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## Self-Remorse a Process to Individuation: A Sartrean Study of Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner*

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An existential crisis is a stage of development at which an individual questions the very foundations of the life, whether the life has any meaning. It is often provoked by a significant event in the person's life like, marriage, separation, major loss, the death of a loved one, a life-threatening experience, and so on. Existentialism puts the major responsibility for finding meaning and value in life on individual human beings, this self-responsibility perceives anxiety about survival and self-care. Arun Joshi's maiden novel *The Foreigner* relates the psycho aberration of Surrinder Oberoi, called Sindi throughout the novel till the protagonist turns into Surrender Oberoi after undergoing intolerable loss out of his false attachment and egoistic stand. In the light of Sartre's theory the article shows that the honest encounter with dread and anguish is the only gateway to become an authentic being.

The contemporary man is constantly in search of a way in which he can, with dignity, confront a universe which has become disjoined, purposeless and absurd on account of the collapse of age-old values. Defining the meaning of the term 'absurd' Eugene Ionesco observes:

Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose... cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless. (56)

Sartrean concept of nothingness is based on his concept that "existence precedes essence." According to Sartre man is literally thrown into the world with no control over the conditions (facticity) in which he finds himself. He stresses choices stating that one must choose the kind of person he wants to be and the kind of life he wants to live, and in choosing, he gives direction and meaning to his existence. The very desire to become authentic is a kind of courage involving a full acceptance of our responsibility as formless beings in search of definition. This article is an attempt to understand Arun Joshi through Sartre's concept of "Existence Precedes Essence."

To Sartre existential man is a conscious being, a 'being-for-itself.' 'Being-in-itself' refers to objects in the world such as house, car, TV, knife, or hammer. The meaning or the essence of the objects is built into the object itself and can be understood by looking at the object. It means, the object reveals its essence. The 'being-for-itself' stands for human consciousness and is applicable only to human beings. Man's consciousness is identified with the gap or space, the emptiness which distinguishes him from the object, 'being-in-itself.' In this aspect nothingness is like space; it is outside the conscious being, and it constitutes the distance which divides him from his world.

Nothingness is the emptiness within him which he aims to fill by his own actions, his thoughts and his perceptions. His freedom is defined in terms of his own potentiality. As Sartre states in *Being and Nothingness*:

Human freedom precedes essence in man and makes it possible; the essence of the human being is suspended in his freedom... Man does not exist first in order to be free subsequently; there is no difference between the being of man and his being-free. (60)

On the one hand, man is open and projects his possibilities, on the other; he is closed by the factual situation in which he already finds himself. Death is another restricting factor of human freedom. It leaves man in doubt and suspense. The individual's freedom, which is the fundamental tenet of existential philosophy, prominently figures in *The Foreigner*.

Arun Joshi portrays protagonist who is singularly individualistic but symbolize the characteristics of the modern age. He deals with mystery and darkness of human mind. His novels probing into existentialism, along with the ethical choices a man has to make, won Arun Joshi huge critical appreciation in India.

Sindi considers his life to be full of illusions. For an insecure man, everybody around him is an enemy and everything is purposeless. He ruminates on the purposelessness of his life:

I wondered in what way, if any did I belong to the world that roared beneath my apartment window. Somebody had begotten me without a purpose and so far I had lived without a purpose, unless you could call the search for peace a purpose. Perhaps I felt like that because I was a foreigner in America. But then, what difference would it have made if I had lived in Kenya or India or any other place for that matters? It seemed to me that I would still be a foreigner. My foreignness lay within me and I couldn't leave myself behind wherever I went. (*The Foreigner* 65)

Sindi Oberoi, like Sartre's existential creature, *pour-soi* is irritated and embarrassed to find himself in the predicament of an outsider. An Indian by origin, brought up in Kenya, Sindi received his early education in London and he has been studying engineering in America for six years. His parents had died in an air crash in his infancy and their only reality for him is the cracked photographs. The fluidity of his background emphasizes his metaphysical alienation. He is a man drifting aimlessly on the surface of life without an anchor to cling to. Sindi, like Camus' hero, is fully aware of the meaninglessness of human life in this world. He believes in the inevitability of suffering and endlessness of the conflict between good and evil. Sindi's attitude to life and the world reminds us of Roquentin, Sartre's hero of *Nausea* who reflects on the absurdity of existence:

We were a heap of existents inconvenienced, embarrassed by ourselves, we hadn't the slightest reason for being there, any of us, each existent, embarrassed, vaguely ill at ease, felt superfluous in relation to the others. (184)

Sindi's feeling of nausea begins in the early years of adolescence and keeps him restless throughout his life. At one stage he feels so tired of living that he even contemplates suicide. This sickness of life possesses him even after he joins London University. Though he has no trouble with his courses, he gets tired of the class-room

lectures. This makes him to say that it does not teach him “a thing about life” (*The Foreigner* 165). Sindi starts to wander through the muddle of his existence, looking for a purpose in life. As Sartre rightly defines:

Man first of all exists, surges up in the world and defines himself afterwards.... Man is not what he conceives to be, but he is what he wills and makes of himself. (*Being and Nothingness* 13)

*The Foreigner* emphasizes the baffling and incalculable nature of life. The events of life are uncontrollable and one gets involved inexorably. Sindi aptly remarks, “One does not choose one’s involvement” (*The Foreigner* 48). The lumbering confusion in Sindi’s approach to life causes the death of his friend Babu Rao Khemka and his sweetheart June Blyth which drains out his confidence. This made him to feel that there is nothing left for him to depend upon. Finding his position unpardonable he is held with a sense of guilt and self-remorse and says, “I could make her happy by simply standing still and letting her use me which ever way she wished. Nothing could have been farther from the idea of detachment” (168).

Sindi experiences anxiety at confronting the world’s loneliness, mercilessness, and nothingness. He continuously looked for meaning, to find a connection with others and the world. But ultimately he fails miserably to establish a reason for living or to reveal an intelligible concept, which explains the world beyond doubt. Out of the meaningless of his life Sindi seems to experience what David E.Cooper calls “existential angst, an experience of groundless and the absence of anything holding one in place and anchoring one’s actions” (*Existentialism: A Reconstruction* 130). Sindi longs to be in a place where he can experiment with himself and “start life anew” (*The Foreigner* 165).

Sindi is anguished to see the abominable wheel of industrialization grinding on inevitably and man who pretends to be the master, being driven before it like torn bits of paper. Then he plans to do something meaningful that is something that could make him forget himself. He is further involved in sympathetic attachment with the lives of others. Gradually he begins to feel sympathy for the labourers working for Mr.Khemka:

It was a sad sight. The workers were falling off in rags and sweat poured off their backs as if they had just had a shower.... These are my people, I thought and I yet moved among them as if I were a stranger. (179)

As Sartre states Sindi realizes that he is essentially free, freedom not in the sense of indeterminacy but in the sense of being able to determine himself through decisions in the centre of his being. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre puts, “Human reality everywhere encounters resistance and obstacles which is not created, but these resistance and obstacles have meaning only in and through the free choice which human reality is” (599). One’s attitude to this freedom of choice can be different. Any individual with moral conscience can be termed as authentic being. This person’s act, such as moral acts, is authentic because it is something to which the person commits oneself. On the contrary, the individual’s act is inauthentic if he/she does something simply by following others without making choice. Authenticity is a mark of freedom of choice, which is an important aspect for existentialists. A person defines himself through his actions not only for the present, but also for the future. Only the careful selection of the choice determines the result.

Sindi as Sartre remarks makes a choice; his earlier detachment with the world has now been replaced by a fervent but unselfish attachment. He surrenders himself to the

cause of others. Deeply aware of this new orientation in his way of life and thought, he gives a new orientation to his name too and instead of 'surendra' or 'surinder' he calls himself 'surrender Oberoi.' Like Sartre, Joshi seems to be interested in action that is concrete, immediate and directed towards the individual rather than action addressed to an end which is ambiguous.

Thus, Sindi in Sartrean terms becomes an 'authentic being,' a typical existential hero. Sindi created for himself a personal way of life out of the void of nothingness all around him. His long and tedious journey helps him to arrive at a meaning. According to Sartre, human beings "possess a consciousness of self and hence are able to create and re-create themselves" (*Being and Nothingness* 195). It seems applicable to suggest that if one embraces negative emotions as well as positive ones, one can establish a sense of belonging, liberation and individuality. Emotions allow for adaptation to one's social; environment and integration. Furthermore, the instinctual nature of emotions creates enthusiasm and excited fleeting experiences that can shape existence. By eliminating negative emotions, one would become disillusioned of their finitude. Thus the novel portrays the progress of Sindi from self-remorse to an 'authentic being.'

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