GANDHIAN IDEOLOGY VERSUS CROOKED BELIEFS

The Apprentice is a close account of the post-independence Indian social conditions and the facts that have moulded the young generation. It closely examines, through the eyes of the Protagonist Ratan Rathor, the changes in the Indian socio-political system not only in the post-independence India but also contradicts and draws parallels between pre-independence India and post-independence India. The ideology of Gandhi that was based on truth, non-violence, honesty, simplicity and accountability, has been replaced by the crooked beliefs and practices in the post-independent India. According to Gandhi, it were the means that defined the ends but in the post-1947 era, the values have changed. Whatever leads to rich us, to success, as defined today, is justified. So, the corruption, violence, unaccountability and dishonesty have become rampant.

The novel narrates the story in the form of a monologue of Ratan Rathor addresses to the young student, telling details of the truth, the truth of post-independence India. The issues raised by Ratan Rathor are not political to a great extent but, in reality, the story is more related to values and ethics the young generation is adopting today. The situation becomes more questionable when the young generation is torn between different beliefs and ideas. The independence movement was driven by
selflessness, the sacrifices of the comforts and luxuries, based on the belief that I sacrificed my today for young generation’s future.

The novel depicts that every new nation that emerges out of problems and exploitation after many years, has the three-fold history. The history is comprised of three stages. At the first stage of Indian independence struggle, it was idealism that was the motto. Then came the period of maturing of the nation, during which the Gandhian philosophy was replaced by “Utilitarianism”, of which Gandhiji himself was a strong opponent. In the third phase comes the empowerment of the common people. In it, the accountability and honesty of the part of the state machinery and its agents are sought and anyone who has been involved in corruption or other illegal activities has to feel sorry in front of the common masses of the nation. It is, in fact, the repentance one has to show to the public. On the other hand, the developmental mode of the nation and its aforesaid three stages are comparable to human development. They can also be understood in terms of the Freudian concept of child development from childhood to adult and then to old age. Three stages of personality development are also associated with identity-formation in the life of the human being.

The child’s development is initiated by the parental support and understanding internalised by the child. In the internalisation process, the culture, values, ethics and the morels of society, in which the child
is born and brought up, play a dominant role. Freud also discusses that if the parents are of contradictory nature, it has a negative impact on the development of the child and the child may probably become abnormal if proper preventive measures are not taken at the right time. The case of the protagonist Ratan Rathor is something like that. It is to be kept in mind that Ratan Rathor is not an individual person alone. Rather he is representative of the whole young generation of post-independence India.

Ratan Rathor--the protagonist of The Apprentice-- is an inheritor of two philosophies. On one side is the philosophy of his father who was influenced by the Gandhian philosophy of idealism. He was a lawyer by profession and could have lived a happy life with his small family and could have left great property to Ratan as his heir. But he did not continue the practice of law after coming in contact with Gandhi ji and left it to join the independence struggle marked by the ideology of Gandhi that was based on idealism. This idealism was based on the theory of simple living and high thinking. Ratan’s father left behind for Ratan the legacy of simplicity and sacrifice. He was killed during the independence struggle, leading a procession.

The mother of Ratan Rathor was a down-to-earth lady and had a practical approach to life. That is why she asks Ratan to earn the money and argues that compared with wealth, everything else is
pigmy. This fact can also be inferred from the argument she advances to Ratan when she remarks: “Don’t fool yourself, son. Man without the money was man without the worth. Many things were great in life but the greatest of them was the money” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 20).

She continues in the same vein: “...it was not the patriotism but the money that bought respect and brought the security. Money made friends. Money succeeded where all else failed. There were many laws but the money unto itself was a law” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 18).

Besides mother and father, a brigadier influences the mind-formation of Ratan Rathor. The brigadier’s episode is there in his mind because of the importance Ratan gives to him. The episode took place in Ratan’s childhood when some miscreants tried to manhandle him. It was the brigadier’s selfless love that rescued Rathor. Hence, selfless love of the brigadier helps haunting Ratan Rathor.

The protagonist Ratan Rathor like other young people of contemporary period is torn apart by the ideologies of Idealism and utilitarianism. Hence, the identity-conflict was inherent in their personality make up.

