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## A Foreigner Everywhere: The Existential Crisis in Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner*

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### Abstract:

Arun Joshi's books digging into existentialism, along with the moral decisions a man needs to make has won him enormous appreciation. His anecdotal world proposes a conflict between estranged self and socio-cultural powers. The heroes of his books are subjected to compelling social, cultural and mental stresses. The inter-generation tensions incited with the changing ethos make expanding demands on the individual and contribute in making a void which is only a disorganized sentiment of rootlessness in life. This attention to rootlessness and uneasiness is the cornerstone of Joshi's existential vision of the situation of the modern man which finds ample reflection in *The Foreigner*. The present paper is an attempt at exploring the sentiments of detachment and foreignness, as they overshadow the protagonist's life; leading him to the existentialist dilemma, where he finds himself a foreigner everywhere.

**Keywords: existentialism-detachment-foreignness-rootlessness- quest for identity.**

*Arun Joshi* (1939-1993) was an Indian writer in English. He was born in Varanasi, completed his higher education in US and returned to India to become an Industrial manager. In today's world of book-promos, Arun Joshi would be an oddball as he generally kept himself out of the spotlight. He was an indrawn person. Who did little to promote his books and who avoided entering literary circles.

His heroes find the importance and value of life testing through the dim maze of the spirit. The quest for identity is the leitmotif of his books:

*In every creation of the author his instinctive ability to articulate the feelings the post-independence Indians trapped between the Indian ethos and western influences reveals in great way. In many of his writings it reveals his psychological insight and understanding of the inner lives of the surrounded prateyevish. ("The Concept of Human Technology in Arun Joshi's The Foreigner")*

Joshi has produced many compelling works of fiction including *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, *the Apprentice* and *The Foreigner*. He in *The Foreigner*, dexterously handles some intriguing, grave issues like rootlessness, separation, disappointment, quest for better option, identity-crisis and self-acknowledgment highlighting our wonderful social legacy and good

values. His reputation has been relentlessly rising following the production of his first novel. *The Foreigner* is the novel after the fortunes of Sindi Oberoi, a young man of Indian descent. The story concentrates primarily on the period from his school years in States to his resulting move to India. Conceived in Kenya of a Kenyan-Indian father and an English mother, he is stranded at four years old when his guardians died in an air-crash and is left in the care of an uncle in Nairobi. Moved by an instinctual thirst towards self-achievement, he grows up free from any enthusiastic connection with nation and family, a sort of disposition that he at first mistakes for detachment.

*The Foreigner* opens like a thriller with the scene set in a funeral home where Sindi recognizes the dead body of his companion Bobu Rao Khemka. He breaks the news of Babu's passing to Babu's life partner, June R. Blyth. Months after the incident, he comes to Delhi looking for an occupation and sees Mr. Khemka, Babu's dad. Mr. Khemka gives him a job in his firm. Sindi describes to Shiela, the sister of Babu, his past and subsequently dispatches on his psychic odyssey. The novel is composed as things past. The portrayal continues moving from the later past in Boston to the present in Delhi. Sindi considers himself to be an outsider wherever he lives or goes-in Kenya where he is conceived, in England and USA where he studied, and in India where he at last settles. His distance rises above the obstructions of geology, nationality and society. It impels him starting with one emergency then onto the next, sucking in the wake a few other individuals including June, an appealing American with whom he has a brief and enthusiastic issue and Babu who frames the third vertex of their destined love triangle.

*The Foreigner* is specifically focused on themes such as estrangement, companionship and East-West experience. Sindi Oberoi is forlorn, discouraged and is horrendously mindful of the chaos he is in. All order has left his life. He just runs with the wind. He doesn't have any arrangement, peace or anything that could keep him inside of the example of regular living. His stranded and ignored youth has made him an outsider and this distance for him is a vital part of his life. Whenever Mr. Khemka needs to know how the demise of his guardians occurred, his answer has a sting: "For the hundredth time I repeated the story of those strangers whose only reality was a couple of wrinkled and crackled photographs." (9)

The character of Sindi legitimizes the title of the novel. He is an outsider by birth yet he remains a Foreigner because of his predicament. Whenever he gives a sentiment of being an outsider to others, so does he feel at whatever point he meets anybody. He is so enormously involved in himself that he becomes insensible of his general surroundings that his company never provides any warmth to people around him. His foreignness is clear in any individual who meets him and converses with him. In their first experience Juni lets him know: "There is something strange about you, you know. Something distant. I'd guess when people are with you they don't feel like they're with a human being. Maybe it's an Indian characteristic, but I have a feeling you'd be a foreigner anywhere" (30).

