiritual, are not yielded easily and quickly either. Ratan is aware of it too. Having lived a life of false values for long, he has to educate himself from scratch in those true values of life which make life meaningful and purposeful. Further, to be of use not to himself but to others, the community and society, he forgets himself and thinks of others and his responsibility towards them. There is no end to this apprenticeship and Ratan may well remain an apprentice all through his life.

Joshi demonstrates that there is no self without society and that they are mutually dependent on each other. Even if one feels alienated or estranged from it, one has to return to it and accept one’s
responsibilities and obligations to it for one’s own good as well as that of society. Sindi Oberoi in *The Foreigner* had no roots anywhere and withdraws himself from all involvement in society until he could identify himself with Muthu and others of the Khemka enterprises, view him as one among them, and participate in their lives by helping them. Ratan on the other hand belongs to a nation and enjoys the security provided by his family and society in which he has his roots. But he feels alienated and estranged from them for a time, partly due to his circumstances and largely because of what he does and doesn’t do for want of a sense of direction and strength of conviction to choose the right course of action that is before him. He develops a sense of guilt which increases and becomes an unbearable burden as time passes by, filling his soul with torment and torture. Although he lives and moves amidst people, he feels lonely, morally isolated and estranged from them all and even from his essential self. He has none to communicate with to share his fears, failures and dilemmas. He feels guilty and lonely because he becomes a social and moral stranger. His salvation and remedy in society becomes possible only when he admits without hesitation, about his misdeeds and unburdens himself before someone who is able to understand and judge him without narrow-mindedness.

The exploration of a guilt-stricken conscious and compulsive forces that lead to confession as well as the relevance of confession to the tormented and confused hero are the major concern of modern
confessional novel. The confession serves a three fold purpose in Ratan’s case. The first, the need for confession is an attribute of criminal consciousness. By compelling the young student to listen to his grisly tale, Ratan regains some of the human courage that his crime had earlier robbed him of. Secondly, it offers him the possibility of cleaning his soul, the layers of filth piled upon it, during his ‘successful’ career as a government official. There can’t be a cleaning of the soul without any clear confession. Finally, through his confession he seeks to achieve a perception which is, however, deeply personal. Aptly Joshi casts Ratan’s story as first-person confessional narrative and makes the protagonist himself tell his story from his point of view. Ratan makes his confession to a young student, an N.C.C. cadet, who has come to Delhi a couple of months in advance of the Republic Day to participate in its parade. He is alert, intelligent, sympathetic but skeptical, and as yet untrained by the rot affecting his society. In the process of telling his story to this young man whom he meets by chance, Ratan tries to clarify to himself precisely want causes led to his own moral downfall. He also raises a number of pertinent questions which he asked himself sporadically on occasions and had not found satisfactory answers to them. Thereby he is able to achieve clarity of perception of himself, his society and the world in so far as an average man of his kind can achieve. The opportunity to talk frankly and at length over some weeks to his listener enables Ratan to regain his ability to communicate with his society, and his
responsibility towards it. He feels renewed and his faith in himself renovated.

In his retrospective narrative Ratan has to recall, though not through tranquility, many of his past experience and reconstruct them to the present, a connected narrative of his life to his listener. However a middle-aged man’s recollection of his experiences, especially those of his adolescence and youth, are apt to some degree to be different from the actual experiences. Thereby the authenticity of the recollections may become doubtful. Therefore recalling and narrating self has to keep itself judiciously apart from the experiencing self. This is a problem that all autobiographical narrators have to encounter and resolve. Ratan tides over it more or less successfully, because of intension to give a candid and truthful account of his life as far as possible. For over a year he has meditated over his life, examined it critically and assessed himself with sufficient detachment. He has realized the value of humility and his own significance, and been looking for an appropriate listener to the story of his life.

The novel, like Coleridge’s great poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, has a cause and effect structure. But it is not rendered entirely in chronological order. 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 of 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. These similarities have been noticed and commented upon, notably by Tapan Kumar Ghosh. But he tends to compare Ratan and Mariner in their experience of guilt, confession and liberation. But there are also some important differences that are noticed. Both bear a burden of guilt and are anxious to dislodge it and seek redemption through an honesty confession. Their guilt isolates and estranges them from society. What is worse is that they experience an extreme loneliness. The urge to confess is irresistible in both so that they may be purified by remorseful confession. But their manner of confession, the auditors to whom they tell their stories and the final outcome of the exercise are different. The Mariner is under a supernatural compulsion to confess. But he has no freedom to choose his listener; the wedding guest whom he addresses abruptly is predestined to be his listener. Neither the Mariner can escape confessing to him nor his listener can escape listening to him and absorbing silently the implication of the tale.

