

SPIRITUAL AND SENSUOUS DIMENSIONS IN ARUN JOSHI'S *THE LAST LABYRINTH*

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Abstract: -

Arun Joshi's *The Last Labyrinth* was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award for its excellent theme. The spiritual and sensuous dimensions are interwoven with great intensity in this novel. The novel, *The Last Labyrinth* is considered as an outstanding contribution of Indian English Literature for its search for a meaning in human existence. Joshi in his novels focused not only on socio-political issues but he has touched the deep sensitive layers of human beings. Joshi's works also reflects the strong influence of Indian spiritual ideology. The protagonist in the novel, *The Last Labyrinth*, is a millionaire industrialist and his incessant urge towards life is depicted in this novel. This paper analyses the struggles of the characters to seek peace and their surrender towards spiritual existence.

Key words: spirituality, ideology, millionaire, dimension

The Last Labyrinth centres around the story of Som Bhaskar, whose love for his father's vast industrial wealth leads to his loss of faith in God and his fellow – beings. The novel is a quest for meaning in life. Ghosh comments: "*The Last Labyrinth*, is a story of deeper seeking through love, a spiritual autobiography of a lost soul groping for the meaning of life and death" (123). Bhaskar searches desperately for some permanent values in life. He wants to overcome the terrible emptiness and the haunting void that surrounds him.

Som Bhaskar becomes a millionaire when he is twenty-five. In spite of having everything in life - a compassionate wife, good education, healthy children and vast industrial empire, he is unhappy and dissatisfied. His predicament sums up the life of the entire mankind. Lost in the labyrinths of materialistic contemporary life, Bhaskar feels smothered, restless and tortured by inner despair. His anxiety results in an aggressive pursuit of materialistic success.

Bhaskar's father was a scientist who was pre-occupied with the question of the first cause of things. He states, "..... You know I have been wondering about causes. Causes of things, things that happen to men, to objects" (22). He spent over a quarter of a million on his son's education in the prestigious American institutions. He is also deeply aware of the philosophical implications of the teachings of Krishna and Sermons of Buddha at Sarnath. Though affluent, he knew, "that money was dirt, a whore. So were houses, cars, carpets" (11). Bhaskar's mother was a devotee of Krishna, with firm faith in him. After her death, Bhaskar's father raises several questions about God and his creations.

In a wake of constant interrogations swarming in his mind, Bhaskar's father suffers from Melancholia that causes his death. His mother has died as Bhaskar says, "Of Cancer and Krishna" (57). She refuses to be hospitalized. Her faith in Krishna is unshakable. She is pretty sure that he will cure her. Bhaskar gets irritated and he sweeps the gods and goddesses on the table. About her strong faith in Krishna, he says, "My mother believed Krishna would cure her and flushes the capsules down the toilet. Krishna sat on the top of her bureau and smiled and smiled and smiled until she was dead" (57).

Bhaskar is tossed between the rationality of his father and spirituality of his mother. He is badly perplexed. He seems to be edging towards spiritual bankruptcy. He seems to be unaware of the importance of the human values of life. So, he flirts from one woman to another. He keeps on grabbing other companies intending to satisfy his discontented self. Instead of getting a sense of fulfilment, he experiences even more dissatisfaction. His discontent turns into lust. He frankly admits that "I was a womanizer all right, and a boozier, but my womanizing and boozing had not settled anything, besides", he is just led "into unbearable entanglements" (157).

The protagonist Bhaskar becomes the incarnation of the quest of hunger for the joy of life. In both the worlds of business and love, he explores possibilities of new experiences. Bhaskar is frequently tormented by his ill-defined hunger, hunger of the body and hunger of the spirit. Hunger of the body is the cry for emotional authentication, while hunger of the spirit is a yearning for self-realization. Bhaskar finds the world meaningless and is convinced that life is full of complications “a labyrinth within the labyrinths” (29). He desires to attain happiness, peace and satisfaction in life even though he knows it is out of his reach. Joshi describes it as mystical.

Leela Sabnis, one of the girl friends of Bhaskar, aptly describes what he is. She remarks, “You are much too high strung. Without reason. You are a neurotic. A compulsive fornicator” (80). Bhaskar is facing the problem of identity. She says may be what you want is mystical identification, identification with a godhead, as most Hindus want sooner or later... You haven't got a stamina for that.... You haven't got the faith. You have always been a sceptic (113).

Bhaskar seeks solace in Leela's company for a short time. Bhaskar- Leela affair lasts for only six months. Bhaskar gets disappointed with Leela. Scholarly as she is, she serves to satisfy his intellectual cravity with her talk of Philosophy. But she fails to give Bhaskar the answer he is looking for. Bhaskar is in need of someone who inhabits both the worlds. He aspires to grab the plastic company of Aftab by acquiring its shares and to possess Anuradha, the mistress of Aftab. Consequently, he gets into an amorous contact with Anuradha, who has been living with Aftab without any formal marriage. Jamkhandi states that, “*The Last Labyrinth* is basically a love – story. Som Bhaskar is captivated by the beauty of an exactress now living with Aftab Rai, a rival industrialist” (43).

Bhaskar neglects his business, his family, and his health in an effort to win the love of Anuradha. He lusts madly for her and feels restless. Though his wife is an angelic personality, Bhaskar draws into an aching painful obsessive love for Anuradha. He is in search for something and someone, who has the capacity to resolve the contradictions of his life. He does not find it neither in his wife, nor in Leela Sabnis, the clever young professor.

At the height of the love affair between Bhaskar and Anuradha the enigmatic Anuradha disappears. She embodies the concept of sacrifice. Though Bhaskar has sexual experiences with Anuradha and Leela, he is not happy because of his spiritual hallowness. The labyrinth of his life can be resolved through intuition and faith rather than science and reason. As Bhaskar had always been vexed by the questions of life and death, his dilemma is not resolved. Bhatnagar notes: “*The Last Labyrinth* ends with the probable possibilities of coming to faith. It makes a fervent appeal to understand the true spirit of India and resolve its apparent contradictions through faith beyond the logic of science and reason” (4).

Bhaskar feels dizzy and off his balance in the absence of Anuradha. Deep inside his heart, he feels that, he is a leper in need of cure, yet he refuses to yield ground. His scientific mind obstructs him from embracing faith. In his search for a cure, he seeks the blessings of Gargi in Benares whose encouraging, promising words, “ God will send someone to help you.... Someone who has known suffering” brings hope (118). She also asks Bhaskar not to have any strife with Anuradha as she is his Shakti, who can transform his hunger of the body into hunger of the spirit. Bhaskar’s journey is the journey of a soul trying to reach faith in God.

Bhaskar’s indomitable hunger for sensuality covers the first part, his slow transformation of spiritual quest occupies the next part of the novel. The novel, *The Last Labyrinth* ends with the possibilities of Bhaskar’s faith in God for a peaceful existence. The finding is that, the novel root in spirituality, that advocates the power of true faith in conquering the difficulties of the secular world.

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