

**HOLLOWNESS OF CIVILIZED SOCIETY IN THE NOVEL THE APPRENTICE****Mr. P. SELVAM<sup>1</sup>, Dr. P. MALATHY<sup>2</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of English, Chikkaiah Naicker College, Erode – 4, Tamil Nadu, India<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Chikkaiah Naicker College, Erode – 4, Tamil Nadu, India**TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:**

SELVAM, M. P. ., & MALATHY, P. . (2024). HOLLOWNESS OF CIVILIZED SOCIETY IN THE NOVEL THE APPRENTICE. Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education (TURCOMAT), 15(2), 244–246. <https://doi.org/10.61841/turcomat.v15i2.14724>

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In the novel *The Apprentice*, the depiction of a civilised society serves as a critical backdrop against which the protagonist's journey unfolds. The protagonist enters a world where rules, order, and societal norms dictate behaviour and interactions. This civilised society starkly contrasts the protagonist's upbringing and challenges the protagonist's beliefs and values. The protagonist confronts societal expectations in a novel that examines the complexities of a civilised society, questioning traditional norms and values. This paper investigates how the author portrays this society and its key traits, reflecting or contrasting with real-world societies to reveal underlying critiques. A central theme of hollowness permeates the narrative, highlighting the emptiness within the characters and their environment. Through a detailed analysis of key events and moments, the paper aims to uncover deeper meanings and the commentary on human nature within a structured society.

**DEPICTION OF CIVILISED SOCIETY IN *THE APPRENTICE***

The novel portrays a 'civilised society' as degraded and sterile, dominated by materialistic values that fail to nurture the human spirit. For Ratan, a truly civilised society must have 'the mark of a truly civilised society is how it cares for its most vulnerable members' (58). But society failed to cater for his needs and expectations. Despite his privileged background and societal status, he embodies a profound sense of alienation within this environment, highlighting that material wealth and social elevation do not shield individuals from inner discontent. The narrative further underscores Billy's struggle to reconcile his existence between the ostentatious American culture and the deeply rooted traditions of Indian society, accentuating his feelings of being a misfit. This dichotomy reveals that the so-called civilised society breeds isolation and existential turmoil among its members, instead of providing a sanctuary of fulfilment. The novel critically explores this theme by juxtaposing the superficial comforts of modernity with the profound wisdom of ancient cultures, implying that the latter may hold solutions to the crises faced by contemporary society. Joshi says,

Our lives, it seemed, had become a paradox. By day we lived in a world of clean tables and polished floors, discussing the welfare of our people, and by night we sank into a mire of deceit and disillusionment, clutching at whatever straw came our way to keep ourselves afloat (124).

This portrayal ultimately calls for re-evaluating what constitutes true civilisation and underscores the need for a more holistic approach that harmonises material progress with cultural and spiritual enrichment.

**MORAL DECAY AND HYPOCRISY:**

The novel vividly depicts the moral decay underlying the seemingly civilised exterior of society. Ratan, who starts as an idealistic young man, becomes entangled in the corrupt practices he once despised. The sharp contrast between his initial aspirations and eventual disillusionment highlights the pervasive hypocrisy that taints societal interactions. He feels exhausted with the moral decay and observes that 'the moral decay of society is like a creeping poison, slowly corroding the very fabric of our values' (95). The novel shows how Ratan's environment significantly affects his moral degradation. The prevailing corrupt system within which he works continually tests his resolve. Under constant pressure and the influence of others, Ratan's initial refusal to engage in corrupt activities weakens. His moral decline is marked by his rationalisation of unethical actions, adapting to survive in a system where honesty appears impractical. This justification leads to increasingly questionable decisions, turning his journey from idealism to disillusionment into a powerful narrative of how prolonged exposure to corruption can corrupt even the most principled individuals. This loss reflects a broader commentary on societal failures and the difficulty of upholding personal integrity in a flawed system.

Hypocrisy emerges as a significant theme, exemplified by characters like Ratan who struggle to reconcile their public personas with their private actions. ‘Hypocrisy is the mask the morally corrupt wear to hide their true intentions’ (62). Ratan exemplifies hypocrisy by displaying a noticeable contrast between his outward persona and the challenges he faces internally. He projects an image of efficiency and reliability, even as he engages in the same corruption he once condemned. This duality reflects the broader social hypocrisy where moral corruption is widespread yet publicly denounced. Throughout the novel, characters, including Ratan, often judge others for the very actions they partake in. This selective moral judgment highlights the ease with which individuals ignore their faults while condemning similar behaviours in others, creating a culture of hypocrisy.