On the other hand, Ratan looks for an appropriate listener for telling his story and waits for months to find one, though things “for one long year burnt inside my skull, simmered in slow fire. And I could not find an audience for long.” (TA 141) He desires to find one who is alert, understanding and sympathetic. When he finds the young N.C.C. cadet unexpectedly on a Sunday evening near the Krishna temple, he feels that he is the one for whom he had been waiting for, and so makes an acquaintance with him at once. If the
Marnier begins at once and abruptly to tell his story to his listener almost at a breathless pace and completes it in one sitting. Ratan narrates his at own speed over some weeks and in several installments. That seems appropriate because his disintegration was gradual unlike the Marnier’s. He intends to trace the stages by which he descended into a life of corruption and settled in it, because there was a time when he was innocent and had sense of honor and some courage. It is his fond hope that the story of his corruption would serve as a warning to the younger generation on whom the future of the nation depends.

Nothing is in Ratan’s style of narration to suggest that he makes intentionally computed moves to make the young man listen to his confession with concentration, despite his anxiety that he should. For the Mariner telling his story is a part of the punishment for his crime. Every time he tells it he has to revive in mind the horror of it. Ratan too goes through a similar experience but he on his own tells his story to agree himself. Further, by the time he buttonholes the young man, the process of his redemption has already begun as he has been regularly at the penitent and purification shoe shining near the temple. Of course, at the end of his narration he is not fully redeemed man. Redemption is always a long-drawn out process for anyone, and one has to work out his salvation with conscientiousness, however Ratan can hope to be fully redeemed in God’s good time, and his confession itself is a part of the journey towards it. Significantly, when
he completes his story, he is hardly thinking of himself of his future. His thoughts are on the younger generation and its future, as it has to confront and survive in a degenerating society. He becomes a reliable narrator of his life as he avoids boundaries of self-protection and excessive and melodramatic self-criticism.

First-person confessional narratives are not new to Indian English novelists. But the narrative strategy that Arun Joshi adopts in *The Apprentice* is certainly something new in the Indian context, and justly invites scrutiny. The novel is shaped as a series of Browning-like dramatic monologues spoken by the protagonist-narrator to a listener. These monologues form the narrative body. This strategy has certainly definite advantages. It enables the protagonist-narrator to tell his dark story continuously and thus renovate and present a connected narrative of his life from the distant past to the present. Secondly, it helps the novelist to present dramatically the protagonist’s confrontation with his own self, inner and outer, probe directly into his psyche and lay it bare for the reader to see it without the mediation of another person. It conveys the best protagonist’s sense of inner compulsion and urgency to communicate and confess, and gives the entire narrative a like urgency.

All of Ratan’s monologues are naturally addressed to the listener. But the address himself too, especially when his narration takes an introspective turn dwells on such recurrent questions about right, wrong, etc. On the whole the monologues sustain the tone,
impression and atmosphere of an oral narrative addressed to a single listener. They also retain the language, the swiftness, and even the gestures of a man talking to his single listener. The role of this listener in the narrative which is chiefly spoken to him has not been properly understood by some critics. As believed by C.N.Srinath, He is not just “an Imaginary companion” whom “the narrator addresses now and then” “to break the monotony” of the narration. Joy Abraham endorses this opinion. As V.V.N. Rajendra Prasad supposes he is not “just passive” who listens, while “the narrator himself puts the questions and express the doubts that may arise in the listener’s mind.” In fact he has a visible and active role to play all along the narrative. He is an alert and intelligent listener and gets genuinely interested in Ratan’s story as it progresses. He responds to it sensitively. His active presence is felt throughout the narration. That he listens attentively to Ratan and punctuates the narrative every now and then by raising intelligent questions, although his voice is audible only to the narrator and not to us, are all understood in the very manner. Ratan tells his story, the turns it takes and the emphasis is acquired now and then. After all, the convention of the monologue requires that there is only one audible speaker. It does not follow necessarily that the audience is or should be passive and silent. Ratan only repeats the questions raised by his young friend.

Here are certain identifiable similarities in the narrative strategy and content between Arun Joshi’s *The Apprentice* and Albert Camus’
The Fall. Therefore V.V.N. Rajendra Prasad has stated that “The Apprentice is closely modeled on The Fall.” V.Gopal Reddy is content to hold that “one may unmistakably find in The Apprentice the impact of The Fall.” Regarding their similarities, both are confessional novels and employ the strategy of monologic narration. Their protagonists, Ratan and J.B.Calmence, confess in detail their hypocrisy, cowardice, clandestine activities, frustration and failures, and in short their moral degeneration. In the process they also unravel the widespread corruption of their times and hold disquieting mirrors to the collapse of moral values in their societies, if Joshi has borrowed the monologic technique from Camus he has made a significant variation rather than an imitation of it, and puts the device to a different use from that of Camus, his own artistic intention being different. Therefore there is not enough ground to assess that Joshi has closely modeled his novel on Camus’. In fact Ratan and J.B Clamence are conceived differently by their creators, and the difference is fundamental. How Ratan chooses his listener has already been seen. Clamence, who describes himself as a ‘judge-penitent’, actually intrudes upon a Frenchmen sitting at the next table at the bar and buttonholes him to listen to his story. Ratan tries to tell his story honestly without any cover up, deception and emotional behavior. He thus becomes a reliable narrator. Though he dwells on the corruption of his times and society, he holds only himself responsible for his misdeeds and tries to make amends for them.
Whereas J.B.Clamence is a stranger to frankness, honesty and determination. Unlike Ratan he is an intellectual and is conscious of it. He is subtle and cunning too. He is deliberately a deceptive narrator. He himself says, “It’s very hard to disentangle the true from the false in what I’m saying.”

