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## **UNDERSTANDING ARUN JOSHI AS A CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ENGLISH WRITER**

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### **Abstract**

Arun Joshi, a major contemporary, Indian English novelist, have depicted powerfully the existential dilemma of the modern man evoking our cultural heritage and imperishable moral values. Through his writings, Josh tries to reveal the restless individual psyche of the Protagonist, urged by an instinctive desire to determine his identity in relation to himself, to his society and also to humanity at large. It is true that genuine literature does have its universal appeal, and yet, it has its roots deep into the native soil. Indianness is inextricably linked to Indian culture, and in its turn, Indian culture is based, apart from other factors, on love or affection, humility or politeness, tolerance and patience, forgiveness or compassion. It would be really worthwhile on our part if we interpret Indian novels from the viewpoint of Indianness.

Keywords: Existentialism, Orientalism, Alienation, Displacement, Diaspora.

Arun Joshi, a major contemporary, Indian English novelist, have depicted powerfully the existential dilemma of the modern man evoking our cultural heritage and imperishable moral values. Through his writings, Joshi tries to reveal the restless individual psyche of the Protagonist, urged by an instinctive desire to determine his identity in relation to himself, to his society and also to humanity at large. It is a matter of regret that he died too early, when he was perhaps at the threshold of a new and interesting phase of his career, passing from a direct portrayal of men and society to allegory, fantasy, prophecy and experimentation with a portrayal of the phenomenon of time by an artistic mingling of the contemporary and the cosmic, resulting not only in an ironic commentary on the present, but also elevating it into a projection of certain archetypal patterns of characters and events which tend to repeat themselves over and over again in the long, and limitless time span. Though, the advancement in the social life comes with all pleasure, luxury and comfort, Yet, the modern contemporary man finds himself forlorn and in a tragic mess because his basic instinct gets crushed under the pressure of a number of mechanisms which are beyond his understanding and control. Modernism in literature demands a cumulative exploration of the inner dimensions of the characters as a modern age stress and restless, questing spirit of man.

Eventhough Arun Joshi has not been a prolific writer and has produced only five novels, and few short stories, yet, he has contributed a lot to the bulk of contemporary Indian

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–English fiction. Before undertaking a deep and detailed study of Arun Joshi’s fictional world, it would be worthwhile on our part to pursue the beginnings of Indian English fiction for appreciating him in its proper perspective.

During the 19th and 20th centuries of colonial period, English was introduced at a large scale in the academic field of India by Lord Macaulay, mainly de-orientalise and anglicize India but it brought about a complete intellectual, and cultural regeneration of Indian society. The knowledge of English on the part of the Indians opened the floodgates of western, or scientific ideas which aroused a new kind of social, and cultural awareness in the intellectuals like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Henry L.V. Derozio, Kashi Prasad Ghose and Michael Madhusudan Dutt among others. This initial phase of creative writings is often termed as the renaissance of modern Indian English literature. It was in the latter half of the nineteenth century that the Indian English novel attempted to take its own shape or form through Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s *Raj Mohan’s wife* (1864), *Raj Lakshmi Devi’s The Hindu wife* (1876), Toru Dutt’s unfinished novel, *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden* (1878), Kali Krishna Lahiri’s *Roshanara* (1881), H. Dutt’s *Bijoy Chand* (1888) and Kshetrapal Chakarvarti’s *Sarata And Hingara* (1895).

Ramesh Chandra Dutt wrote all his novels in Bengali, but he translated two of them in English which are *The Lake of Palms* (1902) and *The Slave girl of Agra* (1909). Bengal continued the long chain of novelist with the emergence of Rabindranath Tagore and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee. Tagore’s three novels appeared in approved English versions in his lifetime; *Naukadubi* (1905) appeared as *The Wreck*, *Gora* (1910) retained the same title and *GhareBahire* (1916) became *The Home and the world*. Tagore’s first novel, *Choker Bali* (1902) was translated into English as *Binodini* by Krishna Kriplani. Sarat Chandra Chatterjee’s masterpiece, *Srikanta* was translated into English by K.C. Sen and Theodosia Thompson.

