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Existing in Existential World: Implementing Theory of Existentialism on the selected novels of Arun Joshi

¹*Kuntal Beniwal*, ²*Dr.Ritu Sharma*

^{1,2} Department of Maths and Humanities, M.M.D. University, Mullana, Ambala, Haryana, India.

¹*kbsbeniwal@gmail.com*

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ABSTRACT

Existentialism has had an enormous influence on the movement of 'Expressionism'. Expressionism originated in the beginning of the 20th century in Germany. But the postmodern Indian English novelists through their novels have well explored the existential issues faced by the contemporary man in relation to socio-cultural circumstances. The readers of the research paper will read through how the theory of existentialism is implemented in the selected novels of Arun Joshi.

1. The Strange Case of Billy Biswas

This novel talks about Billy, who is completely alienated in the middle-class society of India. In this novel, the author is talking about two different cultures and the story revolves between New Delhi and Satpura Hills. The lead character of the novel, Billy Biswas abandons his native place in quest of happiness and peace. He moves to an urban city of the country thinking he will be happy there. But in a few days, he realizes otherwise and feels isolated, disoriented, and disillusioned in the contemporary society. He gradually starts regretting his moving away from the traditional values that he inherited, the ethics and the culture that he was closely associated to. He only gets to merge

with his tradition in form of ashes, after his death, when his ashes are brought to his village. After moving to a city, he develops symptoms of a split personality and is unable to establish connection with the world, not even himself. Billy Biswas felt close to nature in Bilasia. His decision of leaving behind everything, even his family and move to the forests in Central India reminds readers of Buddha. He is highly educated and holds a Ph.D. from America and is a lecturer at University of Delhi. He spent large part of his life in so called well civilized urban city of India but deep within himself he kept repenting his decision of moving away from the village life. He could never associate himself with this contemporary society. Despite his qualification and urban experience, he had more zeal in the aboriginals and their lifestyle and said: "All I want to do in life is to visit the places they describe, meet the people who live there, find out about aboriginals of the world". (Joshi, *The Strange Case* 14).

From a conversation with Romi in the novel, the readers shall understand the fondness for simpler, close to nature living that Billy had and longed for. While having a talk with Romi about the play *Avocambo*, the splitpersonality of Billy is beautifully depicted that is trying to balance his life between contemporary and primitive world around him. According to him, everyone in the world is self-centered and he does not at all fit in this society where people do not think beyond themselves. And such a feeling makes him get into a quest for a place where he gets a sense of belonging. And looking for such a place, he lands up in Harlem and build his residence there. Since his childhood, nature drew him closer. He was always attracted to the landscapes and rural India. He had a great fascination for the sculpture art at Konard and the mesmerizing landscapes at Bhubaneswar, since the age of 14 when he first visited there. The soulful music that he heard there was so erotic that he unknowingly started dancing to it. This was the turning point in his life. He, time and again wants to visit and experience it again and again.

After completing his education in America and living there for a few years, he decides to return to India in search of peace and happiness. But even in India, he felt alienated residing in a so-called hybrid society that existed in Delhi. He neither found people spiritually enlightened nor emotionally connected. Experiencing all this in Delhi, he concludes that all high civilized societies in any part of the world are just superficial. He was so excited to share his knowledge of Anthropology while teaching at the University of Delhi, but he again felt disappointed. To overcome this disappointment, he decides to get married. He gets into an alliance with a very beautiful, well-groomed lady named Meena Chatterjee, but soon comes to realization that marriage did not bring him any solution, it just proved to be a catastrophe. Both Meena and

Billy are poles apart when it comes to their interests and choices in life. While Billy wanted to remain away from the superficial society and materialistic world, Meena found herself more connected and drawn to the same. These major differences in the personality of both deeply impacts Billy, both health wise and at intellectual level and understanding. Slowly, both starts drifting apart and their marriage turns into a mess.

