

AN EXAMINATION OF THE EXISTENTIAL THEMES PRESENT IN A SELECTION OF ARUN JOSHI'S NOVELS

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Abstract

This essay examines existentialism and alienation in a few of Arun Joshi's writings. One book and a collection of sketches have been left behind by Arun Joshi, one of the most well-known Indo-English authors of the Post-colonial Era of Indian Literature. Joshi has utilized psychology as a potent tool to highlight the mental disorder that most of his heroes experience, but not more. Joshi is deeply concerned with bringing out the essence of Indian ethos, whose role is inevitable in all aspects of life, not only for the ancient ones but also for the perplexed contemporary youngster, whether he be Indian or alien. This is true even though his writings on the surface resemble those of Western existentialist writers who harp on the futility and negation of life and existence divine.

Keywords: Existentialism, foreignness, alienation, negation existentialism, alienation, existence

Introduction

Indian English literature, also known as Indo-Anglican literature, has gone a long way from being dismissed as condescending by the British to sometimes making literary appearances and being recognized as a well-liked genre of Modern English literature. One of the Indo-English writers who provided Indian literature written in English a new direction is Arun Joshi. It seems that his personal experience of living abroad is depicted in his books in the shape of diverse characters. His novels are built on the rootless of the characters who is continually in quest of his identity.

Joshi explores themes of engagement and alienation, east-west encounter and compromise, love and hatred, quest and complacency, and existentialism and materialism in all of his works. His make-believe universe reveals a reality where man must deal with his identity and the existential dilemma. His books represent an effort to comprehend himself and the world more fully. Albert Camus and other existentialist authors have affected him.

Arun Joshi is a writer from India. The *Foreigner*, which was released in 1968, marked the beginning of Joshi's writing career. The *Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), *The Apprentice* (1974), *The Last Labyrinth* (1981), and *The City and the River* (1990) are some of Arun Joshi's other books. He also published a collection of short tales in 1975 called *The Survivor*. For his fourth book, *The Last Labyrinth*, he received the coveted Sahitya Academy prize in 1982. Arun Joshi stands recognized as a major author in the Indo-English novel's modern landscape. He is an ethical author who works with the novel form to depict the existentialist predicament and moral challenges of his heroes as they fight to deal with situations of severe spiritual crisis. Joshi appears as a writer in the decadent tradition of Kafka, Camus, Sartre and Saul Bellow, Ellison and Malamud rather than in the vein of Jane Austen, Dickens, Anand, Narayan, Kamala Markandaya or Bhabani Bhattacharyya. His major characters are looking for their identities and lost selves.

Arun Joshi, like existential writers, is deeply concerned with how anxious and alienated

people feel in life. However, he differs from western existential writers in that his existentialist predicament, alienation's agony, and absurdity are never the end result. In addition, he does not accept alienation or absurdity as the necessary condition of human existence, unlike other Indo-English authors like Raja Rao and Sudhin Ghosh who hold up renunciation as the ideal form of Indian life and rely on some Indian philosophical framework to ground their works.

Instead, his main theme is a quest, and all of his protagonists are searchers and questers. Joshi's portrayal of the troubled and conflicted ego of the modern man has given the Indo-English book a new depth.

His books are of inestimable value to all people because they convey a positive, eloquent message for humanity. His protagonists seriously consider the meaning and purpose of life through a process of active experience, which usually leads them to the realization that only love, compassion, sincerity, courage, and fidelity to oneself can counteract the sense of sterility and meaninglessness in modern life. Arun Joshi stands apart from certain existentialists by never losing hope in the potential of receiving positive reinforcement. These existentialists' quest for values is never complete. Arun Joshi seems to be a brilliant star in the constellation of Indo-English novelists, despite the fact that he has only contributed five novels and a few short tales to Indo-English literature.

Identity Crisis in the Foreigner

Unquestionably, Arun Joshi is one of the few top-tier novelists working today. The Foreigner, his first book, was published in 1968 and marked his literary breakthrough in the Indian-English genre. The author has called it "one of the most compelling existential works of Indian English Fiction." (Bhatnagar) Arun Joshi has written some excellent fiction. He has skillfully addressed several challenging, serious problems in The Foreigner, such as rootlessness, alienation, dissatisfaction, the search for better options, identity, crises, and self-realization, while underlining our rich cultural legacy and inviolable moral principles.