His deal sign would be “a double face, a charming Janus, with the motto: Don’t rely on it.”

His “failures to meet his own grand moral crisis, when he once refused to go to the aid of drowning suicide become our general failures to accept moral responsibility.” Finally, Clamence wishes to bring out the “fundamental duplicity of the human being.”

There is no need to labor the point that Ratan in his intension as well as performance as a confessor is at the opposite end. In creating Clamence, Camus is concerned with the problem of honesty especially in confession.

It is very important for Ratan’s purpose that the young man to whom he tells his story becomes a willing and interested listener so that he may experience its full impact. He recounts his story in twelve installments, more or less chronologically to serve his specific objectives, which have been noted already, he selects only those details of his life which are strictly relevant and bear out the essential truth about him. He focuses on what he feels inwardly and on those events and persons who have affected him. Approximately four phases may be discerned in his life. The first phase covers his early life of innocent boyhood, youth and idealism, lived in a small town in the Punjab, under the protective care of his nationalist and Gandhian
father and his practical mother. The four monologues cover this phase of his life. The next four cover Ratan’s search for employment in Delhi, his trials, travails, and frustrations, having found a job, his becoming wholly obsessed with his career, and his turning unscrupulous in his relentless pursuit of it, compromising the ideals he had been brought upon. During this phase begins his prolonged and increasing experience of acute isolation, estrangement and loneliness, more mental than physical, which harass him despite his professional success and advancement.

The next phase of Ratan’s life is the most revealing. It tells of his steep moral fall, as if into a bottomless pit, not only does he get involved in shady transactions but betrays his best friend and benefactor, the Brigadier, whose life he could certainly have served had he chosen to admit his guilt in time and establish his friend’s innocence. As a result the long and accumulating guilt now becomes an intolerable burden. He feels trapped within him with none to communicate with, or confide in and share his agony and disillusionment. His conscience remains awake and keeps on warning him in squeaking his voice against the road to moral ruin he has chosen. This phase of his life is graphed by monologues nine to eleven. Monologue twelve, the last and longest and the most important, has for its burden Ratan’s experience of grief, remorse and repentance after his friend’s suicide, and his determined attempts to atone for his crimes.
All the monologues, as it may be seen, are inter-linked, continuous, and together form a unified whole. The opening monologue reveals a few significant facts. First of all is the Krishna temple. In its precincts Ratan performs his ritualistic shoe-shining every morning. It is here that he makes the acquaintance of the young man who becomes his listener. As many of the monologues are spoken in the temple vicinity, it serves as a significant backdrop to their conversation and also as a witness to the truth of Ratan’s confession. Secondly, this monologue reveals that the conversation takes places in winter, some few weeks before the Republic Day celebrations, after India’s debacle in the border war with China. Though the Republic Day is a day of national pride and celebration, this particular day in the context of Ratan’s story has ironical implications. Because the celebration is actually an attempt, though feeble, to cover up the ignominy of India’s defeat in the recent war. It is one of many instances of self-deception and hypocrisy of those in power in the country that the novel exposes. It is clear from this monologue that Ratan gets to know the young man by chance and not by design. His asking Ratan for direction to reach the “Grounds” sets the series of monologues into motion.

From the subsequent monologue onwards, which is spoken a week after the first, Ratan’s confessional story is gradually unfolded. He talks to his new acquaintance informally with appearing to be eager to know all about him or tell him all about himself, although
soon after getting to know him, Ratan must have found in him the most appropriate listener to his story. First, he builds up a close rapport with the young man before he ventures to tell him his story and getting him to be interested in it. In the first few monologues Ratan succeeds in rousing his interest in his story. If there is any advance planning as such in his narration, it is chiefly in them.