The post-independence India is marked by a simply transfer of power from the white elites to the Indian elites and the functioning of the system remained unchanged from the British Raj to the “Baburaj”. The continuity and change are the basic elements of society and they
are automatically transferred from one ruling class to the other with the passage of time. The other notable change that took place in society was the new meaning of success, acquired more out of the influence of “Individualism” of the west where the success was measured in terms of property, wealth and size in the fast moving, competitive world order. In it, to accumulate wealth and succeed leg pulling and back-biting had become the established norms in this period. Indifference to morality and social values and ethics had become the accepted norm of life.

Gandhi ji may not be the inspiration of the youth but Gandhi is still living with the people. Today’s Gandhi ji may not be in the heart but he lives on currency notes. Gandhism is converted to Goondagardi but time has its own discourse to prove that the Gandhism may not be there but “Gandhigiri”, as depicted in the film Lage Raho Munna Bhai, will certainly be cherished.

In the initial part of the novel, the most important aspect that emerges is that Ratan Rathor has cowardice in his nature. It is not known as to why he is cowardly. But this flaw of cowardice in Ratan’s personality makes him struggle with the identity-crisis. In fact, he was unsure of his true identity. He could not himself decide which way to go and if going were inevitable, he did not from home to do it. His is a divided self. His ego instincts pull him in different directions. And he
does not know which way to go and whom to follow: father or the mother. As a result of the confrontation between the two beliefs, he has been reduced to a split self.

The most ironic situation arises when he decides to join Subhash Chandra Bose’s Army and he starts thinking that he has started to move in the right direction towards his destination. Hence, he announced: “I am excited for the long journey...” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 21). But just after “moving a few miles comes the sweating and exhaustion” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 21). He breaks up and weeps. While weeping, he broods whether he made for such hardships of life or for enjoying the luxuries of life?

He sits and talks to his mother. The mother, as in history all mothers did, said that she wanted to see his son in comfort and happiness and she puts a ray of hope in his mind. She asked Ratan to approach the acquaintances of his father in Delhi who could help him to find a job in Delhi. He comes to Delhi and moves from one place to the other but everywhere he was “interrogated, examined” but he was interrogated and examined only to be “rejected” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 30).

Now Ratan could relate the post-independence India to the Independence struggle and realise how this short span of time the very ethics and philosophical pillar of the nation: simplicity, idealism and
efficiency had been replaced by opportunism, treachery, dishonesty and inefficiency. At this juncture, he remarks: “The nation for which his father has laid down his life was a nation of frustrated men sailing about in a confused society, a society without norms, direction, without even, perhaps a purpose” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 74).

The wind of changes that he witnessed made him even more frustrated and perplexed. The frustration is reflected in his anguish while talking to the student: “There is nothing in the world as sad as the end of the hope, not even the death” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 26).

His short sojourn to Delhi changes his personality changed for ever. It is reflected in the statement when he confesses: “I had added a new dimension to my life. I have become a hypocrite and a liar at the age of twenty one” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 28).

From now onwards, the personality of Ratan Rathor starts degrading, his personality has changed, his identity is under threat and everything crumbles. However, it is to be noted that though the personality of the Ratan is undergoing changes for the more, yet the Gandhian idealism is still with him, because whatever he may have become, at least he is sincere in his confessions. He never blames others for his supposed failure, though they might be actually at fault. Herein lies the greatness of Ratan. He has learnt at least advocacy of
truth from the Gandhian philosophy. True confession and the habit of not blaming others bring him close to the character of Dr. Faustus.

His confession of his degeneration, adds new dimension to his personality. Though he thinks aloof from the society and the friends he succeeds in getting the job of a clerk in the department of war purchases. From this point onwards, he wish to have a new identity altogether. The story of the protagonist of the novel, from now onwards is not that of his alone. Instead, he becomes the spokes-person of the young careerist generation. He like a careerist finds the mantra of success and the mantra of success for him is stitching to the boss.

