



Quest For Identity: A Study of Arun Joshi's the Foreigner

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ABSTRACT

Alienation and identity are connected to such an extent that both are inseparable. Social alienation or psychological alienation is the result of loss of identity. A man in search of his identity comes close to the society to which he belongs and ultimately finds that his search for identity is nothing but the discovery of his self. Sindi, the protagonist, recounts his life as a seeker who finds himself in a world that is devoid of meaning. In search of a meaningful existence, he roams different parts of the world and adopts different philosophies to solve his problem of existence. He wrongly construes the philosophy of detachment as inaction. Throughout the novel, he hops from one place to another to find a solution and finally learns the teaching of The Bhagavad Gita that detachment is not inaction but action without attachment. Thus, the present study is an attempt to analyze Arun Joshi's vision of life. He is one of the Indian novelists who have expounded on the predicament of modern man in a materialistic society. Withdrawing from the external world to explore the internal one, he explores the dark labyrinth of the human soul. He finds modern man isolated and alienated from his fellow beings. With his knowledge of Hindu philosophy, Arun Joshi attempts to provide a solution based on Lord Krishna's preaching to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita.

Introduction:

One of the Indo-English writers who provided Indian fiction written in English a new direction is Arun Joshi. The protagonist of his books is a rootless person who is constantly trying to figure out who he is. It appears that he uses a variety of characters in his novels to represent his own experience living overseas.

Joshi addresses themes of love and hate, complacency and quest, materialism and existentialism, alienation and engagement, and East-West encounter and compromise in all of his writings. His made-up universe reveals a world in which man is faced with concerns about his own existence and identity. His books are an attempt to comprehend the world and oneself on a deeper level.

Albert Camus and other existentialist authors have affected him.

Arun Joshi is a unique talent who delves deeper into the ethical and spiritual dilemma facing modern-day Indians. He is among the handful most prominent Indo-English novelists who has created incredibly captivating fictional works. His numerous novels and short stories were published, which served as highlights for his literary career. His breakthrough as a novelist came to light with the 1971 release of *The Stranger* and *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. *The Apprentice* (1974) and a compilation of his short stories titled *The Survivor* (1976) came after this. He had carried the biography *Lala Shri Ram: a Study in Entrepreneurship in Industrial Management* earlier in 1975.

The Sahitya Academy award was given to him in 1982 for his next book, *The Last Labyrinth* (1981). *The City and the River*, his final book, was released in 1990. Finally, his premature passing in 1993 ended his writing career.

Arun Joshi is the author of five novels: *The Stranger*, *The Apprentice*, *The Last Labyrinth*, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, and *The City and the River*. He also has a collection of short tales called *The Survivor* to his credit. In addition to exploring some universal themes of human existence in the Indian context, his novels deal with societal alienation and define, in Verghese's words, "the search for the essence of human living." Despite their alienation from society, his protagonists do not grow apathetic about it, unlike Camus's protagonists in *The Outsider*.

They are still looking for a purposeful path in life. They eventually "step out of themselves and question not only their own self-indulgent attitude that keeps them from facing the truth, but also their consciousness." Actually, the main source of their uneasiness and existential sorrow is their self-indulgent attitude, hesitation, and uncertainty. They eventually reach their life's ultimate crisis as a result of this passivity in their personality, when they recognize the foolishness of their earlier inaction and

hesitation. They eventually come to the realization that death is the sole ultimate truth and that all humans are ultimately alone since they are unable to identify with the values of life.

This essay attempts to examine Arun Joshi's idea and identity issue in the book "The Foreigner." His book will therefore be examined via the lens of existential philosophy. The next paper attempts to solve the enigma of man's psyche in order to return to his primitive origins.

Modernity has a remarkable effect on the lives of every individual. It has completely changed the society. In modern society, man has become a slave, obeying orders without giving an iota of thought to his existence and identity. If development in science and technology has enriched the lifestyle of modern man, it has also impoverished him spiritually. On the one hand, modern man boasts about his success with the help of science and technology. On the other hand, he regrets leaving behind his peaceful life. Modernity has reached every corner of the world and achieved its goal by making the lives of people easier and cozy. It has given comfort to the body but snatched mental and spiritual peace. Human's values are on the verge of extinction, leading to a crisis of existence and identity. In modern society, man has failed to perceive the importance of his existence and finds his life rootless and meaningless.

Arun Joshi (1939-1993) is one of the Indian writers whose novels are based on experience. He does not merely restate it but shapes it to show the reality that lies hidden in some corner of his existence. He uses literature as an experimental tool for studying man's situation in the modern world. "My novels, says Joshi, are essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and of myself" (Dhawan 8). In his fiction, he deals with the problem of rootlessness, restlessness, spiritual bareness, existence, and identity. While dealing with these ontological issues, he shows the influence of western existential philosophers in delineating his characters. He declares, "I did read Camus and Sartre. I liked *The Outsider*. I might have been influenced by them. Sartre I did not understand clearly or like. As for existentialist philosophers like Kierkegaard, I have never understood anything except odd statements" (Jain 95-96). Despite his denial, there are instances throughout the book that make it read as an existential quest to find meaning in the absurdity of existence. In terms of Hindu philosophy, he has been inspired by the *Bhagavad Gita*, particularly its prime message of how to act to live a meaningful life. He believes that the irresponsible actions of an individual have drastic effects on both others and oneself. He believes that "Hinduism is highly existentialist-oriented philosophy since it attaches so much importance to the right way to live (to exist)" (Jain 98). He finds a valueless world where men have forgotten their responsibility towards others. Chaos, confusion and anarchy have replaced the spiritual

and peaceful life. He, therefore, decides to use his literary works to reform society. He not only enumerates the flaws of society but also gives a solution to cope with the problem.