In the novel Joshi has portrayed man's predicament especially the sentiments of dejection and meaninglessness that have come as a consequence of worldly success, material prosperity breaking down of all powers of profound devotion and solidarity. Sindi's story is fundamentally the account of an estranged man who looks for distance as per him it will function as a safety valve for his torments and fears. Throughout the story he tries not to get involved and be detached. The story tests the existentialist predicament of Sindi as O.P. Bhatnagar observes: "A strange feeling of aloneness and aloofness...permeates the entire narrative and provides the necessary texture and structure of the novel" ("Arun Joshi's The Foreigner: A Critique of East and West". p.13-14).

Sindi is a puzzled man who finds himself participating in a wild rat-race with no reasonable objective. The financial drudgery, social-weights, the disintegration of old religions and authoritative opinions and dubious loyalties barbarously crump his life and wound him so much that he embraces a skeptical mentality towards life and set up social standards and values. S.P. Swain and S. Samartray in "The problem of Alienation and the Quest for Identity in Joshi's novels" observe about Joshi's heroes that they: "... rebel against the socio-cultural pressures and pursue their quest for identity. Through self-probing and self-exploration, through perceptions of the past and alienating experiences of the present they discover the higher values for life."(114)

Sindi's dejection as opposed to his situation turns into his fixation which makes him pull back from people around him and thus it makes his life appear purposeless. The first position of his alienation is found when he tells how he sat tight for Babu at the New York airplane terminal: "I was hired by the foreign students' office to look after new Indian students...in the beginning it had been interesting...but the strain of too many friendships had proved too much."(16) He is so much involved in his depression that companionships prove strenuous for him. Babu also discovers his life in America extremely lonely. He gets himself distanced however unlike Sindi he loathes his alienation. He craves to blend up with individuals and make companions with them. He is very astonished at American's disagreeable and frosty disposition towards the non-natives. He responds like a typical Indian: "But one would expect them to show some interest in foreigners." And again: "Well, just because they are foreigners! If we meet any Americans in Delhi we take great interest in them, we? (18).

Sindi detests the thought of mingling with individuals, swarmed places seem suffocating to him. The gatherings which are a source of delight for individuals are a mere burden for him. He prefers not to be among the public. Whenever he has to attend the gatherings of the International Students he takes them as a trouble: "It is one thing to be invited to somebody's house for a party, quite another to go to a public hall, buy a ticket and then search a place for a girl you can dance with. I hated it. I never went to those things except as an ex officio host."(21) At the point when Sindi is in India an educator at his address talks about each remote student's being the ambassador of his country. On hearing this Sindi feels that the instance of his being a representative of his nation is splendidly comical. The distance of the non-natives is additionally the aftereffect of the cynic demeanor of nearby individuals. It is clear in the verbal confrontation

over the marriage of Babu and June .At one point Babu anticipates that Americans will be warm towards the nonnatives yet the thought of his marriage with a foreigner is not acknowledged in his own crew. His sister says: “A foreigner doesn’t fit in our homes.”(56) At this Sindi replies, “Don’t get angry Shiela. I really want to know. Foreigners don’t fit in our homes because we do not want them to fit in, isn’t that the reason?”(56)

The situation of Sindi absolutely legitimizes that one's national identity on one hands is a matter of pride yet the globalized people always suffer the crisis of national identity. Conveying his discourse at the Australian Conference on Natinal-Identity in August1968, Radney Hall asserted that: “National identity is inescapable to anyone using his national tongue. An affirmation of national identity takes the form of national glorification, an awareness of historical sense. The loss of it also leads to crisis of identity.” The alienation of Sindi makes him selfish and he is well aware of it: “Unlike pain, happiness can be shared. It is aloneness in suffering that makes men selfish.” (27)