The young man, who too belongs to the Punjab, reminds Ratan of his own father, how he lived and why he sacrificed his life. So he tells him briefly about his father and mother. His father abandoned his fairly lucrative legal practice, gave away most of his wealth to follow the path of Gandhiji in the struggle for freedom. His worldly-wise mother was indignant at her husband’s folly. Ratan as a boy was “a witness to this difference,” (TA 8) which left its deep impress on his character and influenced the course of his life. As he grows older the memory of his father and his significance for him “grows more compelling every day.” (TA 7) In his brief conversation with his young friend, Ratan in passing refers to the India-China war, India’s loss of honor, and the government’s determination “to defend our honour.”(TA 6) The threatening significance of it and his incidental remark that “it is difficult to retrieve honour, once it is lost” (TA 6) becomes clear later when his story is fully told. For it has a deep implication for the nation as well as himself. It anticipates the twists and turns Ratan’s life takes to drive home to him the true meaning of ‘honour’ and how to be a man of honour.
Ratan’s story takes shape and progresses as he recalls significant event after event, as directed by the moment of confession and the association of memories it rouses. It gathers urgency and momentum as he proceeds, its direction guided by the questions raised by the listener, especially when Ratan tends to digress. From the third monologue his confession gets into its stride. He begins casually with a nostalgic reference to his carefree youthful days in the company of his friend. Thus he makes the first ever mention of the Brigadier who has always been on his conscience for betraying him. As the later monologues show, the most difficult part of Ratan’s task that is to describe this heinous act of his. But at this stage, he does not know how to go about it. Moreover he has to muster all courage first to narrate it without distortion and prepare his auditor to listen to it properly so that he may grasp fully its implications. Since his young friend does not know anything about the Brigadier, he resumes tentatively with, “Between Brigadier and me there were other things too,” (TA 9) but hesitates to elaborate at this moment. Instead, he reverts to talking about his own father in some detail, as the cadet wanted to know how he was killed, feeling perhaps to have an excuse to digress.

Ratan stays on the circumstance that led to his father’s martyrdom, and admits that he is yet to understand its full significance. Towards the end of his narrative he reveals that it is driven home to him by a most unexpected person, Sheikh, whom he
mentions now incidentally. He vividly describes how the satyagrahis comprising “multitudes, yellow with dust ragged poor people” (TA 10) who had come from distant villages voluntarily in the blazing sun to participate in the procession led by his father. They were all “a non-descript” crowd, but on that occasion they were “transformed them, into something grand, something more than what the wretched of the earth are normally allowed to become.” (TA 10) The Boy Ratan too, excited and frightened, jumped into the crowd and found himself close to his father. As he watched, his father was beaten by the police and later was shot dead at close range for defying the police command not to move. Ratan was a witness to his father’s martyrdom. These extraordinary moments of his courage and a sacrifice was “frozen” in his memory “as a moment of great silence.” (TA 12) This traumatic experience remained at the back of his mind throughout his career to remind him of his own cowardice and betrayal of his father’s ideals of courage, honesty and integrity in life. His description of this overpowering incident is remarkable for its vividness and reticence. Lest he should break down with this recollection of his father’s death, Ratan diverts his attention. However he refers to “a friend” in passing, apart from his father and the Brigadier, who affected him profoundly later. Perhaps it is the approach of the night and the describing dense smog and darkness that remind him of the Sheikh, “the prince of the underworld” (TA 14) who too is died. By the end of this monologue (the third) Ratan has introduced into his narrative the chief figures of his
life—his father and mother, the Brigadier, and the Sheikh—all of whom leave their impress upon him.

When Ratan and his young friends meet again, it is clear that the latter has become an interested and eager listener. Ratan now tells him a little more about the Brigadier, “probably the only friend I ever had.” (TA15) The occasion for it is the war with China, and the many pointless speeches made and platitudes indulged in by ignorant officials and politicians alike, and the Brigadier’s realistic view of it. The Brigadier, every inch a soldier, had known wars and was wounded several times. But this war with China worried him because “he knew, they would not win” and “he feared—the humiliation of defeat.” (TA18) To the implicit question of the listener about the Brigadier, Ratan merely says that he was not killed in the war. But he does not choose to say what actually happened to him after the war was over, probably because the Brigadier’s was no ordinary death, and the auditor has to know much more about the relationship between Ratan and Brigadier, and the deplorable changes that came about Ratan to understand the significance of his betrayal of his friend, and the magnitude of his guilt. He recalls nostalgically the days when he and the Brigadier grew together as carefree young men playing hockey, cycling, and swimming, talking of everything under the sun, and enjoying innocent fun. The Brigadier once saved his life too when he was ambushed and beaten by some boys. The irony of recalling this incident at this
moment becomes evident to the listener later when Ratan reveals that he betrayed the friend in need, when he needed his help most.