The Foreigner is the study of an individual who moves across the globe in search of identity. After coming into existence, he finds himself deprived of all kinds of values and roles that a child receives first from his parents. He lost his parents in his childhood and was brought up by his uncle. He does not associate any kind of relationship with them, as he says, "for the hundredth time I related the story of those strangers whose only reality was a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs" (12). After the death of his parents, his uncle gives him a feeling of anchor, but he too dies very soon. A parentless childhood gives birth to emotional insecurity and makes him an alien and foreigner to the society in which he was born. "The novel is about an individual's loneliness and feeling of anguish in the wake of his estrangement from his environment, tradition and from his true self" (Ghosh 38). In his quest for identity, he moves from Kenya to London, from London to Boston, and from Boston to Delhi but the feeling of anchorless life remains the same everywhere, as he says, "And yet all the shores are alien when you do not belong anywhere" (80).

He does not belong to anywhere as he does not have his identity. In order to create his own identity, he has to transcend inherited values. At one of the International Students Association parties, he feels as if he is sitting in his tomb. His behaviour indicates that he has failed to identify himself with them. "Rather than remaining immersed in the group identity, the identity-forming individual must separate from the mass and make a stand as a unique person" (Bilsker 185-86). Sindi moves ahead from thrownness to identity formation. Heidegger's concept of thrownness is the state of coming into existence of the individual. After coming into existence, an individual can either lead an unauthentic life given by the mass culture or form his own identity and lead an authentic life. So, in search of his identity, Sindi withdraws from the world then returns after moving from one place to another.

Intending to do engineering, he joined London University. Soon he finds that classroom lectures are not providing a solution to his problem, and he wants to have a different kind of adventure to sort out his identity problem. He says, "I wanted to know the meaning of my life. And all my classrooms didn't tell me a thing about it" (142). He, therefore, joins the Soho Club as a dishwasher and meets with a minor artist, Anna. They get intimate and have a coitus relationship. He leaves her when he comes into contact with Kathy, who has separated from her husband. This time, Kathy leaves him because she thinks that marriage is a sacred bond and returns to her husband. Meanwhile, Sindi moves to Scotland and meets a

Catholic priest who teaches him the lesson of detachment, which he wrongly construes as inaction. Following his illusion of detachment, he avers to June that “love begot greed and attachment, and it led to possession” (145).

In Boston, he comes into contact with June Blyth and Babu Rao Khemka. They become his intimate friends, but his illusion of detachment takes the lives of his two dear ones. He meets June at an International Ball Association and develops an intimate relationship with her. She wants to get married, but Sindi refuses, as he does not want to take any kind of responsibility. He fails to return June's genuine and pure love since he thinks that no relationship lasts long. The lesson he has learned from his previous mistakes weighs heavily on him, and it has the effect of paralyzing his capacity to make new commitments in his life.

The events in the novel develop in a zigzag pattern rather than a linear one. As a result, the action takes place in several locations throughout the book; Boston, New York, and London are just a few of the places where significant moments in the protagonist's life occur. To maintain suspense and pique the reader's interest, the events are presented in an unnatural order. Overall, Arun Joshi's novel *The Foreigner* is exceptionally well-written. It has the distinction of being one of the few novels in Indo-English fiction that addresses the advantages and disadvantages of existentialist thought in a clear and creative manner.

Conclusion:

Arun Joshi is one of the most important novelists working in the Indo-English genre today. He is a diligent author who plays about with the novel's format to convey the existentialist problems and struggles of his characters as they attempt to make sense of intensely spiritually trying times. Joshi appears as a novelist in the lineage of Kafka, Camus, Sartre and Saul Bellow, Ellison and Malamud, rather than in the tradition of Jane Austen, Dickens, Anand, Narayan, Kamala Markandaya, or Bhabani Bhattacharya. His central characters are looking for their identity, their lost selves.

Similar to existential writers, Arun Joshi is deeply troubled by the anguish and alienation that people experience throughout life. However, he is different from the existentialist writers of the West in that he never lets the absurdity of the circumstance, the existentialist conundrum, or the agony of alienation remain the ultimate dilemma. Additionally, he differs from Indo-English authors such as Raja Rao and

Sudhin Ghosh, who promote renunciation as the ideal way of living in India and base their novels on some form of Indian philosophy. He rejects the idea that absurdity or alienation are necessary conditions of human existence. Rather than that, his main theme is quest, and all of his heroes are seekers and questers.

In conclusion, Joshi's depiction of the troubled and contradictory aspects of modern man has given the Indo-English novel new depths. His books are of immeasurable value to all people because of their powerful, positive messages for humanity, and because of their extraordinary uniqueness and unique creativity. His protagonists engage in a serious search for life's meaning and definition through active experience, which ultimately leads them to the realization that the sense of meaninglessness and sterility that permeates modern life can only be balanced by love, compassion, sincerity, courage, and fidelity to oneself. Arun Joshi differs from certain existentialists in that he never gives up on the potential of finding positive affirmation in their quest for values. Despite his contribution of only five novels and a few short stories to the Indo-English writing, Arun Joshi seems as a bright star in the galaxy of Indo-English Novelists.

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