

**Arun Joshi`s `The Foreigner`: A Record of Traumas
and Agonies**

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Abstract

An outstanding novelist of human predicament Arun Joshi is more emphatically concerned with a modern man`s traumas and agonies which have various manifestations in the form of rootlessness, loneliness, meaninglessness, self-estrangement and anxiety. In his seminal novel `The Foreigner` Arun Joshi tries to explore the predicament of modern life due to the Globalization and Modernization. Human virtues such as love, sympathy, kindness etc have disappeared altogether. Material consideration dominates man`s life. The result is that there is chaos and confusion in the life of the modern man. He finds himself lonely, frustrated, dejected and almost alienated in the absence of meaningful relations with his fellow beings.

The narrator protagonist Sindi presents himself ``an uprooted Youngman living in the later half of the twentieth century.``¹ Devoid of the life -sustainable values and cultural anchorage, and being brought up in a loveless world, he develops in him a deep sense of insecurity and unreality.

He goes on hoping from one country to another to conquer pain and give his suffering soul solace. But he has been alien throughout his life right from his

life in Kenya, London and Boston. He undergoes various changes and varied experiences. These experiences and the burden of broken relationships disturb him intensely. The result is that he cultivates a sense of detachment to overcome his sour experiences of the past. His detachment is the root cause of his traumas and agonies.

Ever since India came in contact with West, there has been the hybridization of races and cultures. This has also caused upheavals in Indian psyche. These amalgamated materials fail to make us identify ourselves either with one or with the other. As a result in the absence of meaningful relations modern man suffers from inner problems; a conviction of isolation, randomness and meaninglessness in his way of existence. He poses to be cosmopolitan in nature; but he is neither purely cosmopolitan nor aware of his roots.

Among the Post Independent Indo-Anglian novelists, Arun Joshi, exceptionally perspective as a creative artist who has successfully explored predicament of modern man in the absurd world. O.P. Bhatnagar aptly points out:

“ A certain awareness of man’s rootlessness and the consequential loneliness and anxiety is the keynote of Arun Joshi’s unique vision of the predicament of modern man in contemporary Indian English fiction. ”²

In this modern era the sensitive man finds it difficult to adjust with the social environment. As a result he suffers from problem of meaninglessness. It has been treated in considerable details in American and European literature. In India Arun Joshi’s approach to this problem adds a new dimension in English fiction. It is because the hiatus between what he really is and what he would like to pretend. The result is that he leads to alienation. Some of the philosophers and thinkers have called the present age to be an age of alienation. Alienation is one of the agonizing

experiences of modern man. He is doomed to suffer under the impact of human alienation which manifests itself in the form of generation gap, the compartmentalization of life, the stunting of personal development, the conspicuous absence of a sense of meaningfulness of life and so on.

In this paper an attempt has been made to explore predicament of modern man in Arun Joshi's maiden novel `` Foreigner`` on the basis of the portrayal of characters and situations. The novel begins in Boston with a note of deep anguish where in morgue Sindi identifies the dead body of Babu Rao Khemka, an engineering student who has died in car accident, and informs June this unexpected happening. The further events are unfolded by Sindi Oberoi, the narrator protagonist using flash ahead and flash -back technique to unfold the incidents in the story.

The novel is a story of Sindi's struggle to seek a way out of the intricate labyrinth of life which he passes through. His mother was an English woman and father a Kenyan Indian. His parents died in an air crash in his infancy and their only reality for him is `` a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs.``³ He lost both his parents at the age of four and hence the question of any country of his parents does not arise. Presumably his own sense of belonging either to his family or nation was in determine. This fluidity of his background emphasizes his alienation and his being a foreigner from birth.

Being orphan he spends a very short time of his life with his uncle in Nairobi. During his short stay with his uncle, he learns some meaning and purpose of life. After his uncle's death, Sindi's sense of security is very much thin. Even as a boy he was fed up with life and had contemplated suicide. However, he leaves Nairobi and joins London University for further education.