### **MATERIALISM AND CORRUPTION:**

Arun Joshi exposes the rampant materialism that characterises the society in the novel. The characters, including Ratan, are driven by a relentless pursuit of wealth and status. This pursuit often comes at the expense of ethical principles, leading to widespread corruption. The emphasis on material success over moral integrity underscores the emptiness of societal values. Ratan starts as a man with noble ideals influenced by his father’s teachings and the nationalistic fervour of the pre-independence era. However, as he navigates the corridors of power, the allure of material success entices him, eroding his ethical principles. Pursuing material wealth becomes a driving force, overshadowing his initial ideals of serving the nation. Arun Joshi observes, ‘The pursuit of wealth and status has become an all-consuming obsession, blinding us to the true meaning of life ... Greed and self-interest have eroded the moral fabric of our society, leaving us hollow and spiritually bankrupt’ (132 - 133). The society around Ratan emphasises success and status, often measured in material terms. This societal pressure exacerbates Ratan’s internal struggle. His desire to provide for his family and the societal expectations of success pushes him towards choices that conflict with his moral compass. Throughout the novel, material possessions symbolise the characters’ shifts in values. For instance, Ratan’s growing collection of personal and professional amenities signifies his deeper entanglement with materialism and the associated moral decline.

Corruption is intricately woven into the fabric of the novel, showcasing how pervasive and detrimental it is to the individual and society. Ratan’s journey represents the ease individuals can slip into corrupt practices. Initially resistant, he succumbs to bribery and manipulation, demonstrating how persistent exposure to a corrupt environment can wear down even a principled individual. His moral compromise represents the more significant systemic issues that plague society. The novel illustrates that corruption is not limited to isolated incidents but is systemic, affecting every level of society. From government offices to business dealings, the pervasive nature of corruption underscores the challenges of maintaining integrity in such an environment. Joshi does not shy away from portraying the consequences of corruption, both for the individual and society. Ratan’s engagement in corrupt practices leads to inner turmoil, loss of self-respect, and strained personal relationships. On a broader level, the novel critiques how corruption undermines societal progress and erodes public trust in institutions.

The themes of materialism and corruption are interrelated in the novel, showing how one often leads to the other. Ratan’s materialistic desires drive him towards corrupt behaviour. His initial foray into corruption is motivated by the need to achieve material success and social status. This cause-and-effect relationship highlights the vicious cycle where the desire for material wealth fosters corruption, perpetuating further moral decay. The constant pursuit of material wealth and the acceptance of corruption lead to an ethical erosion that is both personal and societal. Ratan’s gradual abandonment of moral values underscores how materialism and corruption can corrode individual integrity and societal morality. Through Ratan’s story, Joshi critiques a society where materialism is often prioritised over ethical behaviour. The novel portrays how focusing on material gain and the normalisation of corrupt practices can lead to a collective decline in moral standards and ethical governance. Prof. Iyenger observes: ‘As a fictional study of the anatomy and dynamics of the almost omnipresent corruption in the country, *The Apprentice* is a powerful indictment. The human story and the stark message both come through’ (748).

### **LOSS OF INDIVIDUALITY:**

The novel captures the loss of individuality in a society that pressures its members to conform to corrupt norms. Ratan’s journey reflects the struggle of an individual trying to maintain his identity and integrity in a system that constantly undermines them. ‘I had added a new dimension to my life. I have become a hypocrite and a liar at the age of twenty one; in short, a sham. . . From morning till night I told more lies than truths. I had become a master faker. . . . A faker. A sham. A faker soon forgets who he really is’ (27). The societal expectation to conform leads to alienation and loss of self, contributing to a sense of hollowness. Joshi delves into the spiritual vacuum that accompanies the

materialistic pursuits of the characters. Ratan's internal strife and his eventual recognition of the futility of his actions point to a deeper existential crisis. The lack of spiritual fulfilment and meaningful values leaves the characters feeling inner emptiness.

#### **SOCIAL INEQUITIES:**

The novel also touches upon the social inequities in the supposed civilised society. The disparities between different social classes and the exploitation of the vulnerable further highlight the moral bankruptcy of society. The civilised façade fails to mask the underlying injustices and exploitation perpetuating the system. Ratan and other characters experience deep alienation and isolation despite being part of a larger community. This reflects the disconnection and lack of genuine relationships in a society driven by selfish motives. The characters' inability to form meaningful connections adds to the pervasive sense of hollowness.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The research paper delves deep into the portrayal of the hollowness of civilised society as depicted in the novel *The Apprentice*. Through the character of Billy Biswas, the narrative highlights the profound sense of alienation and inner discontent experienced by individuals, regardless of their material wealth and societal status. The juxtaposition of ostentatious American culture and traditional Indian values underscores Billy's struggle to find his place within a society that values materialism over spiritual enrichment. The novel delves into societal norms and personal experiences, symbolizing the complex relationship between individual growth and societal demands, urging a reassessment of true civilization through the portrayal of materialism and corruption that cause isolation and existential crisis among the characters. The novel skillfully contrasts the superficial comforts of modernity with the profound wisdom of ancient cultures, suggesting that a holistic approach that harmonises material progress with cultural and spiritual enrichment is essential for societal well-being. The narrative highlights the impact of personal and societal introspection, promoting a life filled with purpose and meaning. The discussion section of this research paper calls for more detailed exploration of themes like isolation, dehumanisation, and societal decay in the novel. It suggests that future research should further investigate the intricate relationship between societal expectations and individual fulfilment.

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