According to Arun Joshi, the world has become very materialistic, to the point that the higher moral principles of life seem to have faded into obscurity. In the modern world, material factors rule a man's life. The Foreigner exposes that some of our most troublesome issues are now being caused by this extremely sophisticated, dehumanized technology. People nowadays are not pleased and joyful. Today, life has become a pointless game for irrational feelings, societal prejudice, and inter-national animosity. Each guy feels intense misery, anger, frustration, and complete dejection as a result of living in an urban environment.

The traumatizing effects of urbanization and industrialization on man are shown in The Foreigner. In a mysterious and sinister universe, Sindi Oberoi, the book's heroine, is a restless and uprooted figure. The Foreigner is primarily the story of an uprooted young man who searches anxiously for a purpose and an anchor in his aimlessly floating existence in the second half of the 20th century. Sindi was raised by his uncle in Kenya after being born to an English mother and an Indian father who passed away when he was only four years old. He received his education in America, East Africa, and London. At such a young age, Sindi lacks any feelings of love or care for his parents due to being denied parental love.

The flashbacks in The Foreigner are skillfully sequenced to increase tension as the tale is delivered. Although the tale also features Babu, an Indian student in America, June, a straightforward but passionate American lady, and Mr. Khemka, a Delhi businessman, Sindi

Oberoi—a restless young man—is the major character. The narrative is told through Sindi's perspective. The novel's arrangement into three sections illuminates the beginnings of relationships, progress and deterioration in the second, and defeat and annihilation in the third.

In revealing the psychological turmoil in the character of Sindi Oberoi in his search for purpose via a succession of relationships, Joshi demonstrates the misery of loneliness. Meenakshi Mukherjee remarks that *The Foreigner* is the first Indo- Anglian fiction to tackle a real human issue. She is moved by the realism and perceptive peek into an anguished brain. At a meeting for international students, Sindi, a Boston-area engineering student, meets June. She likes him, but he struggles mightily to keep from having another affair. When June inquires about Sindi's origins, it is clear that he feels detached and rootless. A sign of Sindi's isolation may be seen in his response to the query:

The same annoying question was posed to me by everyone.

As if it truly mattered a lot where I was from, someone asked me, "Where are you from?" (23) *The Foreigner* tells the tale of its narrator, who ponders his pointless past and worries about his similarly pointless future in an imperceptibly powerless manner. He strives to avoid being engaged with anybody or anything throughout his life until he finally understands what detachment genuinely is since he feels uprooted and lost like a "foreigner anywhere." "I had to admit to myself that I was a lonely man," said Sindi of his isolation from the world and its issues. (*The Outsider*) Wherever he travels, others find him to be remote and alien due to his lack of participation, indifference, loneliness, and strangeness.

Sindi is depressed because he believes he contributed to the deaths of his buddy Babu and his girlfriend June. He is now trying to come to terms with his own behavior. I believed that my actions were motivated by detachment, but they were really just a need to demonstrate my continued control over June's happiness. Sindi is touched to see Muthu spending his evenings in his one-room tenement with eleven individuals, one of whom has had tuberculosis for 10 years. In the end, he thinks that the proper definition of detachment included engaging with the outside world in order to oppose hypocrisy and exhibitionism. Finally, Sindi agrees to Muthu's proposal to run the plant. This clarifies the meaning of the disinterested participation message.

In his detached but sympathetic devotion to labor in order to engage himself effectively in the society, Sindi Oberoi's transcendence is evident. After a strong search for purpose that moulded his life and plagued his mind, he eventually discovered paradise. Arun Joshi is a distinguished author of human plight who is particularly interested in the traumas and agonies of contemporary man, which appear in numerous ways such as worry, rootlessness, loneliness, and meaninglessness. Arun Joshi attempts to examine the difficulties of contemporary existence as a result of globalization and modernization in his groundbreaking book *The Foreigner*.

Love, compassion, and other human traits have completely vanished. Man's existence is dominated by material concerns. The upshot is that the contemporary man's existence is chaotic and confusing. In the lack of genuine relationships with other people, he feels alone, irritated, disappointed, and virtually alienated.