All the major incidents during his stay in London are the events connected to Sindi's relationship with two women Anna and Kathy:

“ The essence of my life in London lay in what I had learnt from Anna and Kathy.”⁽⁴⁾

Sindi leaves Anna willingly, but Kathy whom he loves passionately deserted him. Therefore, Sindi suffers badly from emotional traumas and agonies. He cultivates a sense of detachment due to the burden of broken relationship and his experiences in Nairobi and London.

It is confused state of a postmodern youth , who is always amidst crowds but always alone, is depicted effectively .In Boston when June Blyth sees him for the first time in a party and notices all dancing and drinking around except Sindi, the ex-officio host. She asks:

“ Why do you look so sad?”⁵

Sindi is trapped in his own loneliness, which is accentuated by his withdrawal from the society around him. He wonders:

“ 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 in Kenya or India or any other place for that matter! It seemed to me that I would still be a foreigner.”⁶ Deviod of purpose, life becomes an aimless existence to him and he feels : he “existed only for dying.”⁷

Sindi believes that man is just a toy in the hands of time having nothing to do but wait till time decides the future. He has a very successful academic career at London university, at Boston where he takes Doctorate in Mechanical Engineering. But he cares for mechanical engineering a bit more than any other subject: “ I cared two pins for all the mechanical engineers in the world. ”⁸During his stay of six years in America, he falls in love with June. His relationship with June fails to rid him of his sadness and detachment. He realizes “love that wanted to possess was

more painful than no love at all⁹. Hence he develops philosophy of life that one should be able to detach oneself from the object of one's love¹⁰. Sindi refuses June's the strongest urge to get married to him. He believes that he is incapable of getting married and marriage is not solution for one's alienation.

Sindi comes to the final crisis in his life when he refuses to marry June. In the meanwhile Baburao khemka is attracted to June and wants to marry her. June is humane, sympathetic and sacrificial girl. She cares for her fellow beings, shares their griefs and consoles them. After Sindi's refusal for marriage, June decides to prefer Babu who needs her. He is an overprotective son of a Delhi tycoon. He has been brought up under his father's strict supervision.

Like Sindi, Babu too has experienced a lost childhood because there is no reference about his mother. Devoid of the love of one of the parents, being brought up under strict supervision of his father, his inner urge has been suppressed. It is for this reasons that in U.S.A he enjoys unfettered freedom. He thinks, 'It is a wonderful country. I would never go back to India if I had the choice'¹¹. Babu sees America as a paradise for free sexes. 'Keep away from mistakes which many others made in America', Sindi warns Babu, 'Don't fall in love.'¹² He argues with Sindi, 'What is good of coming America if one is not to play around with girls?'¹³ Babu is totally aware about his father's expectation from him regarding his marriage. He tells Sindi: 'He sent me here and I promised him I'll never marry in America'¹⁴.

Despite his father's unwillingness, Babu and June are betrothed and this comes as a blow to Sindi. The edge of pain is so intense that it leaves him completely numb. He is totally helpless because he has himself allowed this to happen. He has had many relationships, but wherever there is a question of marriage, he has tried to be excused on the ground of his own philosophy of detachment. He does not realize that a man who avoids his duties has nothing in

store but pain. He cherishes the hope that June may return to him. So when June makes advance to Sindi one night in his apartment, he yields to her. Later June drives to Babu's flat where both of them quarrel and she admits to Babu that she has been sleeping with Sindi. Babu, due to his Indian mental makeup fails to accept the American standards of conduct between the betrothed lovers. In a fit of anger he drives off car blindly and is killed in the car accident. Both June and Sindi realize that Babu has committed suicide. Babu has been sent out of his college as he had failed in exams. He had been disowned by his father for intending to marry June. And on the top of it all comes to June's confession of her relations with Sindi which ultimately prods him to put an end of life.

Sindi's attitude of detachment turns out to be his mental trauma, aggrandizing itself with the death of Babu. He is rendered more and more isolated and exposed. Hence He wants to move away from America in search of mental peace. It is unbearable for him to stay there anymore: "The feeling of my nakedness in the hands of existence grew with every passing day and a strong urge possessed me to once again roam the streets of the world. I did not know where I would go or what the future held for me, but one thing was certain my search had to continue".¹⁵

He hopes to meet individuals and places which will give his suffering soul solace. Being optimistic he always hopes to find out better place for living meaningful life. But in absence of any basic and life -sustainable values he is not able to cultivate the culture or even become a part of it.

