

Existentialism in Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner*

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Abstract

Existentialism is the odyssey for the real meaning in life. It is the human struggle for existence in a civilized modern world which is full of spiritual stress and strain. Arun Joshi a twentieth-century novelist affirms that the greatness of Indian form of existentialism is the outcome of the Upanishad and Hinduism that focuses on the correct way of living. His novels are branded as theme dealing with fretfulness, alienation and the existential predicament of the contemporary man. The central characters are mentally disturbed and filled with despair, self-hatred and self-pity and regard themselves as stranger in this lonely planet. In the novel, 'The Foreigner', Arun Joshi focuses on the aspect of Existentialism and rootlessness. The protagonist Sindi Oberoi is alienated from the world and is projected as a perennial outsider. In this paper, the novel "The Foreigner" is presented in terms of existential philosophy and an effort is made to unfold the mystery of man's psyche to search for his earlier roots.

Keywords: *existentialism, alienation, rootlessness, identity, foreigner*

Arun Joshi's 'The Foreigner' is the first existential novel that explores and expresses the depth of human's inner soul. In this novel Joshi depicts that man can attain materialistic comforts but his search for peace remains unachievable. Joshi explores the individual's anguished consciousness of being isolated from the whole apparatus of social conventions and moral properties and his attempt to understand and face with dignity the abominable absurdity of the world. This novel deals with the life of a young man Surinder Oberoi; henceforth called Sindi, who is alone in this wide world and wants to do something meaningful. The protagonist Sindi Oberoi is thoroughly an existentialist character, who can be called as rootless, restless and luckless in a mad, bad and absent world. His early life, parentage and the circumstances turn him into an ideal foreigner. He has always been in the world of alienation searching for meaning in existence. Whether he is in London, Boston or in Delhi, he is a man without roots and remains a foreigner. The word 'Foreigner' suggests that person who belongs nowhere.

The novel is the tale of Surinder Oberoi called Sindi, a vagrant kid who is separated from everyone else in this

world and wants to accomplish something significant and is in search for comfort and the genuine significance of his presence. He considers himself a non-native wherever he goes- Kenya, Uganda, London, America, and finally to India. It is a journey of a man who cannot develop any attachment to any place. Sindi is born to an Indian skeptic father and an English mother in Kenya an African country. His mixed parentage twist existential problems in Sindi's life. Later both his parents die in an air-crash near Cairo and he is orphaned both in terms of his relation and emotional roots at his caring age of four. After his parents' death he is brought up by his uncle in Kenya but regrettably he too dies soon and he feels himself miserable, isolated and is forced to lead a life of 'a perennial foreigner', a man who does not belong anywhere. Sindi has been denied parental love, family affection and cultural roots. He grows into a wayward man and finally becomes a wanderer- alien to his own culture. He finds no longer any security and his sense of being an outsider remains to be static. His restlessness, the mental agencies that he suffers and his own predicament compel him to think as such.

The death of his parents at his tender age has deprived him of parental love and all the basic opportunities to learn to shape his inter-personal relation with family, with people and with society. So, without anchor, Sindi considers himself insecure and explores his own feelings like, "I had not felt like that when my uncle was living. It was not that I loved him very much or anything as a matter of fact. We rarely exchanged letters but the thought that he moved about in that house on the outskirts of Nairobi gave me a feeling of anchor. After his death that security was destroyed". (TF P-61-62)

Thus, the absence of familiar affection creates a vacuum of emotional mutability which cannot be filled. He has a deep sense of loneliness, insecurity and impermanence, which color his entire attitude towards himself, his life and existence. Against this background of emotional rootlessness, the various incidents of Sindi's life appear more comprehensible. This vagrant intellectual moves from Nairobi where he is born to London where he studies, to Saho where he works as a dish washer and bar man, to

Scotland where he works at a small village library and discusses religion, God and mysticism with a Catholic priest. Sindi has studied in different places like Africa, London and America where he meets different types of people with varied experiences. In London he meets Anna, a minor artist a thirty-five-year-old woman separated from her husband. He has an affair with her and comes to apprehend that Anna has not yearns for him or anybody. But she is merely seeking 'for her lost youth'. After he leaves Anna, he comes across Kathy, a married woman separated from her husband like Anna and enjoys sex with her. Consequently, Kathy leaves Sindi because she understands the importance of the ritual of marriage and saying the words: "Marriage is sacred and has to be maintained at all costs" (TF, P.144). Except these two women, Sindi has relations with Judy, Christine and June, he enjoys sex with them under the bogus garb of detachment. As a result, each of his affair end in failure and disappointment. Sindi makes relationships with number of women; but with June he has come face to face with his hypocrisy and stupidity.