He forgets his seniors, who are academically higher than him, because he considers himself superior to others now. For him, the meaning of life is going up and up, getting promotion after promotion by keeping the boss happy in all manners. He gives a dog like obedience to his master. He finds that in this fast-moving competitive world, it is the secret of success. The world knows the identity by the power and the power that comes through money or the order that one could pass to his juniors. Accordingly, he thinks aloud: “Some survive through defiance, some through ability. Still others through obedience, by becoming a whore or becoming the servants of the power of the world” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 35).
He no more bothers what the others say about him. He is deaf blind to everything, except to the orders of the boss. Ultimately, the boss for him is god. He is indifferent to what other tell about him. Ratan Rathor is now a big man. He has grown one shameless. Hence he shamefacedly tells the young student: “I am a thick skin now, a thick skin and a wash out but, believe me, my friend. I too have thoughts such as these. But what was to be done? One had to live. And to live one has to make a living. And how was a living to be made except through the careers” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 46).

The new mantra of success has not come to Ratan in a short span of time. Rather the circumstances have compelled him to do what he was doing. Till yesterday, he was a rejected person, to be interrogated, examined and rejected but suddenly he has become efficient. The fault is not with the protagonist but with the system. But none has the guts to blame the system, since everyone wants a good career and promotion.

The Gandhian view that the means which define the end has been substituted by the new theory in the post independence India that the ends define the means. If one attains a high, the means one has adopted to reach it are automatically is justified. This contradictory but self evident fact is the bitter truth of modern times, irrespective of whether one accepts or ignores it.
The identity of the self is not formed in a short time. Instead, it is an attribute of the maturity of life and one takes a considerable time to mature of the self. Ratan Rathor is now a grown-up man. The growth in society depends upon the social circumstances prevalent in it.

The Gandhian idealism has been replaced by utilitarianism and the latter is based on the theory of capital formation. As per its dictates, Ratan’s mother had warned him: “Don’t befool yourself, son...The man without the money is the man without worth” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 50). In his present situation, the legacy of his father seems to be of no use to Ratan. He must have thanked her mother on this careerist journey since the advice she had given to him at his tender age later became the guiding principle for his success.

The identity that Ratan has acquired is now in keeping with the mother’s advice. What went wrong, however, is that the mother had discussed only the end and had not mentioned the means. The latter merely found by Ratan on his own. If the identity of Ratan is not appreciable, it is not Rathor who is to be wholly blamed but the society and the system have to equally share it. His self degenerated because he could not rightly choose out of the two self-contradictory philosophies of his mother and his father and there was none in the society to show him the proper way to reconcile the two ways of life.
The other perception that surfaces up about the post-independence Indian society is of unemployment that has gradually crept into it. One can hardly decide whether the common man as the policy-makers is responsible for it. To a great extent, Ratan seems to be when he states that one has to live and to live one need a career. The absence of it living is a threat to the identity itself to establish the identity one has to pursue a career. Hence, the protagonist does so to the maximum possible.

But, in its pursuit, Ratan becomes too ambitious to make a distinction between the good and the bad. He is bound exclusively to the interest and happiness of his boss. He erroneously thinks that if the boss is happy, the staff will be naturally happy; his ambitions had him to betray even his friend. On a promise of confirmation from his bosses, this insult by the friends has very little effect on him. Normally the day one’s refuse to have tea with one should be the most insulting day for an employee. But, to utter surprise, it does not affect Ratan at all. There could be no worse insult for an employee, and it could have been a turning point for many others but strangely for Ratan, it is a common things that happens to a fast-moving careerist. Many like him hold that when people start criticizing, it is time to believe in the progress of the venture undertaken. Hence, they opine that advance criticism should be ignored to somehow achieve the desired goal.
The utter servility people showed to him also amazed Ratan. He was confused by the way of the world and confided his doubts and fears to the superintendent, his mentor. But the latter’s reply leads to confusion worse confounded, it is what he says: “You know, Rathor he said, nothing but God exists. You can be certain only of Him” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 45).

He further admonishes him: “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” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 45).

But Ratan couldn’t accept an explanation that gave no cognisance of the purity of means and the consequences of one’s actions. His perplexity knew no bounds and he wondered: “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?” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 45).

