

**The Protagonist Sindi Oberoi is a “No Where Man” and Feels
Alien in Arun Joshi’s The Foreigner**

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Abstract:

Nowhere man doesn't have a point of view,
knows not where is going to,
Isn't be a bit like you and me?
Doesn't have a point of view,
Nowhere Man, please listen,
You don't know what you're missing,
-From Nowhere Man, a song by Lenon MC Cartney

Arun Joshi's first novel, *The Foreigner* (1968), illustrates the traumatic influence of modernization on a man Sindi Oberoi which asks him at once a nowhere man. The above popular song *Nowhere Man* which is written by Lenon Mccartney and performed by The Beatles (U.S.) is relevant enough to comprehend Sindi's everyman and nobody's dilemma. The paper examines how Arun Joshi being lived himself in refined societies of America and India takes up this theme magnificently and enthusiastically. Sindi, the protagonist who feels himself like a "foreigner anywhere"(29) is separated from the whole system of the social order. Joshi has made him at once a 'nowhere man' as revealed in the song of Lennon McCartney.

The novel enacts what Spengler defines "the crisis of the present"¹ in the story of Sindi Oberai, the protagonist who is thoroughly an existentialist character --"rootless, is" a perennial in a mad, bad, absurd world".² He is "a perennial outsider"³ an uprooted young man living in

the latter half of the twentieth century"(P.207) who belongs to no country, no people and finds himself in the predicament of a foreigner wherever he goes--Kenya, Uganda, England, America and India. He is one who does not have roots anywhere in the world as he himself admits: "I have not roots" (P.143). He muses over his foreignness:

"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 would call the search for peace a purpose. Perhaps I felt like that because I was a foreigner in America. B/ut 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".

(P.65)

He feels alien everywhere and does not "belong" to any place, and his words and behaviour create the same impression in all those with whom he meets.

He is orphaned at the age of four when his parents die in an air crash near Cairo. He is brought up by his uncle in Kenya who, too, dies soon. He had felt some kind of security when his uncle was alive but the death of his uncle wastes away every sense of sustenance to his being. He says:

I hadn't felt like that when my uncle was living. it wasn't 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 small house on the outskirts of Nairobi gave me a feeling of having an anchor. After his death the security was destroyed". (P.65)

He is totally broken and anchorless. In his infancy, he was denied of parental love and affection.

Verily speaking, he finds himself incapable of receiving any emotional involvement with the milieu of his racial origin. He "is an alien everywhere physically as well as metaphorically".⁴ He is a born "foreigner", a man alienated from all humanity. He confesses "My foreignness lay within me." (P.65) He grows up without family ties and without a country"⁵ To Mr. Khemka and his daughter he tells clearly, "I hated to talk about my parents, I hated the pity I got from the people". (P.11)

"Denied of love, familial nourishment and cultural roots, he grow with a built-in fissure in his personality and becomes a wandering alien, rootless like Naipul's unanchored souls or Camus's outsider".⁶ His dilemma is socio-psychological, resulting from social disfunctioning. "He is a case of sociological anomie resulting in ontological insecurity of the psychosis of engulfment".⁷ he turns out to be an anomic man, responsible to no one, having no morality, no ambition , no purpose in life. The theory of the French sociologist Durkhemim and the American thinker Robert K. Merton on alienation or anomie so well illustrated by Sindi, is clearly expressed by Robert M. Maciver as under:

Anomie signifies the state of mind of one who has been pulled up from his moral roots—who has no longer any sense of continuity of folk. The anomic man has become spiritually sterile responsive only to himself, responsible to no one."⁸

Sindi's case typically represents this state of anomic of alienation. In the words of O.P. Bhatnagar, "A strange feeling of aloneness and aloofness, permeates the entire narrative and provides the necessary texture and structure to the novel".⁹ Sindi Oberoi is totally isolated from the whole set-up of society. He describes himself —: An uprooted young man living in the latter half of the twentieth century who had become detached from everything except myself," (P.207). Very clearly he spells out his predicament in his dialogue with Mr. Khemka:

But you at least what made an ass of a man; we don't even know that. You had a clear cut system of morality, a caste system that laid down all you had to do. You had a God; you had roots in the soil you lived upon. Look at me. I have no roots. I have no system of morality. What does it meant to me if you call me an immoral man. I have no reason to be one thing rather than another. You ask me why I am not ambitious: well, I have no reason to be. come to think of it don't even have a reason to live!" (PP.143-144)

He feelingly expresses a peculiar sense of parentlessness: " I only know what it is not to have a father; I don't know how it would have been if I had one". (P.131) After his uncle's death, he feels unanchored and life becomes a purposeless existence for him. He seems to have no settled aim in life and gets, every now and then nervous and ill at ease. He confesses: "Talking about myself always makes me ill at ease." (P.35) In religion and faith, he may be deemed to be one the way to spiritual sterility. When June asks him if he believes in God, he finds himself in a fix and ultimately shows his leanings towards the negative side.

"She asked me again if I believed in God. I said I didn't know, But I supposed I didn't." I thought every Hindu believed in God". "Anyway, I can't really be called a Hindu. My mother was English and my father, I am told a sceptic. That doesn't seem like a good beginning for a Hindu, does it?"(P.35)`

He has "no system of morality". Morality and immorality do not have any distinction for him. One day in a discussion with him, Sheila says "with an air of stubborn finality" that June was not virtuous as she was not a virgin. Her use of the word "virgin" surprises him and very boldly he asks "Is that all?" When she nods, he laughs and says; "So you think one of these Marwari girls is really superior merely because of a silly membrane between her legs?" (P.60) Here Sindi macks at the sex-centred attitude concerning morality.

Psychologically speaking, a person so alienated and isolated like Sindi Oberoi is bound to be cynical and frustrated. Many of Arun Joshi's characters in the novel point out that Sindi is a prefect cynic. Babu Rao Khemka, his friend and a student at Boston, writes to his sister Sheila that Sindi is "so terribly cynical." (P.55) June's mother, Mrs. Blyth, tells Sindi: "You are just a cynic my boy". (P.108) His playmate Karl once says to replies: "I can if I'm drunk enough". (P.77) Sheila once tells: "You are the saddest man I have ever known." (P.148) Sindi himself confesses: "I was cynical and exhausted, grown old before my time, weary with my own loneliness." (P.16) Mr. Khemka is not far wrong when he tells him that he is "Living, but as bad as dead". (P.145)+

Right from his boyhood hes gets "tired of living" and" is contemplating suicide".(PP.174-175) As a student, his profession is utterly indifferent as to what he studies and what had a brilliant opts for. At the London University, he has doctorate in Mechanical Engineering, but he attaches no special importance to it, and says: "I cared two pins for all the mechanical engineers in the world." (P.15) An extraordinarily brilliant student as he is, his professor offers him a place in the college faculty. But he opts for a job in New York from where he comes to Ne

He undertakes the job not for the sake of money but for the sake of getting an altogether new experience": I didn't work to earn money. My mind was full of thoughts and I wanted a different kind of experience to sort my ideas out". (P.175) He works there for three months and thereafter he is transferred to the bar where one night he happens to meet Anna, a woman of "about thirty-five with dark hair and finely chiselled features." (P.176) She is "a