The freedom movement of India and her social and political problems inspired a number of writers like M.R. Anand, Raja Rao, K.A. Abbas, N. Nagerajan, K.S. Venkatramani, Manohar Malgaonkar, Nayantara Sahgal, R.K. Narayan, Khuswant Singh, Chaman Nahal and Kamala Markandaya. Indian-English novel opened a new chapter of contemporary social realism with K.S. Venkteramani’s *Murugan the Tiller* (1927) and *Kandan*, *The Patriot* (1932), but it came into force with the ‘Big three’- Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan. In this regard William Walsh rightly comments:

“It was this three who defined the area in which the Indian novel was to operate.....give the Indian novel its particular distinctiveness.” 1

Mulk Raj Anand has been a humanist, a Marxist and a champion of the suffering section of humanity whose reputation as a novelist of social realism rest on his first three novels, *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936) and *Two leaves and a Bud* (1937). Besides these three novels, his other famous novels with his revolutionary attitude, are *The Village*, *Across*

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the Black waters, The Sword and the Sickle and Private life of An Indian Prince. R.K. Narayan, who is famous for his comic-ironic vision of life, produced a number of novels within his limited range of Malgudi.

His famous novels are Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937), The Dark Room(1938) and The English Teacher (1946). He received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1960 for his novel, The Guide. R.K. Narayan is a novelist of the middle-class individual man who gets exploited by his situations to which he wants to exploit. Through his simple prose-style, Narayan describes the unavoidable ironic-comical knots of human life. Raja Rao has always been described or appreciated as the writer of the Metaphysical man. Even though he seemed to be greatly interested in the Gandhian movement in India, yet, he likes to preach his own Vedantic philosophy even in his first novel, Kanthapuram (1938). His other two famous novels, The Serpent and The Rope (1960) and The Cat and Shakespeare (1965) are also philosophical and metaphysical in nature. Raja Rao was not as prolific a writer as Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, but whatever he wrote, he presents his reflection of a Vedanta Scholar, preaching Advaita Vedanta which asserts there is only one reality in existence, the idea of BrahmanAtma and God.

Indian English fiction came into its own when India attained independence in 1947, but the tradition of social realism in the background of contemporary historical situation has been carried on by Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Khuswant Singh and Chaman Nahal. Bhabani Bhattacharya's novel So Many Hungers (1947) and He Who Rides a Tiger (1954) rendered the very real picture of poverty, hunger and deprivation caused by World War 2 and the Bengal Famine. His other novels, like Music For Mohini (1952) and Shadow From Laddakh (1966) deal with the theme of clash between tradition and modernity, Gandhism and Nehruism. He gives his own theory of synthesis or integration between two opposite views or attitudes of life.

Kamala Markandaya, an expatriate novelist writes about the ugly realities of Indian life. She presents the miserable life condition of the poor villagers and low-class people in a two of her novels, Nectar in a Sieve (1954) and A Handful of Rice (1966). Her other novels like Some Inner Fury, Possession and A Silence of Desire depict the story of East-West encounter. G.V. Desani's novel All About H. Hatter (1948) has been regarded by some as a brilliant satire on intellectual, social, and religious charlatanism, while others have thought of it as a study of different varieties of human deception. VenuChitale's In Transit (1950) is a socio-political novel covering the crucial period of 1915-35 in Indian history and recording chronologically the fast-changing or crumbling social and familiar institutions. Ruth Pramar Jhabvala, an outsider-insider, produced her three novels To Whom She Will (1955), The Nature of Passion (1956) and Esmond in India (1958), dealing with the theme of love and marriage within the framework of India's joint-family system in the urban middle-class life. The East-West encounter resulting in the inevitable conflict between traditional Hinduism and western modernism is as much her concern as it is of Santha Rama Rau in her novel,

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Remember the House (1956). Nayantara Sahgal's *A time to be happy* (1957) is an attempt to recapture the upper-class life during the arrival of independence.

The theme of social change from traditional values to modern ones, and the transformation of the socio-cultural milieu have been dealt within Menon's *The Wound of Spring* (1960) and *The Sale of an Island* (1961); the former powerfully depicts the crumbling of a traditional matriarchal Nayar family, the Gandhism movement and the Moplahi revolt of 1921; and the latter portrays the tragedy of being uprooted from the native soil. Similarly, Romen Basu, treating the Ghosh family as a microcosm, successfully evokes the life of a typical sleepy village of Calcutta in his novel, *The Tamarind Tree*. Some minor women novelist wrote ethnic novels marked by relentless realism. Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* (1977) portrays the orthodox and backwards family life of Rajasthan's aristocracy which won the writer the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1979. Zeenath Futenally's *Zohra* (1951) realistically depicts the princely state of Hyderabad in the Gandhian age.