Here, is evinced an indelible impression of the Gandhian values on Arun Joshi. For Arun Joshi, it is the means that justify the end and their sanctity is all important. But the superintendent neither believed in the validity of the means nor did he give cognisance to the consequences of one’s actions. At this juncture, it seems that there is a
metamorphosis in the nature if Ratan, but the truth belies it. He has not changed at all. On the contrary, he has become more hypocritical. Gradually, he starts heartening away the remainder of his spiritual self as well.

As the story proceeds, Ratan is seemingly more practical in his field. Now he comes to believe that the world is not governed by God, or sex or such other things. Instead, he is convinced that life runs on its own conditions and that these conditions are determined by the deals. Also he thinks that under such a deal, he was married to the niece of the superintendent, and that the meaning of the deal was clear to him. Obviously, it was made for promotion, higher salary and other benefits. He is now confirmed and dozens of clerks work under him. Gradually, he is promoted to the post of a officer in the same department.

The department which requires the utmost honesty and transparency is most corrupt and it is not known to the people of the outside world. The other colleagues of Ratan hold this old positions and salary. The deceit and treachery were the means for Ratan Rathor to reach such a position. He has become more expert in this field, because in it to grow one has to learn the mantra of success--the dedication: the dedication not to the work but to the boss.

The promotion and other facilities may sound well to Ratan Rathor, but the quest of the self keeps haunting him, now and then. He
has the best that could be expected from the career, but he is not satisfied; nor is he happy and has to pass sleepless nights. If the higher rank was truly a means to establish the identity, he should have been satisfied. But the higher instinct of man cannot be satisfied by the worldly success and possessions. Hence, it leads to the inner conflict in Ratan’s self.

When the inner self is in conflict with the hypocritical, deceitful outer self, the metabolic and physiological order is adversely affected. As a result of it, the protagonist lost his sleep. In such a condition, Ratan tries to find a solution and the solution to the problem, according to him, lies in material pursuits. Following his lower instinct, he again commits the same mistake of falling a prey to the accumulation of materialistic possessions. He purchases new car, a flat, a refrigerator and such other things. Besides, he has a bank balance of twenty thousand rupees. So, he gathers all the things he could afford to make life sense for him.

Rathor lives this dual life in the city of the Bombay. It has been rightly observed by various thinkers that with the advent of the modernisation and urbanization, people have to wear different masks on different occasions. Ratan has no words to appreciate the superintendent for the thoughts he gave to Ratan to enlighten him. In
the Ratan’s eyes, the superintendent is not a prince like the other superintendents, but he is a priest.

The next sections of the novel reveal that he was not free from inner conflict, the conflict of identity. Suddenly, a sense of the patriotism becomes uppermost in the following passage suddenly a sense of the patriotism has occurred in the mind of the protagonist. Indo-China war has been declared and all at once his father comes to his mind. The father stood for courage and his nation so much that he sacrificed his life for it. Consequently, Ratan felt that it was a matter of shame for him to sit quietly in such national emergency. He changes for the time being; his inner self calls him a son of the revolutionary and so he should also be a revolutionary for the nation at the time of the crisis. He collects donations at the camps and at other different places for the soldiers sacrificing their lives at the border. He suddenly finds a new assignment and sees his own people and the nation engulfed in ruin and debt. He feels that they have to save the nation and thus preserve the legacy left by Gandhi, his father and other like patriots. He is inspired by the Bhagawad Gita and with the help of some other holy texts he writes the article “Crisis of Character”. But whose was the character is still difficult to define.

Such pretentions stem from the dubious nature of Ratan and are a result of his inner conflict. He confessed to the young student that
just before attack on the nation, he took the huge bribe, nothing less nothing more, but as per the deal. So, this overnight change is hard to swallow.

Once the degradation of morality sets in, it has its own way of slithering down, without the least control of the human self. The same thing happens with the protagonist of the novel. On the one side, he thinks for the nation in the time of national emergency of Chinese attack on India, but, on the other side, he is ready to compromise the nation’s vital security inputs—the arms and ammunition. It happens that when he was posted in Bombay a deal between him and Himmat Singh takes place. Under this deal, he has to approve an order for the defective arsenal to be used at the front. This deal takes place without the consent of the brigadier.