minor a love affair with her and comes to know, in due course, that" Anna was not yearning for me or anybody, but for her lost youth. "(P.177) She shows that she has fallen flat in love with him, but his response is languid and listless: "We like this for six months. I think she loved me intensely and unselfishly, I enjoyed making love to her and her sadness attracted me, but engrossed as I was with myself I couldn't return her love". (P.177) Anna knows that it is her age that discourages him. It is at one of her own parties that he meets Kathy and is drawn towards her. "I left her (Anna) the moment Kathy showed any interest in me". He gets deeply involved with Kathy, an English housewife, who hungers for adulterous love. But Kathy, in turn, leaves him after carrying on with him for a few weeks and goes back to her husband for the sacredness of marriage: "We imagined we were in love had to be maintained all costs" (P.178). These experiences in London enrich his mind: "The essence of my life in London lay in what I had learnt from Anna and Kathy". (P.178) He spends a whole year "wandering through the maze of my existence "for "finding the purpose of my life." (P.179) The next summer he makes friends with a Catholic priest in Scatholic priest in scotland and spends much of his time "discussing religion and God and mysticism ". (P.179) He comes to have "a revelation. I had almost felt as if I had been infused with a new existence". (P.179). He creates an illusion that he has learnt detachment. It so happens that one morning it comes to him in a flash: "All love-- whether of things, or persons, or oneself--was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion. Love begot greed and attachment, and it led to possession". (P.180) He is of the view that "One should be able to detach oneself from the object of one's love".(P.171) He feels that this philosophy of detachment would enable him to meet the challenges of life.

His life turns over a leaf when he meets June Blyth, a beautiful, benign, sensual, affectionate American girl at a foreign student's party. June is free, frank, uninhibited and generous, with a Christ in her heart craving to be of help to someone. Sindi loves her deeply and has sex with her. She gives of herself abundantly to him as sex "she wanted to be of use to someone" (P.91) and "was one of those rare persons who have a capacity to forget themselves in somebody's trouble."(P.119) Her love for Sindi is more than a mere sexual gratification. "We made love with a strange fierceness that was a as excruciating in its pleasure as it was painful". (P.132) Time and again, she requests him to get married to her: "Let's get married. Sindi, for God's sake, let's get married." (P.133) But Sindi is "anomic",

emotionally sterile, responsible to no one, and responsive only to himself. His feeling of nausea, of futility and meaninglessness of life prevails within and without, He replies: Marriage wouldn't help, June. We are alone, both you and I. That is the problem. And our aloneness must be resolved from within," (P.133) He further tells her plainly: "I can't marry you because I am incapable of doing so. It would be like going deliberately mad. It is inevitable that our delusions will break up sooner or later". (P.133) He deceives himself with the notion that he has developed the spirit of "detachment". He further tells her:" There is another way of loving. You can love without fooling yourself that the things you love are indispensable either to you or to the world. Love is real only when you know that what you love must one day die."(P.180) Sindi's cold "detachment" estranges June and paves the way for her to go to Babu Rao Khemka who loves her with a dog-like devotion. He gives her all that she needs. He is a simple character. He has his roots in Indian soil.

His values are middle class values that are choked down in the glossy living of the West. To him, America seems to be dreamland of free sex, and there is no use of coming to America if not to pay around with girls. He argues with Sindi: "What is the good girls?" (P.23) But he forgets that roots are like fortifications in one's self and they may destroy one in the process of disowning them. Babu, too, turns into a split-personality. He loves to enjoy the free life of America. He tells Sindi: "I think it is a wonderful country, I would never go back to India if I had the choice". (P.95) He further says: "Sometimes against India but there is nothing to beat America" (P.97). At the same time, he has got his moral inhibitions as he is born and brought up in Indian orthodox background. He loves June intensely, decides to marry her, but his conventional morality comes in the way. He avoids physical relations with her, as she says:" He said he didn't want to do it until after wedding" (PP.167-68). On the other hand. June is accustomed to free sex life of America. She tells him of her earlier relations with Sindi: " she told him that as a matter of fact she had been sleeping with me (Sindi) and, what's more, she had been doing me year before she met him (Babu)". (P.183) At this, Babu suddenly grows pale, calls her a whore, hits her in the face, leaves the flat and drives off blindly in his car to his tragic end by committing suicide.