The author of the novel has very beautifully explained how the lead character, Billy is worn out between two societies and how he gets detached from all. All this encourages him to find a place where he could find his mental peace. In order to do so, Billy in one of the incidents in the novel, gets into a quarrel with his friend and quotes –“... all banjaras were thieves and their women were no better than the whores” (Joshi, *The Strange Case* 60). There were several reasons of Billy to feel that the civilized society of the world lacked emotions and he adapts the habits of the people from rural region of India as he is more attracted to that lifestyle. Though his father tries to deviate his attention, but his attempt goes in vain. For him, this modern, civilized society is like an animal world and thus a well-educated Anthropologist feels withdrawn and disoriented. Not even a marriage could bring him any peace.

When Billy meets Bilasia, he gets drawn closer as she is least interested in city life and is away from all kind of materialistic pleasures. His overall personality changes after meeting Bilasia. He is so happy to realize that relations are priority for her over anything else. He was amused by her habit of sleeping on leaves of a tree which made Billy feel that she was so close to the nature. He finds her so different from Meena and very similar to himself. He finds himself so closely associated to nature while living in the hills of Maikal. Such drastic steps that Billy takes in life is because he lived in an opposite society to what he desired to be in. Once, Romi questions him on why he has been ignoring his social responsibilities. To which Billy explained that he feels more responsible for the self – to his soul than family and friends, as per him it is because of self that the relations are developed in life.

Billy wishes to see a well civilized society, free of hypocrisy and deceitfulness. The second phase of the novel gets more interesting where he gets to spend his life in the rural part of the country. He resides in the village called Dhunia. He finds himself at peace, content living his life in this village until Romi discovers him in the hills and discloses about his whereabouts to Situ. His family wants him to get back to the city life and he refuses to do so. Even when people from his family come looking for him, the people from the village does not disclose anything about him as they genuinely love and respect him. Gradually, a rumor that Billy is dead makes rounds. This novel explains how we are surrounded by so many, yet we are alienated. Arun Joshi through the

character Billy explains how well-educated person can also abandon everything in search of spiritual peace.

2. The Foreigner

A marvelous story writer of humanoid problems, Arun Joshi has engaged in all his four novels the peculiar catastrophe of the present man. His novels agree with individual anxieties than obstacles advancing out of regional adherences. His condemnation of the business, the knowledgeable and the avaricious humankind is not led by his warmth for Indian viewpoint or the doctrines of life but by a sincere trust in the truthfulness of the primordial values of sensuousness, desire and act. His skill of self-self-analysis deepened by self-ridicule begins a new component in the art of Indo-English Fact-based.

Arun Joshi showed on the Indian English intellectual background with his very first narrative *The Foreigner* in 1968. Its agreements with the expedition of the central person, Sindi Oberoi, from his lack of sympathy from the humankind to his vow to it. The story writer portrays Sindi's angst after his isolation and his subsequently called rootlessness. The narrative demonstrates the miseries of Sindi who declares himself neglected in the labyrinth of worldly wise way of life and is disadvantaged of any hereditary, societal and intellectual ties, and whose spirit shouts for a way out of these muddled avenues of life. He delivers a justification of the argument among membership and detachment from the humanity rushing on in the psyche of Sindi. To uncover a way out to the impasse of his nervousness and foreignness Sindi struggles to be distant from the realm. He envisions accepting by the 'Karmic' Theory, advocated by Lord Krishna in *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita*. Purposelessly he roams all through the convoluted approaches of his continuation in pursuit of harmony, distinctiveness, and intent of his lifetime. Regrettably, he struggles to break from the realm as an answer to his challenges. But Arun Joshi has his foundations deep-rooted in the primordial Indian philosophy and that is a reason why he never assumes indifference as the definitive resolution to the crises of life. He has belief in the perception that schism is rather to be defeated, and not to be nurtured. Via Sindi, Joshi represents before us incredible ability for supremacy. The novel exemplifies the hero's flight from wavering to act, from isolation to connection and from deceit to truth.