Porim Barucha presents a vivid account of parsi life in *Fire Worshippers* (1958). Equally, interesting are ethnological studies by two men novelists. B.K. Karanjia's *More of an Indian* (1970) engagingly depicts Parsi life in Bombay while Leslie de Noronha's *The Mango and The Tamarind Tree* (1970) presents a fine study of colonial Goan life. Some recent post-independence novels focus on a different aspect of the East-West encounter theme. Victor Anant's *The Revolving man* (1959), Timeric Murari's *The Marriage* (1972), Reginald and Jamila Masseys *The Immigrant* (1973), Sastri Batra's *She and He* (1973), Saros Cowarjee's *Goodbye to Elsa* (1975), M.V. Rama Sarma's *The Stream and Look Homeward*, Raman Basu's *A Gift of Love, Candles and Roses, and Portraits on the Roof*, Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Black Bird* (1971), Dilip Hiro's *A Triangular View* (1969), K.D. Khosla's *Never the Twain* (1981), Chaman Nahal's *Into Another Dawn* (1977) and S.S. Dharmi's *Maluka* (1978) all explore the life of the Indian who goes abroad and how he adjusts or fails to adjust to the alien culture. In *Look Homeward*, Rana Sharma deals evocatively with one of the complex and vexing problems of India, "the irreparable brain drain sapping the life-blood of a developing nation struggling to recover from centuries of foreign exploitation",<sup>2</sup> and exhorts Indian immigrants to return home to serve their motherland.

In the eighties or in the penultimate phase (1975-2000), we get yet another breed of novelists emerged. It includes Salman Rusdie, Vikram Seth, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Allan Sealy, Sashi Deshpande, Shashi Tharoor, Farukh Dhondi, Amitav Ghosh, Bapsi Sidhwa, Ipsita Roy Chakraverti, Sudhir Kakkar, Dina Mehta, Dolly Ramanujan and others. Salman Rusdie's *Midnight Children* (1980), Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* (1986), a novel in verse and *A Suitable Boy* (1993), a massive novel running to nearly 1400 pages and Amitav

Moreover, it is here in this phase that in our readings we are frequented by such terms as 'exile,' 'immigrants', 'the outsider-insider', 'the insider-outsider', 'loneliness', 'alienation', 'rootedness', 'uprootedness' and 'diaspora.' However, at this point it is

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important to mention Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) which is a great novel indeed, besides other things, for its parallelistic structure. In the last phase (2001-2010) we found ourselves in the company of such novels, as Kiran Desai's Booker Prize winning novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), yet another Booker Prize-winning novel, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tides* (2004) and *Sea of Poppies* (2008), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), Chitra Baherjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) and *One Amazing Thing* (2010), Upmanu Chatterjee's *Weight Loss* (2006), Amit Chaudhuri's *The Immortals* (2009), Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters* (2002), Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* (2002) and *Home* (2006), Shashi Deshpandi's *Moving On* (2004) and *In a Country of Deceit* (2010), and wonderfully enough, Khushwant Singh's *The Sunset Club* (2010).

Recently, we come across the sub-generation of fictional writing, appreciated as the campus novel. As Prabhat K. Singh comments:

The life and activity in educational institutions from the content of this type, a novel, which has so far been chiefly urban, and written by students rather than teachers. Interspersed with irony and humor, intellectual flare and emotional overbearing, these tales of dreams and disappointments, intrigues, and manipulations, love, and longing, friendship and rivalry, curiosity and casualness, career concerns and job worries have rocked the new generation readers who identify themselves with the narratives quite temperamentally. The strength of this new age pop fiction lies in its directness of experience and lightheartedness of reading, even if the plot or the sub-plot is a little complex.<sup>3</sup>

Chetan Bhagat, the leader of this school of fictional writing, is followed by Abhijit Bhaduri's *Mediocre but Arrogant* (2005), an expanded image of MBA set in a management Institute of Jamshedpur, and its sequel *Married but Available* (2008), a search for inspiration within the corporate world to achieve self-actualization, Tushar Raheja's *Anything for you Maam* (2006), a love story of an IITian, Srividya Natarajan's *No Onions, Nor Garlic* (2006), a hilarious wodehousian satire on the academic life of an English department, Amitabh Bagchi's *Above Average* (2007), an IITian's sensitive account of the difficulties in chasing a goal, Kausik Sircar's *Three, Makes a Crowd* (2007), an account of hostel life and escapades of the students of a military college.