June, on the other hand, is a complex character, she dangles between Sindi Oberoi and Babu Rao Khemka. She loves Sindi intensely and has sex with him. Repeatedly she requests

him to marry her. But his cold 'detachment' alienates June from him and paves the way for her to fall for Babu. It is meet to quote the following lines from a dialogue (between Sindi and June) that brings about her analytical study of Sindi and Babu and her decisive follow-up action backed by reasoning. Sindi initiates the discussion:

"Are you in love with Babu now"? "No". "Then why did you decide to marry him". "I thought he needed me. I had wanted to belong to you, but you didn't want it. You are so self-sufficient there is hardly any place for me in your life-except perhaps as a mistress". She added with a short laugh. "Babu, on the other hand, was on the edge of a breakdown-and still is for that matter. He needs me and what's more he says so. He loves me more than he loves himself-that's more than what can be said for you. In return, I am prepared to give him all that I have". (P.167)

The decision that June takes is an act of her practical wisdom. Truly speaking, the man she really loves is Sindi. She affirms: "You are beautiful, Sindi, beautiful God. I don't think I can even stop loving you".(P.182) Her love for Babu is merely a stop-gap arrangement. It is only on an ad-hoc basis.

The dilemma of June's character makes her an interesting study. It has already been shown how she is certainly painful for him, particularly under the circumstances she is denied any favourable response from Sindi, to deny within. She tries to release her tension through love with Sindi.

"I want to ". [Sindi] said. "She said nothing but got up and went into the bedroom. She had been sunning herself and her tanned body was lovely as a rose in the dim light. We made love with a strange fierceness that was as excruciating in its pleasure as her body was thrown into a paroxysm of spasms. She shuddered under me in a thousand convulsions gasping for breath. She bit into my shoulder until blood came out and then suddenly I discovered that she was crying. I put my arms around her and tried to calm her down. She bit her lip and tired to hide face in the pillow. Then something seemed to break within her and she burst into uncontrollable sobs. "It is all so meaningless, Sindi, so utterly meaningless. All we do is get into bed and..." Her sobs choked her off. "I patted her hair mechanically, She was right, dreadfully right. After some time her body ceased to shake and she wiped her tears". (PP.132-133)

When she comes to know that she is pregnant by Babu and he is being no more alive, she feels utterly frustrated. She undergoes an operation for abortion and , during the course of it, she dies.

Sindi Oberoi is responsible for the death of both--Babu and June. It is, really, his false and cold "detachment" that leads to the tragedy of Babu and June. When Babu comes to know that June has been sleeping with Sindi and has been yielding to him, he goes out immediately and kills himself in a car accident. His Indian morality is terribly hurt. Babu's death signifies the destruction of oriental innocence in the strange ways of the Western world. Sindi knows that he, actually, has killed Babu. He himself confesses: "All along I had acted out of lust and greed and selfishness and they had applauded my wisdom. When I had sought only detachment I had driven a man to his death". (P.5) June accusingly tells him [Sindi]: Look, what your detachment has done". (P.184) June too dies later. Sindi has physical contacts with her in the name of detachment. He says: "When I made love to her it was not in lust or passion but in a belief that I was helping her find herself". (P.182) Detachment becomes a misty notion with him. He makes love in a detached manner: "Love without fooling yourself that the things you love are indispensable either to you or to the world". (P.180) No doubt, Sindi and June are deeply in love with each other. Although he loves her with "a strange fierceness" (P.132), he does not accede to her proposal of marriage. He holds that he is "not rally cut out for marriage"(P.111), that marriage is "one big illusion that has been pounded into them by society" (P.112), that "Nothing even seems real to me. leave alone permanent. Nothing seems to be very important". (P.113), and that "Death wipes out

everything, for most of us any way. All that is left is a big mocking zero". (P.114) To him, "Good things and bad things appear to be the same in the long run of existence". (P.114) He seems to be conscious of the meaninglessness of human life. An awareness of the absurdity of human existence can be clearly traced in his reflections repeatedly. According to Ionesco, the "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". Sindi's responses to June's proposal of marriage only heightens the absurdity of human situation and proves his act absurd in line with the heroes of existentialist writers like Sartre, Camus, Ionesco, Pinter and a few others.