Soon Ratan was to move away from this pastoral life of innocence, spontaneous friendship and security, as yet untainted by selfish interests and ambitions, to go to Delhi to earn his livelihood. Before he embarked on this second phase of his life, when he was still in his hometown, memory of his father’s self is still fresh in his mind, he toyed with the idea of joining the “Movement” rather than seek career. The “sheer heroism of its contents” (P.18) appealed to him. His mother who never minced words told him not to make a fool of himself, but think of earning money. Ratan’s mother always says,

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. If I had everything and had no money I would be little better than a beggar’s shoe. 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)

Though this advice finally prevailed, he would not give up at once his ambition to follow his father’s example little realizing that he never had his father’s mental and moral equipment, will and selflessness. Swept off his feet by his vaporous enthusiasm and
patriotism, he thought of joining Subhas Bose’s army to fight the British, dreaming of fame, greatness, and a glorious future. Having gone some distance towards the secret recruiting center, he became afraid of failure and returned home, though ashamed of his own cowardice. In retrospect he is struck by the stupidity and absurdity of this heroic adventure of his and its humiliation. This incident reveals his innate timidity, cowardice and inner deficiency, and also his absorption in himself when he was supposed to be thinking of the nation’s cause.

In the next meet, Ratan tells his listener about the next phase of his life when he was flung unaware of the world of youthful inexperience, impractical idealism, dreams of honour and greatness, into the world of harsh realities where the ideas of right and wrong, honour, usefulness and service he had been taught were treated with cynical indifference and contempt. Though disappointed with himself for having failed to join Bose’s army, Ratan with youthful optimism hoped that something “dramatic” would occur and that he would be “called” to do great things. To Delhi, “a city of opportunities,” he made his way confident of getting a suitable job with help of those known to his father. And he expected to make “a mark on the world, a mark as visible and striking as my father’s.” (TA 23) Disappointed by every one of them, he had to make his own efforts to find a job to be hopelessly disappointed there again. Of necessity he had to stay in a cheap Sarai with five others, all working men and illiterate expect one who was a
stenographer. Ratan was struck by the sheer contrast between himself and them. He feels:

What got me down, wiped the laughter off my face, so to speak, was that they all worked, earned, spent, and I had no job. I, who was the most educated of them all, would soon be on the streets, a failure, an incompetent, penniless fool. (TA 25)

Of course Ratan enjoyed their company, but the snob in him could not be wholly comfortable in their inferior company. He, now repentant, confesses his dilemma to his listener. He considered himself better than them in education, polish, and intelligence. But he also knew that such men as these:

I had no doubt that the company of these men, who I knew had formed the backbone of my father’s processions and were always the first to be teargassed or shot in the stomachs, I had a little doubt they were pulling me down to a baser plane. And my biggest dread was that I shall fail to get a job and be indefinitely tied to their company. (TA 26)

But he feared that he might remain forever in their company since all his efforts to find a job were in vain. To cover up his confusion and sustain his mask of superiority, he pretended to have found a job and told them large stories about it. Only later in life in
self-scrutiny he realized the enormous damage he had done himself by what then seemed to be harmless lying. He tells his listener:

I had added a new dimension to my life. I had become, at the age of twenty one, a hypocrite and a liar; in short, a sham - - - for once I had lied about having a job I had to lie about numerous other things, like food, clothing, why I did not want to go to the Cinema and so on. From morning till night I told more lies than truths. I had become a master faker. (TA 27)

Though it seemed harmless then, faking could become in course of time a habit and make one a hardened liar. In the light of Ratan’s subsequent course of life and his hot pursuit of a career, his innocent lying could be seen as marking the beginning of his apprenticeship to a life of deception and corruption. The utter fatigue of hunting for a job in vain and the humiliation experienced in most places resulted in Ratan’s falling seriously ill. During his illness his Sarai companions, the very people whom he regards as his inferiors, looked after him until he recovered. This ought to have been an eye-opener to him but instead he was embarrassed. An additional humiliation was that during his illness all his pretensions of having a job were revealed. But his companions made no fuss about it and thought that his pretense was pointless. Ironically the stenographer, one of his Sarai mates, no particular significance finally found for Ratan the position of a temporary clerk in a department of war purchase in defense.
The selfish snob in Ratan became active again after getting a job. He shifted from the Sarai to lodgings and as he feels “I considered more appropriate to my class.” (TA 31) As a sop to his conscience he told himself that he was of course thankful to his Sarai friends for their help. But that did not mean that he should be associated with them forever. After all he “was a different cut: educated, intelligent, cultured and it was my right that I should rise in life, to levels higher than the others aspired for.” (TA 31) The most shocking was his moving house without taking leave of the turner who had taken care of him during his illness and who at that moment was away. He avoided all contacts with his Sarai mates but for an occasional meeting with the stenographer. With amazing speed and without any regret, he could turn his back upon them and forget altogether the natural solidarity and kindness they had shown to him. He could even invent specious arguments to justify himself, and view those months in the Sarai as a temporary setback to his progress. His conduct towards them amounted to a betrayal of his benefactors, a foretaste of his subsequent betrayals, though on a small scale, the worst being his betrayal of the Brigadier. His moral hollowness and stupidity could be partly due to the dehumanizing effect of the corrupt urban environment he had got into. From the time Ratan got employed the process of his isolation and estrangement from his fellowmen began. He also became more and more self-centered and selfish. Initiated into the mysteries of his job by his boss the superintendent, he could feel quite at home in the new environment as well as win in no time the
approval and favor of his boss. In retrospect Ratan could realize that his instinct for several, his docility, servility, his sycophancy and his strangeness to please his superiors, were responsible for his quick success. These came to him with the same naturalness and effortlessness as “rebellion” came to his father. Of course he was also hardworking and efficient, which many other clerks in the office were not. As rewarded for his competence and usefulness, he was confirmed in service and given many “unique” assignments to the envy of his colleagues. They called him names but he was indifferent, for he had come to Delhi only for a career.