All through the story Sindi tries to escape from reality. The distance is an escape when you would prefer not to be with anybody since you need to share their torment. He creates a fictional universe for himself where he exists alone and all reality for him is his distance. This makes him perceive everything as illusionary: “And then to be in love in your sense requires one to take things seriously, assume that there is permanence about things. Nothing ever seems too real to me, leave alone seeming to be permanent. Nothing seems to be very important.” (107)His splendid carrier prospects and advantageous scholastic accomplishments are of no profit on the grounds that from surrounding he is overpowered by a bothering feeling of forlornness and disorder of his being. He is by all accounts lost in the typical feeling of the world and to him “good things and bad things appear to be same in the long run of existence” (108). His sufferings are the appearances of a profound emergency which every single delicate people need to face today. His position is that of “the dull school boy who always gets stuck with the same unanswerable questions.” (141)

Rootless as he seems to be, he meanders from spot to put and individual to individual looking for peace and significance of life, which for him can be accomplished just in depression. He discovers his life a weight after the demise of his guardians so he considers conferring suicide to ease himself of weight, he begins moving and never stops. He leaves for England and joins London University, yet is soon tired of classroom addresses and proceeds with his quest for the “meaning of life”. In the process he is enticed by a moderately aged lady of 35, Anna. In spite of the fact that pulled in by her bitterness, yet being charmed in his own particular self, he neglects to give back her affection not long after he gets included with Kathy however as she “thought marriage was sacred and had to be maintained at all costs”(169), she separates from him.

The short lived delights of life neglect to fulfill him for they don't help him in discovering him the motivation behind his life. Having tasted the treachery and the important agony, Sindi needs to stay uninvolved for the duration of his life. He stays suspicious of all

inclusion and estrangement the belief of his life. In the nearby, calm and exceptionally private minutes with June, Sindi once admits that his foreignness exists in him and drives him from emergency to emergency rendering it troublesome for him to desert himself any place he goes:

*“...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 matter? 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...” (61)*

He doesn't know which religion to take after, his dad's or his mother's. He appears to have no confidence in any religion. He is his own particular god, he has his own implicit rules, the punch line of which is is 'not to get involved': "Anyway, I can't really be called a Hindu. My mother was English and my father, I am told, a sceptic. That does not seem like a good beginning for a Hindu, does it?"(31) In spite of the fact that all through the story a large portion of the general population botches Sindi to be an Indian when he really arrives in India, he understands that he is a nonnative here moreover. Indians around him are of the assessment that he doesn't comprehend India. Mr Khemka lets him know: "You don't understand. This is pretty serious you are new to India. Here if the government gets hold of you it really screws you up."(133) He even tires to explain his strangeness: "I'm not strange. I am perhaps different from you and your world. My set of experiences has taught me a reality that is different from yours. That's all."(137)

As Sindi is uninterested and estranged he can't have faith in affection, being adored and in the instinct of marriage. He feels that ownership produces torment as it incorporates inclusion. This speculation depends all alone experience over the span of his undertaking with Anna and Kathy. Despite the fact that he cherishes June seriously he is lost in loathsome hopelessness when she proposes marriage. He advises her that he:

"didn't believe in marriage because" "marriage was a more often a lust for possession than anything else. People got married just as they bought new cars. And then they gobbled each other up. One should be able to love without wanting to possess. Otherwise you end up by doing a lot more harm than good." (66)

As he has not delighted in the glow of relations gave by enthusiastic bonds, he harbors a profound feeling of unreliability falsity and impermanence about things. June tires to include him in adoring relationship yet comes up short since he declines to lose his grasp on non-inclusion: "I enjoyed making love to her and her sadness attracted me, but engrossed as I was with my own self I couldn't return her love."(169) Sindi is of the view that one should have the capability to lock up oneself from the object of one's affection, he wouldn't like to get integrated, he needs to stay free and on his own. In a skeptical he tells June: "You can love without attachment, without desire... love is real only when you know that what you love must one day die" (171) His involvement with June makes him sense that he can't love and stay separated in spite of the fact

that he had done it already with Anna and Kathy however the involvement with June ends up being not pretty similar where he couldn't turn out untouched. :