June Blyth is a very beautiful, sensitive, generous, bold girl. Her Immoral love soothes and comforts him. Sindi's relation with her is in stark contrast to his relations with Anna and Kathy. June is a pure girl by heart and wants to be useful to someone. The open hearted and caring girl loves him genuinely and does not want to leave him at any cost. Both have sexual relations and she starts insisting him to get married to her saying, "Let's get married Sindi, for God's sake, let's get married." (TF, P.107) But Sindi is neutral, responsible to no-one. His cold detachment isolates him from June and paves the way for her love towards Babu, Sindi's friend.

Sindi's philosophy of detachment is not the result of pragmatic approach to life but of his search for wrong things in wrong places. His false notion of living without desire is badly shattered when his ideal theory of non-involvement comes into clash with the reality of life during his passionate involvement with June Blyth. He is afraid of possessing or being possessed by others. Actually, Sindi wants to love and be loved but he is afraid of commitment and involvement. Although he loves June deeply, yet he tries not to get attached to her. When she insists for marriage he tells her, "There is another way of loving. You can love without attachment to the objects of your love. You can love without fooling yourself that the things you love are indispensable either to you or to the world. Love is only real when you know that you must one day die." (TF, P.145)

Disappointed and detached from Sindi, June and Babu are engaged to be married, but just before marriage, the

relationship breaks down. Sindi makes love to her when she is depressed due to the failure of her adjustment with Babu. He forgets that now she belongs to Babu. Babu being frustrated due to his academic failure and suspicion that June is carrying on with Sindi, quarrels with her. He cannot digest the indecorum behavior of June. In a fit of depression, he blatantly drives the car and crashing it commits suicide. Subsequently, June comes to know about her pregnancy. She is upset and takes a decision to abort herself. During the abortion surgery, June also dies. When Sindi gets the shocking news about the death of June and Babu, Sindi is left numb and desperate. He thinks that he is responsible for their tragic death and feels alone and detached in the world now. He suffers from a sense of repentance. (He has been nourishing illusions and pretending detachment. He admits, "I tried to speculate about things objectively not realizing that objectivity was another form of vanity". He has been nourishing illusions and pretending detachment. He admits, "I tried to speculate about things objectively not realizing that objectivity was another form of vanity." Sindi's sense alienation deepens after the death of June and Babu. And he feels that "Detachment consisted of right action and not escape from it." (TF, P.206)

Finally in this unexpected chaotic situation and his quest of existence, he decides to go to Delhi far away from his internal trauma. Consequently, when Sindi comes to India, he reaches at Khemka's house where he encounters a bronze figure of the dancing Shiva. The dancing Shiva is the paradox of truth; he is both destructive fury and creative force. Similarly, Sindi Oberoi is a paradox who passes through a process of death and a new man is born. At last, he comes to know the purpose of his existence on this planet in search of which he has been wandering from place to place. The rootless and detached Sindi finds purpose of life. From a life of alienation in America and England, he moves to a life of identification in India.

To conclude, Arun Joshi's novel, 'The Foreigner' is confessional in tone. Joshi is a conscientious writer who gives impression to the existential predicaments and dilemmas of his protagonists. His main characters are in search of their lost self and their identity. His protagonist shows the traits of extreme self-consciousness and self-orientation. He is in the quest of his existence. The author wonderfully depicts the interior of a man as a human and his treatment to man's grief, suffering, waywardness, loneliness and also the rootlessness is noteworthy in this context. Arun Joshi is passionately concerned with man's feeling of alienation and anxiety in life. He does not accept alienation or absurdity as the contingent condition of human life. Instead of that, his central motive is quest and

all his heroes are questers or seekers. The self-centered and self-oriented heroes of Arun Joshi are unaware not only of their surroundings and environment but also of their own selves and it is because of their self-satisfying conduct that they feel uncomfortable to face the truth.

Arun Joshi demonstrated the agonized self and torn existence of a man. His amalgamation of psychology, social motive with spiritual elements has uplifted the art of narrative to such an extent that he commemorated the Indian Cultural Values. Thus, the novel 'The Foreigner' deals with the spiritually adventurous journey of the puzzled Sindi Oberoi who is confused in the maze of life. The title 'The Foreigner' is significant in a way it deals with alienation of displaced person felt both at social and domestic level. He is a wanderer without the sense of belonging. As the Gandhian philosophy preaches that our existence is the outcome of suffering which is unavoidable. Joshi makes Sindi's experience soul-searing pain throughout his quest for self-realization. Finally, his soul comes out renewed, purified and revitalized.

Note: The abbreviation TF is used for 'The Foreigner'.

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