The novels of Karan Bajaj, Mainak Dhar, Sachin Garg and Siddharth Choudhary belong to this group, dealing with dark zones of campus life, plagued with love, sex, drugs, dance, betrayals and death. Campus novels are put into the category of popular fiction because they do not maintain a serious narrative, explaining the graver issues of life. Some other novels like Sandeep Chakravarti's *Tin Fish* (2005) and Anirban Bose's *Bombay Rains Bombay Girls* (2008) reveal the psyche of the adolescent school students. The highly evocative path-breaking graphic novels, with complimentary text and illustrations, include Ashok Banker's *Prince of Ayodhya* (2003), Sarnath Banerjee's *Corridor* and *The Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers* (2007), Amruta Patil's *Kari* (2008) and Gautam Bhartiya's *Lie: A*

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Traditional Tale of Modern India (2010). These novels opt for the communicative techniques of cartoon, and painting for depicting successfully both comic and serious issues of the life. In the field of novel writing, a new branch of critical enquiry emerged as 'disability studies' which takes up for consideration the issues of the disabled ones whom we prefer to call differently abled ones. Firdaus Knga extends his disability concerns by portraying wheelchair-confined tiny Brit with his bones as brittle as glass in *Trying to Grow* (1991) and Vikram Seth's *An Equal Music* (1999) which exposes pathetically the stone deafness of Julia, the pianist Susmita Bagchi's *Children of a Better God* (2010), Hari Kunzru's *Gods without Men* (2011) and Palsy Stricken Malini Chib's *One little Finger* (2011), belong to the same category. Mental disorder is another area of human concern that poses a challenge in narratology. Pramila Balasundram has face this challenge quite successfully.

In this fast grown world of Indian English novel we are introduced to the lesbian and gay novels like Suniti Namjoshi's *The Conservations of Cow* (1985), Abha Dawesr's *Babuji* (2005), Dalit novels or literature like Mistry's *The Radiance of Ashes* (2006) and Om Prakash Valmiki's English translated novel *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* (2003), and also the novels containing myth and fantasy like Ashwin Sanghi's *Chanakya's Chant* (2010) and Shiv K. Kumar's *The Mahabharata* (2011). The Indian English fiction is now nearly 150 years old and some of these novels have added to the value, credibility and enduringness of the Indian novels in English. It is interesting to find that during this period we are ponderously, Post colonialism, Post structuralism, and Post feminism, Post Freudianism, New Historicism, Cross Culturalism, Multinationality, Semiotics and Deconstruction. Our novelists inspired by the rich legacy of our culture, and history and confronted by the varied realities of life, both gentle and harsh, have been enjoying the liberty of creative exuberance while painting the literary landscapes with remarkable aesthetic prowess and linguistic ingenuity. But this trajectory is not without streaks of skepticism.

Way back in 1974 she pronounced in her book *A study of Representative Indo Anglian Novelists*, "I set AD 2000 as the dirge-date for Indo-Anglian literature." 4 Equally prognostically, V.S. Naipaul, while announcing in October 2004 that *Magic Seeds* (2004), which was a sequel to his novel *Half a life* (2001), might be his last novel, declared that he had no faith within the survival of the novel; the novel was dead.

But with the passage of time the constant pursuit of our writers have proved all such postulations or premature obituary notices wrong for the Indian English novel is still pulsating with an upscale sort of life, and artistic fecundity demonstrating the novelist's undimmed faith within the kind.

It is true that genuine literature does have its universal appeal, and yet, it's its roots deep into the native soil. Indianness is inextricably linked to Indian culture, and in its turn, Indian culture is predicated, aside from other factors, on love or affection, humility or politeness, tolerance and patience, forgiveness or compassion. It would be really worthwhile

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on our part if we interpret Indian novels from the viewpoint of Indianness. We ought to know the recent developments that have been taking place in the literary field in the west, but it would be rather proper to say that quite a few of the contemporary critical approaches to literature, such as gender criticism, feminist criticism, eco criticism or criticism addressed to subaltern and dalit literature are utility centric and should only get the attention they deserve. In the words of Dr. Mohan Jha:

The truth is there are two stable critical approaches, classical and romantic. Going by the principles or prescription could also be and is usually a tame affair; but trying to understand and appreciate the text is the litmus test of one's reading ability. Interdisciplinary studies do have their advantages, but in no case should they be practiced at the value of novels or literature proper. It is our response to the text that ought to be given precedence over other considerations or criteria. 5

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