Sindi, the main character and narrator, introduces himself as a young guy who has been uprooted and is living in the second half of the 20th century. Due to his lack of cultural and

life-sustaining values and his upbringing in a hostile environment, he grows up with a profound feeling of unreality and uncertainty. He keeps moving from one nation to another in an effort to defeat sorrow and find consolation for his spirit. But he has always felt foreign, starting with his time spent in Kenya, London, and Boston. He encounters a wide range of transformations. He is deeply troubled by these encounters and the weight of his shattered connections. As a consequence, he develops a feeling of detachment to get over his unpleasant previous experiences. His tragedies and suffering are a direct result of his estrangement.

Races and civilizations have been mixing ever since the West first encountered India. The Indian mind has also been disturbed by this. These combined materials don't allow us to associate ourselves with either one or the other. Modern man has interior issues as a consequence of the lack of meaningful relationships, including the sense that his life is pointless, arbitrary, and alone. He presents himself as cosmopolitan, yet he is neither really cosmopolitan nor conscious of his origins.

Arun Josh stands out among the Post Independent Indo-Anglian authors as a creative artist with extraordinary viewpoints who has masterfully examined the plight of contemporary man in the ludicrous world. According to O.P. Bhatnagar, "Arun Joshi's unique vision of the predicament of modern man in contemporary Indian English fiction is the keynote of man's awareness of his rootlessness and the consequential loneliness and anxiety." (29)

The sensitive guy finds it challenging to fit into the social milieu in this day and age. He thus struggles with the issue of meaninglessness. In both American and European literature, it has been covered in great depth. In India, Arun Joshi's solution to this issue gives English fiction a fresh perspective. The discrepancy between what he really is and what he would want to pretend is the reason. Some philosophers and intellectuals have referred to the current era as one of alienation as a consequence of this. One of the most terrible sensations for a contemporary guy is alienation. He is destined to endure the effects of human alienation, which take the shape of generational gaps, compartmentalizing existence, inhibiting personal growth, the glaring lack of a feeling of the significance of life, and other manifestations.

On the basis of how individuals and events are portrayed, an effort has been made in this book to examine the problem of contemporary man in Arun Joshi's first book, *The Foreigner*. The book starts in Boston on a somber note when Sindi tells June about the untimely death of Babu Rao Khemka, an engineering student who was killed in a vehicle accident, after identifying his corpse at the morgue. The story's protagonist and narrator, Sindi Oberoi, uses the flash-forward and flash-back techniques to describe subsequent events.

The book tells the tale of Sindi's effort to find a route out of the complex maze that is his existence. His father is an Indian from Kenya, while his mother is English. His parents perished in an airplane accident when he was a little child, and all he has left of them are a few scrunched-up photos. He lost both of his parents when he was four, thus it is irrelevant what nation his parents were from. Probably a feeling of belonging to his own family or country. His background is fluid, which highlights his estrangement and the fact that he was born outside of the country.

Sindi is enmeshed in his own loneliness, which is made worse by his isolation from the outside world. He wonders who gave birth to him without a reason, and whether the pursuit of peace qualifies as a reason for his existence so far. I could have felt that way because I was

an outsider in America. Then then, it wouldn't have mattered if I had been in Kenya, India, or anywhere else for that matter! I had the impression that I would continue to be a foreigner. Without a goal, life becomes meaningless to him, and he believes he just has life to live to die. (Pandey)

According to Sindi, man is only a puppet in the hands of time, with nothing to do except wait for the future to be decided.

He pursues a doctorate in mechanical engineering at Boston University and has a very successful academic career at London University. However, he is somewhat more interested in mechanical engineering than any other topic. During his six-year stay in America, he develops feelings for June. His friendship with June is unable to make him feel happier or less detached. He understands that wanting love was more terrible than having no love at all. As a result, he formulates the life philosophy that one should be able to separate themselves from the object of their affection. He thinks that getting married is out of the question for him and that it won't end his estrangement.