The narrative commences in Boston, where in a funeral home Sindi sees the corpse of Babu Rao Khemka, an engineering undergraduate, who has deceased in a car mishap, and informs June about this unsuspected jolt. At this point of time, June is carrying Babu's child. Then, the focus turns to Delhi, where Sindi, at

present-day, is a member of company of Babu's father, Mr. Khemka. The storyline has a steady progress among the latest past in Boston and the current day in Delhi. For the duration of his stay in Delhi, Sindi must manage with the upsetting query by Sheila, Babu's elder sister, about the circumstances that triggered Babu's death. He does his best to evade her question since he doesn't anticipate recollecting his obnoxious history, but all his actions end futile: "Helplessly, I watched my past overtake me. I had traveled the world to escape Babu's ghost and still it stalked me from behind those bronze statues". (p.17). Whilst responding to Sheila's hesitation Sindi tries hard to hide away the fact relating Babu's death assuming not to unearth the bleakest part of his lifetime. But, on the contradictory, in the process of recounting the earlier period, the truth is exposed and one and all is permitted to make out of Sindi's befuddled innersole.

Sindi is a self-searcher and illogical chap and an empirical personality. Although his encounters tell him not to be affected but he gets implicated out of affection and honesty. It is merely a possibility that Sindi makes his way, but he intends to survive the lifespan of an Indian saint. The dreadful results of his repetition of remoteness in America induce him to abandon the state and to go to India. He plans to reside in India, a life distinct from New York and Boston. Sindi's life is a justification of his hunt for his background in a parentless human race and comprehending his oath to life and commitment as refused to submissive coldness. He is a native immigrant fit in no country, for he is born in Kenya to an Indian father and an English mother. When he is a child aged four, he is disadvantaged of his parents, who are killed in an air collision near Cairo. After the demise of his parents he develops a feeling of loneliness. At this vital period, an uncle of his affords unparented Sindi with a feel of getting an anchor man. Almost immediately, his uncle also perishes and again Sindi realizes himself as lonely, disenfranchised, and vulnerable in this world. This unparented upbringing of Sindi creates in him a profound feeling of passionate anxiety. All over, Sindi realizes himself as a foreigner and in seclusion. The thinking of owning no extended family and staying nomadic in all places annoys his soul. Sindi's heart shrieks sometimes, "I had never had a home" (p. 20). There is barely any time when he is not mindful of his absence of any family. When Professor White exclaims, "Every foreign student is an ambassador of his country", Sindi asks himself, "And what country had I represented? Kenya or England or India?" (p. 43) He believes himself to be "An uprooted young man living in the latter half of the twentieth century, who had become detached from everything except himself"

(p. 195). He additionally to this call out his grief of being a foreigner all over, “And yet all shores are alien when you do not belong anywhere” (p. 92).

In adventure of his backgrounds Sindi keeps on altering places. He slouches from Nairobi to London to Boston and then in the end to Delhi. He registers in London University with an intention of studying engineering. But he is instantly fed up with lecture-room orations learning them unqualified to meet with his persistent queries about life. He speaks, “I wanted to know the meaning of my life. And all my class-rooms didn’t tell me a thing about it” (p. 142). He enrolls a night club in Soho as a dish washer, not with the objective to secure money but craving to have an exceptional style of expertise of life to sort out his beliefs. It is here that he meets up Anna, a minor-league artist, who has separated from her man. This female is about thirty-five but seem to be a lot more youthful and appealing. With the enactment of moment, the relationship between them extends to an intimate relationship. Anna be fond of Sindi from the nucleus of her soul and he is fascinated by her grief. But this situation does not last for an extended period. It occurs to be simply an affair of erotic participation. Anna attempts to get her lost adolescent once again in a relationship with Sindi, a boy far younger than her. Other Sindi exclaims, “Anna was not yearning for me or anybody, but for her lost youth” (p. 143). Sindi avoids Anna the instant she comes through Kathy, a married lady. This matter too moved on for a few weeks only and happened to be an encounter of extreme erotic activity. Here, it is Kathy who dumps Sindi for “She had to go back to her husband” (p. 144) and “She thought marriage was sacred and had to be maintained at all costs” (p. 144). Added, he builds relationship with a Catholic preacher in Scotland where he is involved in a village allusion library. He converses with the pastor on numerous topics linked to religion, God and spirituality, and steadily his lack of knowledge vanishes, and his concept enhances. He becomes spiritual, as he describes to June shortly – “Suddenly, I felt a great lightening, as if someone had lifted a burden from my chest and it all came through in a flash. All love – whether of things, of persons, of oneself – was illusion. Love begot greed and attachment and it led to possession. (p. 145)