Once secure in his job, Ratan could forget altogether those days of despite struggle to find a job when even mere survival seemed impossible. The pursuit of a career gripped his mind. Its ominous power over him was proved on the day he let down two of his senior colleagues who along with him had been overburdened with work without any compensation for it. Ratan was at first indignant of a possible promotion and a bright career held before him by his bosses did the trick. And he decided to let down the two clerks. Ratan tells his listeners mysteriously, “the die was cast” and he was launched “up on the solemn and relentless pursuit of a career. Bourgeois filth. Careers and bourgeois filth.” (TA 38) What means adopted, did not matter. His apprenticeship to a life of deception and material gain began to pick up velocity.
What makes Ratan’s character three dimensional and interesting is that he was not without doubts and misgivings about his unscrupulous pursuit of a career. His wakeful conscience raised from time to time inconvenient questions about what he was doing and means he adopted. Its voices were feeble but could not be silenced or muffled. Without an alert conscience he could not have felt any sense of guilt which became for him in course of time intolerable burden, the “Albatross” hanging around his neck. Later his fully awakened conscience would not leave him in peace until he sought ways of redeeming himself. He still remembered men of exemplary self-abnegating pursuits whom he had known, those:

There were men I knew of who had pursued truth, whatever it might have meant to them. There were others who had devoted life-times to art or public service. Still others who had suffered endless privation, even death, for a thing called freedom. And, of course, there were those who, in the face of the world’s indifference, had chosen to expend their lives in the pursuit of goodness. (TA 39)

There were also moments when he “saw nothing but filth” around him and had violent and rebellious thoughts. But he soon calmed down to ask himself whether there was anything he could do, or could he do anything at all? How could he ever get away from the surrounding filth? There were certainly honest doubts and not easily answered. But lacking the will-power and sense of purpose of his
father and those like him, he easily succumbed to the pressure of circumstances, and silenced, perhaps a little too soon, the turbulence in him. As an anticlimax to his honest doubt, now his worldly-wise thoughts were:

What was to be done? One had to live. And to live, one had to make a living. And now how was a living made except through careers. Thus the turbulence always died until it ceased to erupt altogether. I never found an answer. Nor have I found one now. (TA 39)

At present that Ratan had made career the goal of his life, the process of his life isolation and estrangement from his fellowmen which had begun when he unceremoniously turned his back upon his Sarai friends, gained momentum from the time he let down his colleagues in the office. An immediate change in him was a hardening of his sensibilities and indifference to the resentment of his colleagues. It was clear to him that he could not take any changes regarding his career. And he got the rewards for his obedience to his bosses, and was promoted to a higher position. He learnt that

The right or the wrong of the side one took was not in question, nor were there touchstones by which one chose. No morals were involved. It was the skill in manoeuvre that mattered. One was like a sailor on a lake, concerned
not with the destination but only with the manipulation of the sails, the riding of the wind. (TA 41)

Ratan began to taste power which fed his ego. A brief note by himself nearly drove a contractor bankrupt and rendered helpless his friends among the higher-ups. When he turned down a bride of ten thousand rupees offered to change his noting, he “felt both righteous and proud”, though the bride offered could have met many of his needs. His refusal was not motivated by any sense of doing what was morally right and just. It was actually an act of egotistical pride and vanity disguised as an act of impartial justice. It must be however said to Ratan’s credit that he also felt somewhat sad and disturbed.