When he decides not to marry June, Sindi experiences his life's ultimate dilemma. Baburao Khemka is drawn to June and wants to marry her in the meantime. June is a kind, empathetic, and selfless young lady. She participates in her fellow creatures' sorrows and comforts them out of compassion. June chooses to help Babu, who needs her, when Sindi declines her proposal of marriage. He is a Delhi tycoon's overprotected son. He was raised under the stern supervision of his father. Babu, like Sindi, had a childhood that was lost since there is no mention of his mother. His inner yearning has been repressed as a result of growing up without the affection of one parent and under his father's harsh supervision. Because of this, he has complete freedom in the United States of America. It is a fantastic nation, he believes. "If I had the option, I would never go back to India." (Khaurana)

Despite his father's opposition, Babu and June get engaged, which Sindi finds upsetting. The pain's sharpness is so sharp that it renders him entirely numb. Because he permitted this to happen, he is completely powerless. He has been in numerous relationships, but whenever there has been talk of marriage, he has attempted to justify himself by citing his own detachment-based philosophy. He is unaware that a guy who shirks his obligations would only experience suffering.

He treasures the possibility that June may come back to him. He gives in to June's advances when she approaches Sindi one night at his apartment. Later, June travels to Babu's apartment, where they fight and she tells Babu she slept with Sindi. Due to his Indian mental nature, Babu is unable to accept the American norms of behavior for engaged couples. In a fit of rage, he recklessly takes off in his automobile and is killed in the collision.

June and Sindi are both aware that Babu had died by suicide. Babu was expelled from college because he had failing grades. His father had abandoned him because he wanted to wed June. The cherry on top is June's admission of her relationships with Sindi, which eventually prompts him to terminate his life. With Babu's passing, Sindi's detached demeanor manifests as his emotional suffering, which intensifies. He is more left alone and vulnerable.

In order to live a meaningful life, he wishes to meet people and choose a better location. But he is unable to foster the culture or even join it if there are no fundamental and enduring principles there. Following Babu's passing, Sindi takes a job offer in New York. One day June writes him a letter informing him that she is expecting Babu's kid. Sindi gives this issue

a lot of thought before deciding to wed June, but when he gets there, he discovers June has passed away after an abortion attempt. Through these painful experiences of losing June and Babu, two people close to him, he understands his error.

"At the time, being detached meant doing nothing. I could now see its logical flaw. The definition of detachment was appropriate action, not running away from it. The hefty reward was set by the gods just to teach me that. (Prasad)

Due to his negative interactions with Anna and Kathy, Sindi comes to understand the need of focusing on nothing but himself. But June's passing causes his devotion to himself to end. At the tender age of 25, when typically a young man is full of passion, vitality, and zest for life, he recognizes the futility of his existence. He expresses his feelings in this way, essentially wasting 25 years looking in the wrong places for the wrong things. 25 years have passed while searching for serenity. Regarding his trip from Kenya to Boston in quest of a meaningful life, Sindi had nothing good to say. He feels guilty about wasting all this time.

The fact that Sindi's hurting spirit is without a system, society, norms, or tradition hurts his soul more than anything else. He doesn't understand the point in living since life seems so pointless to him. He does not belong in this world, and his style of living seems unclear. This is explained by his condition of being cynical, worn out, and older than he should be. Because of this, his cynical attitude drives all of his actions and resolves. All sensitive and uprooted people must experience a spiritual crisis at some point in their lives, and Sindi's hardships are only one example of this. He aspires to have love, tranquility, and the bravery to live without want or connection. His major goal is to defeat suffering and death, which eliminate everything and leave just a large mocking zero. But like a fish out of water, his varied life experiences have left him with unanswered questions.

Conclusion

Arun Joshi has the appearance of a guy who opposes the violence, hypocrisy, and greed of the populace while alienating himself in the process. The title takes on metaphorical meaning as the novel's hero has a lifetime of feeling like a "foreigner." The reality is that detachment comes from really engaging, which is just suitable for the hero. The book is existential because it centers on a character's search for identity, his sense of loneliness, anguish, and sadness as a consequence of his alienation from the outside world and other societal norms. Arun Joshi uses the idea of alienation as a myth, and the main character portrays themselves as outsiders.

The first chapter discusses identity crisis, a term that has been used extensively in religious, philosophical, sociological, and psychological texts for a long time and is not entirely new in the contemporary world. Alienation is the act of withdrawing from social interaction and spending time alone with one's thoughts. In *The Foreigner*, Sindi Oberoi has a constant sense of loneliness and ease in the realm of identity crises while searching for a purpose in life. Due to a lack of parental support, cultural roots, and love in his own origins, he is in a sociopsychological bind.

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