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Search for the Essence of Humain living Depicted in Arun Joshi`s 'The City and The River'

Abstract

Amidst the plethora of Post Independent Indo-Anglian novelists, Arun Joshi is more emphatically concerned with search for the essence of human living and the need for the acculturation of man to establish him back to his roots, self and peace. Arun Joshi's fifth and the last novel 'The City and the River' is about the anguished boatmen's quest for meaningful life and search for a viable alternative amidst materialism, corruption, cynicism, alienation and dwindling spiritual faith.

Key-words-Quest, Essence, City, River

Introduction

This search for meaningful life is the leitmotif of Arun Joshi's novels. The work of Arun Joshi in particular reads like the spiritual moorings. Despite some differences in their approach, all of Joshi's heroes are "men engaged in meaning of life".¹

G.S. Amur aptly points out:

"His novels take us to the heart of darkness- one of his most favorite metaphors is the Labyrinth -but he is not a prophet of despair. All his novels hold out promise of regeneration and redemption".²

In the novel 'The City and the River' The city represents a microcosm for an entire civilization ruled by the Grand master who runs it with the assistance of a council of Advisers. The river passing by the city symbolizes the endless flow of life for the boatmen who are her real

children. In the earlier novels, protagonists suffer because of the degradation of values in the civilized society, here the whole society suffers. In this novel Arun Joshi throws significant limelight on the meaning of life.

The city in it is a nowhere city and the river also is nameless like the nameless one, great Yogeshwar's disciple. It is the great Yogeshwar's who narrates the story of the city and the river to the nameless-one.

“The Sorry Tale”³ moves round the city which is ruled by the Grand master who has dream in which he sees himself as the king of the city. All around his throne there is flood of the river and even the Gods are playing with the musical instruments used by the boatmen. But the side of the naked man climbing towards his throne disturbs him. Therefore he orders them, “Go away”.⁴ The disturbed Grand Master wakes up and he asks the astrologer to interpret the dream who informs him that “there exists a prophecy that speaks of the coming of a king”.⁵

Grand Master determines to become king and plans various schemes through his advisers and suppress rebellion of the boatmen to win allegiance of people specially boatmen. It is because the people lose faith in him. Astrologer's declaration of the triple way or the way of the three Beatitudes that means the implementation of his tyranny in the city.

The caution of Grand-master's father to him:

“They consider themselves to be the children of the river, and to the river, and river alone do they hold allegiance. They believe, unfortunately, with their hearts, and for their beliefs they are willing to die. And don't let their poverty mislead you into believing that they can be bought.”⁶

His father's observation exhibits boatmen's mentality that they are poor but the grand master can't buy them to win their allegiance on his side.

The boatmen led by their head boatman who is a woman. Astrologer tries to convince the head boatman, who is woman, for the allegiance to Grand-master. But the head-boatman's reply to Astrologer:

“The boatmen, Astrologer are children of great river”.⁷ Further she says “the grace of the river and the mountain rain is made. By the grace of the mother earth a crop is grown. What is grown is plentiful for all and money more”.⁸

River for them is “a symbol of the divine mother of God himself”.⁹ Therefore the head of Boatmen tells that their allegiance “only to the river”.¹⁰

When Grandmaster fails to win allegiance of Boatmen, he finds out various ways to torture them and fills the atmosphere with terror and awe. On the announcement of a new era, the people are enjoined to beware of the enemy within and the enemy without and remind them of three Beatitudes. The new era is inaugurated with the arrest of a boatmen and a clown. This incidents

creates among the citizens with fear and foreboding. Grand –master destroys the musical instruments of the boatmen and orders the police to crush the people who deny allegiance to him. The arrested people are taken to the Gold Mines.

There is a boat race at the festival of the great river. But this time the boatmen are not allowed to race barebodied. They have to wear sport shirts and salute the Grand-master. The problem is that they do not know how to salute a Grand –master. So they have to practice it which generates anger in them.

The Astrologer performs a Yojana in which he substitutes the hymn of the great river with speaks another composition that of the greatness of kings and their indispensability to the earth. This incidents make the Hermit of the mountain very angry. He stands up and informs the Astrologer that he is committing sacrilege. After the Hermit's departure the son of the Grand-master is crowned and the people are asked to cheer the new king. But there is very cold response because `` the multitude was either confused or unwilling``.¹¹

Immediately after Dharma, the professor and hundreds of boatmen are arrested. It is because `` their lips during oath-taking ceremony, it had been observed, had –not moved at all``.¹²

In the next chapter, Professor begins a free lottery stall to tell the innocence of Bhoma who has label of a great conspirator, to the people. Bhoma's student helps the professor to tell the truth through the fable of the King who became naked and exposed.

After that the lottery stall is destroyed and the Professor is sent to Jail. When the headman of the boatpeople takes up the Professor's mission, she is also sent to the Gold Mines. Despite many kinds of torture she does not accept the Grand-master's rules. She tells the Astrologer, `` I spit on you and I spit on the Grand-master``.¹³ In turn her eyes are gouged out and the professor goes on a fast. He dies in the gold mines expecting `` a new world``.¹⁴

The news of professor's death and the sad plight of the headman results in the strike of the boatmen. They take a pledge that there will be no movement on the river until their oppressor opens his eyes and ears to their lament.

Meanwhile, the minister for Trader and the Education Advisor also decide to assist the boatmen. Advisors try to oust the Grand-master and grab the power for themselves. Consequently, `` shops, schools, buses telephone exchange and railway stations are systematically burnt``¹⁵ and the very next night all the prisoners are set free. But during the following night two hundred sleeping boatmen are brutally killed and thrown into the river.

In this atmosphere of chaos the river turns very furious and comes forwards to punish the evil doers. It emancipates the true sons from endless and unbearable suffering. The river is also symbolic of the Great Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh in the Indian religion. Like Brahma, she is a creator of the city, Like Vishnu, she is preserver to it, and like Shiva, she is destroyer.

It is the only poor boatmen who have the courage to lead an authentic existence through they pay a heavy price for it. Their leader is symbol of strength and commitment. The essence of the boatmen's life contains in great Yogeshwara's words:

`` The question is not of success or failure, the question is of trying-----The city must strive once again for purity. But purity can come only through sacrifice``. ¹⁶

The novel depicts, in fact, the predicament of the whole generation or rather the whole race and divine salvation of mankind.

Conclusion:

In the novel 'The city and the River' the Great Yogeshwara narrates his disciple the Nameless-One a strange sorry tale about the struggle of the boatmen for the essence of life against the torturing laws regulated by the power-hungry Grand Master and his Advisory Council.

Throughout the story there is an eternal conflict between allegiance to man and allegiance to God. The Grand Master and his followers represent evil, self-centered and materialistic attitude. They long for empowering the boatmen who are purified, selfless and ready to sacrifice for the essence of life. The boatmen's revolt against the desire of the Grand Master to win their allegiance is directed to the purgation of the city and the compulsion of the Grand Master to see himself in the eyes of his subjects. Neither the Seven Hills nor the boatmen are ready to yield. In the wake of man's failure to find a suitable solution for the conflict divine power triumphs finally. In the novel Arun Joshi throws light on the essence of life that `` man can attain salvation and conquer the recurrent cycles of birth and death, creation and disintegration, through self-purification to be attained through suffering and sacrifice``.

References

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⁶Ibid.,p.14.

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⁹Ibid.,p.22.

¹⁰Ibid.,p.19.

¹¹Ibid.,p.102.

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¹⁴Ibid.,p.167.

¹⁵Ibid.,p.182.

¹⁶Ibid.,p.263.