Sindi departs for Boston with the intention of obtaining Ph.D. degree in mechanical engineering. Here, Sindi gets fascinated by June since she is so beautiful and her sameness with Kathy. There cultivates an informal liaison between them. It is the very first time that Sindi is “afraid of getting involved with June” (p. 53). He feels the agony for her. But when June conveys her longing to him that they must get wedded, he rebuffs telling, “I am not the right

kind of man for you. Some people are not really cut for marriage” (p. 91). Further, Babu Rao Khemka, Sindi's best friend, is equally dumbfounded by June's charm and desires to get hitched with her. June, understanding adverse attitude of Sindi, determines to choose Babu. June is a compassionate and a supportive girl. She bothers about others and her only object in life seems to provide help to her colleague, to be sharing their sorrow and to comfort them in their anguish. Babu, on the other hand, who goes to a traditional Indian family, calculates a woman's decency based upon her innocence. Once in an argument with June, Babu realizes that she has had a close relation with Sindi, is extremely stunned and dashes into his car forcefully not ever to come back. He dies in a car accident. Sindi, who is working in New York, through a letter from June gets to know that she is bearing Babu's child. At this moment, Sindi decides to wed June but when he gets there, he discovers June deceased during abortion. Sindi holds himself accountable for both the casualties.

Because of Sindi's fascination with his loneliness, alienation, and displacement, he turns to unsympathetic world around him. To Mr. Khemka he exclaims, “Nothing is bothering me” (p. 117). It does not matter to him how the world regards him. He responds to Mr. Khemka's remarks, “What does it mean to me if you call me an immoral man. I have no reason to be one thing or another” (p. 118). Consequently, *The Stranger* matters with the expressively daring voyage of a confused man, who is mystified in the mishmash of life. Joshi makes Sindi to feel the soul-scorching anguish all through his journey for self-fulfillment. Lastly, his spirit comes out rekindled, cleansed, and energized. At last out, by his encounters, Sindi attains his objective. Ignoring his own concerns, he assumes the onus of becoming the rescuer of the factory people.

3. The Last Labyrinth

Som Bhaskar is an entrepreneur who succeeded to a massive plastic manufacturing business. He has studied at the world's premium campuses. This developed a westernized attitude on being partiality for acquisitiveness and a reliance in cause. He is wedded to Geeta, “an extraordinary woman” (11), and he has two children with her and is “all that a wife could be” (40). Hitherto, he agonizes from a voracious hunger: “Hunger of the body and hunger of the spirit” (11). He is tycoon; nonetheless he distinguished that “money was dirt, a whore. So were houses, cars, carpets”. A bizarre logic of dissatisfaction retains soul that is consequential in the commotion of his life. Since the age of 25, he has been ranting the same thing: “I want, I want, I want”. The unhappiness primes him to take a path after the erotic desires.

Despite the thought that he cannot survive without Geeta, he hooks with woman-ayahs, wives of his friends, librarians, nurses, aunts, and anybody and everybody. All this also does not satisfy his appetite for bodily pleasures. Som's mother is a religious lady and a lady of deep conviction and strength. She gets diagnosed with cancer but avoids medication. She has immense faith in Lord Krishna and believes that he will save her and one day dies out of cancer.