Ratan was shocked by the contradiction that the same world which once drove him from pillar to post only to refuse him a petty job, now was absurdly on its knees to bribe him to make him change his note which, as all knew, was true to facts. The world seemed to be “a place without law, a planet turning in the darkness, going heaven knew where.” (TA 42) The superintendent’s enigmatic explanation for the moral confusion around only added to Ratan’s perplexity. He said:

You know, Rathore, nothing but God exists. You can be certain only of Him. He meant that there was no point in looking for truths aside from the truth of God. Money in the world always changed hands. God was only concerned
with what one did with the money. Did a man...use it for
good purposes? (TA 42-43)

But Ratan, who had not as yet forgotten his father for whom the
nobility of means was as important as the noble ends sought, could
not be satisfied with the superintendent’s explanation. His question
had not been answered:

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? And what about
the consequences, consequences for what was termed as
the ‘character’ of the given and the taker? Or, was
‘character’ just a myth---? And did the Superintendent at
all consider the consequences of a wrong noting for other
people, strangers, people that you did not even know
existed. (TA 43)

Implicit in all these questions genuinely troubling Ratan’s mind
is the question of one’s responsibility to one’s fellowmen and one’s
society, since one did not live in isolation but in the midst of people,
and whatever one did invariably affected others too, as Ratan’s father
used to remind him. Ratan was to find answers to some of these
questions by the hard way in course of time. For the present the
oracular utterance of the superintendent left a wide breath for one to
interpret as it suited one’s convenience.
The mature Ratan, grown wise and humble after prolonged and scrupulous self-analysis of his own motives and actions, realizes how he himself succumbed to the widespread amoral, utilization and commercial attitude to religion and God, acknowledging. His existence, visiting temples regularly, donating sums of money to religious institutions, a compensation for what one had done, and pursuing with a free conscience, with vigor one’s selfish materialistic pursuits without a thought of what harm he did to others directly and indirectly. It was tacitly assumed that God “seems all, but does not necessarily at the same time judge. His judgment...comes only in spurts, if it comes at all, and can be influenced with a lump sum. All you need is the wherewithal and a broker.” (TA 44) What Ratan says amounts to a severe indictment of Indian society since independence, in which even religion is turned into a transaction, a bargain, while such values as honesty, integrity, service and the like are forgotten. But young Ratan intents on his career and easily susceptible to influences compromised like most people and accepted the superintendent’s explanation of God’s ways. The gain of the compromise he had made was soon to manifest. The superintendent tricked him into marrying his niece and saw to it that he was made an officer sometime after as the reward for it. If the insinuation made by his colleagues about his degrading marriage hurt him, he could ignore them; he had become “a man of ambition. Not the vaporous ambition of his adolescence --- but the cold calculated ambition of hardened man” (TA 49)
Ratan’s narration now reaches a difficult phase. He cannot articulate with ease and coherence as a number of issues personal and public get tangled up. This phase is concerned with the India-China war. Ratan is promoted to dwell on it by the listener who wants to know about Ratan’s conduct during the war. Ratan characterizes it as “nothing if not exemplary.”(TA 52) The explosive irony of this affirmation becomes clear when he elaborates on it. The very tone of his narration brings out his self-mockery and irony. In retrospect he realizes the sheer dishonesty, hypocrisy and deception of his conduct, his heroic gestures, the loud-mouthed platitudes and patriotic speeches, outbursts of indignation, demonstration of love for his fellow citizens, donation of blood, and contribution to the war is fund. They were all instance of his histrionics and a mask to cover up his perfidy which he reveals later. He also fabricated an article titled "CRISIS OF CHARACTER" (TA 54) claiming to trace the root cause for India’s downfall to the failure of “INDIAN CHARACTER.”(TA 55) This article is a parody of composition, full of clichés and grandiloquence, a hotchpotch of pieces gathered from second hand and third hand sources.97

Once referring to the declamatory and rhetorical flourishes of his article-a comic document written with an amazing cocksureness - Ratan knocks out a bolt by his startling revelation to his listener:

You see, to cut a long story short, just before the war started I took a bribe. An enormous bribe. Yes, Mr. Crisis
of Character took an enormous bribe. No more, no less.

(TA 57)

In this sudden surprise of Ratan’s there is a touch of drama, but it is justifiable because he is not acting but trying to impress upon his auditor a bitter truth about himself as forcibly as possible. This revelation would have been ‘anticlimactic’ had it been about something trivial. But there is something more in Ratan’s document than his hypocrisy and self-deception. While the account of India’s glorious past is all garbled, his onslaught on the corruption of the times, though verbose, has a hard core of truth in it in the sense that Ratan knows about it first and as an insider. Therefore the document is as much directed against him as against the corrupt society of which he is a product; through he might not have been aware of it at the time of writing it. Or, it could be a camouflage to cover up his own moral lapses. As Tapan Kumar Ghosh observes, his failures “to face his moral crisis in his life is symptomatic of a whole generation to accept moral responsibility.”