In Indo-China war, India is defeated at every front because of the poor quality of the ammunition. Many soldiers become a prey to the defective arsenal and have to lose their lives. The brigadier return from the battlefield and an enquiry is held. It holds the brigadier responsible for the poor quality of the arsenal. He is courtmartialed and put under observation.

The news comes to Ratan Rathor. In fact, the brigadier was not guilty of the corruption he was held responsible for. The real culprit was Ratan and he knew it. A sense of guilt haunts him and the conflict
between his lower and higher instincts, utterly confuses him. The acceptance of the fault on his part can save the life and dignity of the brigadier. But it will also doom his career, besides heaping humiliation on him.

The higher instinct reminds him of the childhood experience of the selflessness love of the brigadier. It was the Brigadier who had saved him from the hooligans. That rescue was the most memorable incident in the life of the Ratan in the childhood period, next to the memories of his mother and father. At a call of the higher instinct, he is ready to accept the fault and writes to the enquiry team headed by the superintendent. But to one’s utmost surprise, on the day of confession his lower instinct predominates and he claims in front of the superintendent that he is not aware of one thing and that he is not involved in such things.

The brigadier has a health problem and is shifted to the hospital. The inner self of Ratan brings him to see the brigadier, but at the entrance of the hospital, he comes to know that the brigadier does not want to meet him and he hears the brigadier saying that the closest to him is the person who betrayed him the most. The brigadier knew that it was none other than Ratan who was the real culprit. But instead of saying so, he likes to remain silent. Ratan’s refusal to accept the fault has a far reaching impact on the personality of the brigadier. He likes
to himself end his life and does not want to be held guilty by the authorities. He commits suicide and with his suicide end the tragic linkages that could prove Ratan a culprit.

Like Raskolnikov of Crime and Punishment by the Russian novelist Dostoyevsky, he is in a trauma, the way Raskolnikov was after the murder of the widow and her sister. Ratan has again the loneliness and frustration within his self. But a man of mistakes always makes others a scapegoat. He thinks that the system is corrupt and so is he so, he alone should not be called corrupt as everyone else also takes the bribes.

His investigates and finds corruption in the whole hierarchy of the system and that every organ of the system was involved in this malpractice; and feels that he was not an exception to the system. The account he gives of the corrupt is an eye opener to all the citizens. The peons of the office, the government officials, the traffic policemen and the railway conductors alike are involved in this nefarious activity. He finds the whole system of administration as corrupt. In his perception, even the non-governmental bodies were involved in the same practice. Even the priest, the so-called the saviour of the truth at the door of the God--where everyone chants the truth--is also involved in this corrupt mechanism. And thus he justifies his own action of taking the bribes.
His degeneration has reached such a low level that he looks at the opportunity to take the bribe as the heaven-sent opportunity by war. The comment of the M.P: ‘Nobody lost a war these days. There were always compromises. To be candid he whispered who cared for the wilderness that we are quarrelling over’ further strengthens the position of Ratan. The other example is of Himmat Singh himself who remarks that he: “Conducts the operations for neither money nor power but in order only to clear” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 60). It reflects his dictatorial bent of mind. Himmat Singh reminds one of Hitler who that whatever he regarded is truth would prevail. It is a different matter that Hitler’s convictions resulted in untold suffering to mankind. Ratan indirectly justifies the stand of Hitler by citing the example of Himmat Singh. What Ratan fails to understand is that life is not created by man and if does not have the power to create life, he does not have the right to destroy it as well. If perceptions and notions are allowed to prevail, like that of Hitler, Himmat Singh and Ratan they are likely to lead to anarchy. Precisely it is what, according to the protagonist, prevails in the post- Independence India.

But one also feels that a new dimension has been added to the identity of the protagonist. Any person involved in crime has to repent at a later stage of life. It is almost for twenty years that the protagonist has been indulging in corruption and opportunism. Gradually, Ratan
starts questioning himself. He is haunted by the thoughts of morality and immorality, and he seeks to console himself. To do so, he finds different means in different situations.