He declines her offer of marriage. He does not want to get "involved" (P.90) in any affair. He gives himself the air "to remain detached under the circumstances". (P.126) He tries to explore further: "I tried to speculate about these things objectively, not realizing that objectively was just another form of vanity. I tried to imaging the worst and then persuaded myself that it could really not happen. Underlying all this was an assumption that June would not leave me, not for Babu anyway. What would she find in Babu that I didn't have"? (P.126)

Sindi making love to several women--Anna, Kathy, Judy, Christine and June-and enjoying sex with them under the bogus grab or "detachment". It is pompous philosophy to his "detachment" that alienates June from him and sends her to his friends Babu Rao Khemka and, thus, Sindi is brought face to face with his hypocrisy, cowardice, fear, jealousy and stupidity. June's tragic death, after the operation for abortion, makes him restless, further rootless and lonely, drifting into meaningless uncertainties about life and existence and "the abominable absurdity of the world". (P.202) His existentialist quest and "experiment with myself". (P.185) Simply add to his loneliness and meaninglessness of life. Mr. Khemka takes him to be "as bad as dead". (P.145) Sheila considers him "the saddest man I have ever known"(P.148) and tells him plenty: "You are still a foreigner. You don't belong here". (P.149)

At times, Sindi conclude like a Vedantin: "All love- whether of things, or persons, or oneself-was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion. Love begot greed and attachment, and it led to possession" (P.180) He seems to believe in "Brahma satyam jaganmithyā"-[God alone is truth, the entire world is illusion]. He considers this world to be "mithyā", only illusion or māyā. He tells June: "Nothing ever seems real to me, leave alone permanent. Nothing seems to be very important ". (P.113) He wants to know "the real". He tells June: "One morning I had gone for a walk. I climbed a hill and sat down on a weathered stone. The sun had just risen and the valley seemed strangely ethereal in the clear light. Suddenly, I felt a great lightening, as if someone had lifted a burden from my chest and it all came through in a flash... Birth and death are real. They are the constants. All else is variable ... According to the Hindu mystics there is a reality beyond all this. But I don't know. I would like to know someday". (PP.179-180) Muthu suggest Sindi that "Māyā"[illusion] keeps the reality hidden and tells him that some persons "mistake the action of their senses for their own actions. It is all Māyā.(P.46)

Sindi comes to realize that detachment, in the true sense of the term, should not only be from the world and its objects but also from one's own self. One can be of some use to other only when one is really detached from his own self. Sindi is led to understand that actually he is the cause of Babu and June's death. He rightly remarks: "I had learnt to be detached from the world, but not myself. That is when that fatal error was made that ultimately led to Babu's and then to June's death". (P.207) He has to struggle hard to get freedom from the fear of involvement. He says: "Still, the old, nagging fear of getting involved with anything, anyone, was pushing through the mists of reason-- a line of reasoning that led to the inevitable conclusion that, for me, detachment consisted in getting involved with the world". (P.239) At Muthu's request, he takes over the management of Mr. Khemka's business but works in a detached manner, as he says: "The fruit of it was really not my concern. (P.242). He becomes, more or less, a 'sthitaprajna', abandoning attachment whatsoever as per Lord Krishna's preachings in the **Gita**:

"Yogasthah kuru karmani sangam tyaktva Dhananjaya, Siddhyasiddhyoh samo bhutva samatvam yoga uchyate"

That is : "Arjuna, perform your duties dwelling in yoga, relinquishing attachment, and indifferent to success and failure; equanimity is called yoga."¹⁰

Thus, as we have seen, Sindi's life undergoes various changes and he happens to experience different facets of life at different stages. Basically he is "a foreigner' (P.149) He has been a vain young man, a sad lover, a jealous competitor, a mechanical engineer," a philosopher (P.151) a Saint (P.146) a conceited, little squirt (P.159)" , "cynical" and "cynic and grown old before my time, hearty with own loneliness"(P.161),a "lusty beast'(P.164) a pretender, a person having "so little control over his own destiny and actions"(P.171)" an uprooted Youngman" (P.207), "a perennial outsider,"¹¹ "an alien everywhere physically as well as metaphorically,"¹² a narcissist, a liar "so heartless"(P.230) "a selfish and "awesomely engressed with myself"(P.234), "an ungrateful upstart"(P.228) and what not? But, finally , Sindi Oberoi becomes "Surrender Oberoi" (P.242) He settles in his business. He also settles in his life with Babu's sister Sheila. Although there were certain misgivings in the beginning they try to understand each other. Sindi is "Sorry"(P.243) The following lines of the dialogue are expressive of an amicable settlement between Sindi and Sheila:

"I didn't think you would come back". "Nor did I". "I thought you had become too detached to get involved in this mess". A smile played at the corners of her mouth. I too smiled, amused by the random absurdity of it all". (P.243)

He seems to unlearn, the so-called code of detachment and learn, by and large, from his experience, that it is involvement that brings change in Sindi's life. Mohan Jha rightly remarks that the change in Sindi's life from detachment to involvement is certainly "a study in experience".¹³ Graham Greene's Mr. Heng in **The Quiet American** tells Fowler: "Sooner or later...one had to take sides, if he commits himself to action he finally chooses to be human. It is this settlement with the self that yields peace and satisfaction in life.

The novel, no doubt, is full of instances and descriptions that make it read as an existentialist quest to find a meaning in the meaninglessness and absurdity of life. For an insecure man like Sindi, everything is purposeless. He turns out to be a thorough going absurdist to whom this world is full of suffering and life is all disillusionment. He is brought face to face with his stupidity and hypocrisy. He fails to apply a check on his senses but talks of practising detachment. He is a man of false conduct and can be rightly called a hypocrite : "Karmendriyāṅī sayamya ya āste manasā maran. Indriyathan vimoodhatama mithyāchārah sa uchyate".¹⁴

["He who outwardly restraining the organs of sense and action, sits mentally dwelling on objects of senses, that man of deluded intellect is called a hypocrite".]

The protagonist Sindi is a typical representative of the contemporary man who, irrespective of all sorts of scientific and technological advancements of the modern times finds himself in a tragic mess. He is a foreigner in the true sense of the term. With all bonds of love and social relationship disintegrated. Hence, his life is all hellish and there is no end to his suffering. The loneliness of the contemporary individual is well articulated by Arun Joshi in the novel:

"We'll see you then". she called. They waved and drove off. So they would see me, would they? That is the loneliness of our times, I thought as I rode up In the elevator. Stranger promise to see you without even knowing your name. You are a king In a deck of kings, shuffled and reshuffled, meeting fifty one similar kings but never saying anything sensible, never exchanging names, (P.197) Grace Stuart rightly remarks:

"There is Heaven when one goes out to one's neighbour, and Hell when one turns back to oneself. Hell is the state of being without affectionate relationship. One may go through circle after circle of Dante's Inferno, down and down, and although there are always crowds there is never relationship ".¹⁵ Sindi's fallacy of detachment is a mask to over his inability to belong to people and have a proper understanding of them. He finds himself utterly naked in the hands of existence. He moves around the streets of the world with the feeling of loneliness. His agony deepens when he realizes that he has no friends indeed. Vyvyan Richards rightly remarks: "Isolation and neglect are men's hell: fellowship is heaven".¹⁶ He is a foreigner not only in Kenya, London or Boston but equally a foreigner in India too. This is the irony of his predicament. In the social parties at Mr. Khemka's house "Old men grown fat with success came with their plump wives. They drank and then they had gorgeous dinners. They talked of money and how to make more of it. They left the impression that they could buy up anybody being out of wanted... the fat men left me with a distinct feeling of being out of place"(P.17) and further as Sindi says: "I would become aware of my own loneliness".(P.17)

Sindi, the alienated protagonist, finally arrives at peace within and calm, around. He settles with the business, with Sheila and, above all, with himself. To quote Hari Mohan "alienation to arrival, from Delhi has been a journey from an anomic responsible to himself to a member of mankind, from being to becoming".¹⁷

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