“I wanted to take that head in my hands and cover with kisses. I don't want to get involved. I repeated to myself. Everywhere I turned I saw involvement. How long could I stay free! The pain of earlier years had taught me wisdom but I didn't know, if I could depend on it. The comment had already been made the moment I had seen June at the dance. Now it was a matter of time.” (69)

Sindi's befuddled and blundering way to deal with life costs him two lives, both dear to him. Babu's sudden passing taken after by June's death come as a discourteous stun to him. As of right now he understands the full importance of June words "look what your separation has done." When he verges on increasing genuine estrangement and carries on of goodness, he drives the two individuals he adores to death. He doubts himself: “Wouldn't Babu still be living if I had not surrendered my body to June that night we went out for a ride? I thought I was acting out of detachment but was it merrily a desire to prove that I still hold key to June's happiness? (196).

A feeling of blame overawes him after the passing of Babu. He has an oblivious and incomprehensible trepidation that he has brought about Babu's passing. Babu's demise channels out something out of him, at one blow the greater part of what he has valued in life is taken away: “Babu had kicked out all my beliefs and disapproved all my theories. I felt like a desert or like a vast field of naked oaks in winter time.”(175) Sindi understands that what he has thought to be the solution for torment has at one stroke made only agony. The very distance which he himself developed to beat his agonizing recollections of the past has now transformed into a wellspring of more profound distress. Maybe in the event that he has not distanced himself he could have kept the catastrophe which happened upon Babu and June.

In the end it the lesson of *Bhagavad-Gita* that comes to his rescue, as it preaches: “To action alone has thou a right and never at all to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in the any attachment to inaction”( The Bhagavad-Gita, II: 47). He confesses: “... Detachment at that time meant inaction. Now I had begun to see the fallacy in it. Detachment consists of right action and not escape from it the Gods had set a very heavy price to teach me just that.” (192) Ramesh k. Srivastava in *Six Indian Novelists in English* groups the different variations of alienation which are much larger than the crisis of identity into two:

*“First with man's alienation from society which is the most prevalent kind of alienation, and second his alienation from his own self. A non-conformist is alienated from the society by rebelling against it, but a conformist is alienated from his own self by not following the voice of his conscience. It is this division of self which doesn't not let man live in peace.”*

Each one of these variables taken together have made this age the period of restlessness as well as the time of aloofness where the common populace like Sindi posture to be

cosmopolitan in nature however are neither completely cosmopolitan nor aware of their roots. Sindi experiences both kinds of rift said above. For American culture he is an outsider as they see him to be an Indian while Indians see him to be a nonnative. He is divided within himself. All through the story he tries to stay as unaccompanied and detached he could. Yet, rather than getting any noteworthy tranquility he generally keeps on being in a state of psychological damage.

His pursuit for meaning of life ends when he chooses to jump into the fight for reclaiming the matter of Mr. Khemka and then helping the laborers to hold their occupations which they can't deal with without his help and support. His long journey from America to India at last reaches its target, his most looked for purpose of internal calm and an important existence in addition to warmth of belongingness is at last accomplished. His expedition mitigates the advancement of a man from non inclusion and distance to acknowledgment of the significance of activities as the ideal replacement for inertia and lack of concern. At last he comes to comprehend that contribution and action are the basic essentials of human life instead of non-involvement and inaction.

The *Foreigner* reads like the insightful voyage of twentieth-century man who has lost his unearthly moorings and is obliquely bewildered, looking for a home. Joshi has attempted to widen the crisis of the urban and very industrialized current human progress along with its dehumanizing influence on the person who is ever vigorous to find out and reaffirm the assessment of major relatedness in life. His long outing from America to India finally accomplishes its destination his most searched for goal of internal peace and vital vicinity notwithstanding warmth of belongingness is finally proficient. His voyage facilitates the headway of a man from avoidance and alienation to affirmation of the essentialness of exercises as the perfect substitute for lethargy and absence of concern. Finally he comes to comprehend that commitment and action are the essential components of human life instead of exclusion and inaction.

The *Foreigner* examines like the supernatural odyssey of twentieth-century man who has lost his significant moorings and is meandering jumbled searching for a home. Arun has endeavored to amplify the crisis of the urbanized and particularly industrialized present day progress nearby its dehumanizing influence on the individual who is ever enthusiastic to find and reaffirm the estimation of essential relatedness in life.

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