Moral bankruptcy of the minds of Ratan and Himmat Singh becomes evident Himmat Singh by division of mankind into two types of people. According to him, one is the ruling class that is phony in nature and the other is the ruled class that comprises of simply brainless chickens. He further held that there was nothing moral or immoral because there were no God and holy texts to define morality. The God himself was the creator of a handful of influential people of the society and the holy texts prepared by them to serve their own interests. All this may found plausible, but the protagonist, at this stage was in need of solace and such philosophy of Nihilism could not provide peace to his mind.

Arun Joshi successfully draws a parallel between different thoughts in the mind of protagonist: Ratan’s justifications & Himmat Singh’s extreme atheistic views. Finally, the fact is that whatever highlighted argument one may use to justify oneself the mind will not be at peace with itself until and unless the repentance is sincere and humble.

Following the discourse with Himmat Singh, he introspects to discover where he has gone wrong. He interrogates himself from the
first day of his life when he entered this profession and recounts how “the gears began to slip” (Arun Joshi, *The Apprentice* 67) after his country’s “tryst with destiny” (Arun Joshi, *The Apprentice* 67)--the famous words to use of Nehru at the dawn of Indian independence.

After Indian independence, the people’s aspirations of a prosperous and strong nation remained unfulfilled and a sense of disappointment and helplessness prevailed among the masses. The corridors of power became the hot bed of politics and the people’s interests became secondary. The ministers started giving wrong information in the parliament to mislead the nation. A whole new generation of politician emerged who had nothing to do with the philosophy of idealism of Gandhi and others who had led the struggle for Indian independence. It seemed that Bhagat Singh was right in his conviction that the power transfer in the post-independence India was merely the transfer of the power from the white ruling class to India’s black ruling class and what Gandhi ji discussed as the empowerment of the people of the nation was buried somewhere in the dust of the memory to be celebrated on different occasions.

In the new set-up in the post-independence India, was there a combination of power and politics. This power politics is driven by money and muscles. The ruling motive of merit and decency was
thrown out of the window and with the change of the wind they were gone with the wind forever.

It is sometimes argued that Ratan has cowardice in his nature and that he is a slave of circumstances. Despite these apparent facts, it cannot be denied that he is responsible for his misdeeds and betrayal of his conscience. This betrayal of the inner self leads to think that he was a man without an entity and identity and he accepts: “I was a nobody. A NOBODY--deep down I was convinced that I had lost my significance: As an official, as a citizen, as man” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 73).

He gradually becomes an alienated man and wherever he goes, he finds guilt. All his colleagues, his wife, his family, his friends are gone from his life. He has been left with nothing except the search for his entity and identity.

The story of his involvement also comes to an end. Though he was convicted and found to be involved in the deal, yet the interference of the secretary and the ministers let him free from the clutches of the law. He may have been given a clean chit, but his mind has not given him a clean chit. Wherever he goes, the voice that he was a murderer goes with him. He needs solace in life and finally reaches the temple. But, unfortunately, there also he finds the priest to be a liar, a betrayer of God, because the priest turns the hand of Ratan to give a bribe to get
his son, who had been convicted for low quality of work in the public works, released. Thus he learns that no religion was a remedy for his malaise.

The solace of the self he was searching for has never been achieved without suffering and suffering of the self. Ratan suffers immediately and finds a way to console himself eliminating all those who are responsible, in his opinion, for his degeneration and identity-crisis. He finds Himmat Singh –the Sheikh--to be the number one enemy and wants to eliminate him but at the confrontation with Himmat Singh, he finds that the Sheikh was merely an instrument involved in the deal and the real culprits were none other than the Secretary and the minister and thus he changes the mind to murder, Himmat Singh and the gun rotates towards the Secretary and the minister. But the inner conscience does not permit him and he postpones the murder. At the same time he also finds that the life of Himmat Singh was not different from his own. Himmat Singh was also conducting the operation to eliminate everyone from top to bottom because it was the society that had made a whore of his mother and it was his mode of vengeance as well. He also comes to know that Himmat Singh too was the son of a revolutionary and should have became a revolutionary in the post-Independence--India but he too falls a victim to the socio-political set-up of new India.
The whole episode, after self-examination, gives him the idea that there was no other way to salvation and repentance and to overcome the crooked ways of the world, the only way was to reform the self. The reformation of the self, for him, could be possible by putting himself into social use.