Ratan did not know why he took the bribe, because he had no need for it. He was no stranger to unscrupulous, unethical and fraudulent conduct towards others for personal gain. But his taking the huge bribe, though an extraordinary act, did not mark “the lowest point to downward movement” as Tapan Kumar Ghosh believes. All his frantic and exaggerated patriotic exercises were obviously attempts to stifle his guilty conscience. And hence he feels “somewhat lighter”
after he reveals his guilty act to his listener. As this young man would like to know in better detail what could have motivated Ratan take the unwanted bribe, he probes his own mind and heart, despite the hurt it cause, for an answer to the question which cannot be evaded. Having taken the bribe, he could not be at peace with himself. He himself was puzzled by what he did. His conscience, awake though not always energetically active, kept on pricking him, continued to caution him and raise uneasy questions from time to time. To it he owed his accumulating sense of guilt which became keen and unbearable. Ratan had to ask himself what had happened to him between his earlier and blunt refusal of a bribe by the contractor, when he had of the money, and his later acceptance of it when he had none at all.

In an effort to find an answer to those questions Ratan looks back at his own career between the days of independence and the India-china war. He notes that many undesirable changes had taken place in himself and in the social, political and moral environment of the country, and become gigantic. As the private and public worlds were inextricably connected, what happened in the one also happened in the other. As Ratan puts it:

The wide world and me. Me and the wide world. But how can one separate the two. The wide world took me in its wake, overwhelmed me, and smothered me. As simple as that. I am no giant. A pigmy, if anything. One of those
dwarfs that follow the processions. As best a bystander.

(TA 62)

The novelist uses the occasion of Ratan’s retrospective account to present artistically a sharp but restrained analysis of the moral degradation of the post-independence generation. Keeping the focus unswervingly on Ratan, who is anxious to know what wrong with him rather than with the society at large, Joshi makes Ratan’s personal failure a reflection of the failures of an entire generation to accept moral responsibility and live up to the ideals and values of the pre-independence generations. Ratan as confessional narrator describes without exaggeration and with restraint what he saw, heard and did, his puzzlement and confusion at the chaos that enveloped him and his society, where corruption had become almost institutionalized. It is at this stage that the advice of his father comes back to Ratan’s mind: "Be Good, Be decent, Be of use." (TA 143) At first he is confused about the ways and means of spiritual rehabilitation and getting rid of the crookedness of the world.

Ratan seeks the remedy for his soul’s melancholy through his flight from the treacherous society and in detachment. He remains in the profligate society of which he was a part and learns to be of some use to others. He begins the process of a novel evolution in his inner world by cleansing the filth gathered on it and realizes the God within him who’s other name is Truth. The choice is entirely his own taken by himself without any external pressure. The means he has adopted
is selfless service which according to Gandhi is the greatest religion of man. Thus Ratan's strange apprenticeship would lead him. He has learnt through his painful trust in life, the meaning of his advice: "Whatever you do touches someone somewhere." (TA 143)

Ratan begins his scrutiny of his times with an account of the elation, hopes and expectations that the advent of freedom generated in all people. He and others like him worked enthusiastically and sincerely night and day. What is important is that he is punished by his own conscience much more than any court of law ever can. Finally Ratan is able to pursuit, and acquire a sharpened awareness of himself, his morning which he had lost for a time. He realizes the imperative need for relatedness as an individual as well as a social being. He reaches the conviction that the only sustaining basis for action is that it should be of use to oneself and others. In dusting the shoes of the congregation at the temple every day, he finds such an activity which reclaims his humanity and brings him back to the fold of his society from which felt he had been isolated and estranged. Thus largely by his own effort he is restored to the community. It is like the prodigal returning home. Ratan also affirms quietly that however depressing and disquieting the present may be, given the will and readiness and to learn, it is still possible to survive and make sense of one's life. Thus at the end of The Apprentice, Ratan Rathor, emerges as a positively changed man, grown mature in outlook, and socially responsible person. M.K.Gandhi in his autobiography 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, it is a purest type of repentance."\(^{101}\) This type of repentance is evidently seen in Ratan's character toward the end.

At the end Ratan a man without shame and honour, "perhaps a man of our times" (TA 144) tell his young and still unpolluted listener that though the present is miserable and the future uncertain, there is still a ray of hope. He pins hope on the youth of the country who are willing to learn from the follies of their elders, "there are young men willing to learn from the follies of their elders. Willing to learn and ready to sacrifice. Willing to pay the price." (TA 144) The novel significantly ends at dawn: "It is cold dawn. But no matter. A dawn, after all, is a dawn." (TA 144)

Ratan who is in search of his self, finally realizes his self at the end. He is now a man with commendable sensibilities, who after rediscovering himself wants to dedicate himself to the welfare of the society. The novel The Apprentice is a powerful indictment of the omnipresent corruption in India as well as a human story with a stark message. O.P.Mathur remarks, "Ratan Rathor's penance is not physical but spiritual. He is willing to pay the price by suffering humiliation."\(^{102}\)