Som believes that there is no peace and even after all these activities he feels isolation and tells himself that he will attain peace once he meets his soul mate. He meets Leela Sabnis, who gradually turns a lover from being a friend to Som. She has a linguistic aptitude and is well knowledgeable in the opinions and philosophies of thinkers like Descartes, Freud. She loves to explain and discuss her outlook. As per her there is nothing in the world that cannot be reasoned about. Som meets Anuradha for the first time in a meeting scheduled for Plastic Manufacturer's Association at Intercontinental Hotel in Delhi. He considers her like a monument "a monument: tall, handsome, ruined" (12). He falls for her dark, sexy eyes. At an invitation from Aftab, Som visits him and Anuradha at the Lal Haveli which "had been built as a maze" (34-35). At Lal Haveli Som gets to know that Aftab and Anuradha are not married but are in a live-in relationship. She tells him: "I have not married. It is better not to be anybody's wife. You can't marry everyone you love. So why marry anyone at all?" (43). When Som questioned Anuradha if she would ever like to get married, she said, "I can imagine I am married to Aftab. I can imagine I am married to you. My mother used to imagine she was married to Lord Krishna" (128). The more Som wanted to learn about Anuradha, the more mysterious she appeared to him.

Anuradha came from a very incomprehensible origin. Since her childhood she immensely suffered and witnessed many shocks that largely impacted her physically and spiritually. She was born as an unlawful child to an impractical mother. She experienced molestation during her childhood and witnessed "murders, suicides, every conceivable evil of the world" (190). She was born in a one-room house in Bihar and her mother entertained strangers by her singing in the evening and possibly also sold her body. Her mother was unmarried but always considered herself as a wife of Lord Krishna. She was murdered by one of her paramours. After the death of her mother, an aunt of Anuradha got her along to Bombay and put her in a convent school where she was humiliated every day. After her schooling, her aunt pushed her to work on screen and made a lot of money through her. After having a successful career in films for two years, Anuradha decided to quit her career and shift with Aftab and start living with him. She came closer to Aftab with the intervention of Gargi, a deaf-mute spiritual

with philosophical empathy and vision that drew Anuradha and Aftab together. Anuradha attempted suicide because she felt ugly as she suffered smallpox but was unbelievably saved.

After a few months, Som requests Anuradha to travel with him to Bombay and she does so against her own wish. He found her cold and unresponsive at Aftab's Haveli and she becomes more of a puzzle for him. Looking at her commitment for Lord Krishna, he becomes jealous of even God as he does not want to share her with anyone, not even with Lord Krishna. During this visit with her to Bombay, he suffers a heart attack and even when his doctor-friend had lost all hopes of his recovery, he does recover. Post this incidence, Anuradha departs from his life as for her love is pure sacrifice.

In the later part of the novel, Som reaches the temple of Lord Krishna located in the hills, where he gets an opportunity to meet Gargi. Here, in this temple, the real identity of Doctor. K is revealed in front of him and he introduces Som to Gargi. He also discloses to Som that he survived that heart attack only because a miracle that Anuradha pleaded Gargi to do for him, looking at his critical condition. When Gargi refused to do so, Anuradha pleaded, cried, and begged for your life. She even warned Gargi that if she does not do a miracle, she will kill herself. Hearing all this, Som gets on his knees and ask God for forgiveness.

In this novel, Arun Joshi submits that the eventual veracity and realism could be apprehended if and only if one were to disown freethinking. Self-effacement, detriment, and misery are the three-crease trail to discover celestial actuality. Arun Joshi's unusual imaginative susceptibility has espoused these impacts and purified the novel as a prevailing masterwork close-fitting his apparition of life, which is indisputably his own, a Hindu outlook to life.