The idea that has enters the mind of Ratan at the closing of the novel is derived from Gandhian idealism. Gandhi Ji himself has said, that the greatest religion of man is to put himself to selfless service. But only through sufferings and sacrifices, Ratan Rathor comes to have complete faith in God and in selfless social service. Thus idealism and morality become his means for the ultimate salvation.

He leaves the world of comforts that he had gained after the degeneration of his personality and walks to the doors of the temple, where he polishes the shoes of the visitors of the temple, thinking that it is the best possible way for him to serve society in a selfless manner and to find consolation and solace in his life.

This metamorphosis of the identity of Ratan Rathor reflects the amalgam of his father’s and the other values that he has learnt from his childhood. The identity of Ratan was full of the conflicts and the conflict had to be washed away one day. The Karma yoga and Dharam yoga are the means to achieve it. The Ratan Rathor’s identity is a symbol of the young generation. Whatever mistakes Ratan committed
in his youth should not be made by the young generation. At the same time, his identity warns that if there is pollution in the system of society, one should not be blind to it. Rather to change the system, one need be an active player of the system. But what is important is to keep in mind that the means should be pure to achieve the end. The identity-formation is not a day’s work but the identity is formed in a long span of life. This is the identity that the world remembers after the death and thus it was the last identity of Ratan that will be remembered. If he had not repented for his mistakes, Ratan Rathor would have died without an identity.

Joshi’s characters feel a need to confess their wrongs at one time or another that The Apprentice makes the confessional motif the focal point of the work. It is no surprise; therefore, that Camus’s The Fall is the text scholars generally tend to compare to Joshi’s third literary work. It is surely a novel that stands apart in the author’s literary output. Of all his books, in fact, The Apprentice is the one most interested in analysing the details of Indian society and Indian history – cantered, as it is, on the episodes gravitating around the Indo-Chinese conflict. It is narrated in spicy Indian English by the central character, Ratan Rathor.

The fictional technique adopted by Arun Joshi is another important element contributing to the uniqueness of The Apprentice, so
that the novel has sometimes been tagged as a fictional experiment. Very ingeniously and with excellent oratorical skill, Ratan pours out the events of his life to a listener, whose name one never learns; of this imaginary dialogue, however, Joshi brings to the text only the narrator’s speech and not his interlocutor’s, leaving the reader with the impression of a monologue. Yet, though apparently mute in the text, the listener is extremely active in oiling the mechanisms of the conversation with Ratan: Joshi’s secret is that the interlocutor is kept well-hidden in the shades of discourse. As the story unfolds, one learns that he is young, well-mannered, patient, idealistic, and proud of being a National Cadet. He pays great attention to every detail of the story he is being told, so that he helps Ratan to find the thread of his thoughts again every time the narrator’s unavoidable digressions lead him to forget the starting point of his tale. His questions are wise and sharp, so that he is even said to take on the role of the inquisitor; however, his esteem for Ratan is so high that he does not hesitate to put all his other chores aside. In short, he is the ideal listener.

On the other hand, Ratan is the ideal orator, who needs a public to fully achieve his goal. One knows very little of his present situation until nearly the end of the novel, when his predicament is fully exposed. In the meantime, however, he grips the reader’s attention, thanks to his brilliant use of a variety of rhetorical devices.
Sentimental, self-centred, as much a prisoner of his own telling as is his listener/reader (if not more so), an astute orator-deceiver, he is the one who, for instance, humbly declares: “Let me not, however, get on the pulpit again. I have not the right” (Arun Joshi, The Apprentice 84), while knowing full well that he would not go on were he not relentlessly in a commanding position. Ratan Rathor is a little past middle age, talks with the self-confidence of an experienced man, and is educated, sensible and extremely intelligent.

The Apprentice, Joshi’s third novel, takes his search for understanding man’s predicament one step further toward the transcendental. Its central figure is a man essentially docile and uncourageous whose life, more or less, parallels the coming into being of postcolonial India. Eventually gaining a post in the civil service, he ends, as many real-life civil servants did, by taking a huge bribe. But in the final pages he comes to see that at least corrupt man can strive to do just a little good, he cleans shoes at a temple and that while there are in the world young people still untainted, there is a spark of hope.