4. The Apprentice

The Apprentice is a real masterpiece of the novelist Arun Joshi. Just like the above three novels, this novel is also about self-identity, self-alienation, and quest for the real meaning of life. The theme of alienation to innermost self and to the humanity is of utmost importance. The novel is a narrative in the form of a speech. In this novel of Joshi, the protagonist undergoes from problems of greed which directs him to down roots, and a distinctiveness crunch. The central character Ratan Rathor is object to worldly wishes, unveils the enigmas of his lifetime because his ethics urges him to acknowledge his misdeeds of duplicity to the wellbeing of the country. Following freedom discouragement was predominated owing to materialistic advancement. Modern-day man is trapped in predicament. The joblessness has raised next to Independence. Ratan's life narrative is the contemplation of that cynicism.

RatanRathor is a well-taught village teenager who hails from progressive family unit of Rajasthan. Past few years his family settle down in the slopes of Himalaya, while he was left isolated in this realm to pursue employment and safeguard his presence. Ratan travels to Delhi just to have a sound career. He was full of aspirations and enthusiasm. He wished to make a name for self and achieve recognition and be flourishing in future. All this while, he experiences demeaning encounters. In his hunt for employment he is interviewed, interrogated, and rejected a several times. But after all this, he manages to get a job of a temporary clerk in the Army Store unit. In this job he rises to a specific position of an assistant and ultimately come to be an officer of the administration of India. As time goes by, a very honest and hardworking Ratan turn into a snobbish man owing to the impact of metropolitan society conduct. The immense competition in the materialistic society makes him leave all the moral values that his father inherited in him. His short stay in Delhi transforms his innermost and external persona indefinitely. He needs for cash caused his self-collapse. His changed persona is echoed in his personal testimony when he acknowledges: “I had added a new dimension to my life. I have become a hypocrite and a liar at the age of twenty-one.”

RatanRathor inherited different ideologies, one that of his father’s Gandhian outlook to life that encourages him to be an honest citizen of his country and the other of his mother that inspires him to be more of a practical in this greedy world. As per his mother’s advice:

“Don’t fool yourself son, she said 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.”

Ratan was far sighting a dark future for himself. He remembers:

“After my father’s death, things were bleak. The three of us were left alone in that little house—I, my mother, and her illness. The people for whom my father had squandered a lifetime had forgotten him with the year.”

To save himself from the upcoming darkness, he brings in major changes in himself. He does not value civility and relationship in his life. This double-dealer humanity deviates him wholly. He comprehends his unconventionality from the true pathway. He utters: “I had a new dimension of life I had become a master faker... faker soon forgets who he really is....” He had no funds to get his mother treated of Tuberculosis and this incident made him understand that money plays an important part in a man’s survival in this masked society. He fails to pick between the philosophies of his father and his mother which results him wandering and isolated in the world.

RatanRathor cannot dodge from entice of acquisitive consolations as per him dwelling is farther critical than life expectancy and to live luxurious life one

must have an excelling career. To have a successful professional career, he becomes way more ambitious resulting in a failure to sensibly choose between good and the bad. The promotion and money-oriented thoughts were more valuable to him. It hardly makes any difference to what people speak about him or how they treat him. He just wants to keep his boss happy and grow in his professional career. This makes him corrupted. Just to have a secure future and a job, he agrees to marry the niece of his boss. Being driven by acquisitive morals, he takes advantage his designation in the Army by considering a massive payoff to clear out a huge lot of malfunctioning arms. Because of this wrong deed, a brigadier friend commits suicide as he goes through a court martial. Ratan feels responsible for this and holds himself guilty of a death of an innocent. He constantly regrets his doings, and this affects him both physically and mentally.

Arun Joshi described a type of personality through the character of Ratan Rathor, who is an exemplary of modern-day man, who can stoop to any level to achieve the luxury in life. The writer outlines the unbearable dilemma of the leading role. According to this novel. Today's man has turn out to be so greedy that collection of fortune is the only objective in life even though he is isolated and fighting with his own inner self. Contemporary man has been consumed in his self-conceived labyrinth which is not easy to break. Dishonesty has become a nationwide danger and must be worked upon.

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