After the death of Babu, Sindi accepts a job in New York. One day he comes to know through a letter from June that she is carrying Babu's child. Sindi thinks a lot on this matter and decides to marry June but when he reaches there he finds June dead during an attempt of abortion. He realizes his blunder through these bitter experiences of losing two dear ones of his- Babu and June. He says:

“ Detachment at that time had meant inaction. Now I had begun to see the fallacy in it. Detachment consisted of right action and not escape from it .The gods had set a heavy prize to teach me just that.”¹⁶

Sindi learns to be detached from everything except himself due to his sour experiences with Anna and Kathy. But June`s death which finally breaks his attachment to himself.

He realizes his worthless life at the bare age of twenty five when normally a young man is full of enthusiasm, energy and zest for life. He gives expression to his feeling thus: `twenty five years largely wasted in search of wrong things in wrong places. Twenty-five years gone in search of peace.”¹⁷Sindi has nothing positive to say about his journey from Kenya to Boston in search of meaningful life. He feels regretted that he had spent all this time uselessly.

In search of peace and to conquer pain, he decides his destination in India: “ the land of ancestors”¹⁸ On reaching India, he joins Mr. Khemka`s firm in Delhi. But his up-bringing makes him a misfit in the Indian society also. Khemka`s daughter Shiela remarks:

“ You are still a foreigner. You don`t belong here.”¹⁹

He feels restless and outlandish even at the lavish Parties at Mr. Khemka`s home. The path of life on which Khemka and his friends walk feels Sindi`s heart with disdain and nausea. He is filled with disgust to know how Mr. Khemka and his tribe exploit needy people like Jain and Mathu so that their empire can grow and expand.

His sense of detachment and good nature or demeanor always land him in trouble. His traumas and agonies can be depicted in his dialogue with Mr. Khemka:

“But you at least knew what made an ass of a man; we don`t ever 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 mean to me if you call me an immoral man. I have no reason to be one thing or another. You ask me why I am not ambitious; well, I have no reason to be. Come of it I don't even have a reason to live! ²⁰

Sindi's suffering soul knows no reason of life, no system, no society, no customs, no tradition. And this is what pinches his soul. Life seems to be so meaningless to him that he does not have reason to live. He does not fit in the world and his way of life seems confused and explains in his state: "cynical and exhausted grown old before his time, weary with my own loneliness". ²¹ It is due to this fact that all his decisions and resolutions are initiated by his cynical temper.

Sindi's sufferings are manifestations of a spiritual crisis which all sensitive and uprooted persons have to face in life. He wants peace, a capacity to love and the courage to live without desire and attachment. His main intention is "to conquer pain" and death which "wipes out everything leaving only" a big mocking zero". ²² His various experiences in life, however leave him with unanswered questions just like a fish out of water.

The foreigner illustrates the traumatic influence of the globalization and modernization on man. Sindi resembles T.S.Eliot's 'The Hollow Men' and 'J. Alfred Prufrock.' Like T.S.Eliot's straw men, he ekes out an existence which is no better than death in life. As Prufrock is an archetypal everyman, the creation of the character of Sindi Oberoi is an evidence of Joshi's "contemporary sensibility etching out the inner wasteland of the archetypal modern Everyman."²³

In the novel the prominent characters go through mental traumas and agonies under the dual forces of native ethos and western culture. Sindi, Babu and June have different roots and all of them are trying for existence in other's culture. Babu has innocence and simplicity. he has his roots firmly set in its traditional

ethics measures the purity of a woman by the standard of his virginity. Without toughness of experience, he feels terribly shocked when he comes to know that June has been sharing bed with Sindi for a year. Thus Babu has his roots in Indian soil, but wings in America. On the other hand June dangles between Babu and Sindi. The philosophy of detachment and temporiness of love does not suit her. Her death symbolizes cultural lag. The two culture of East and west hardly meet.

Sindi's crisis of identity rests in his soul. It has nothing to do with the geographical chasm. He feels himself a foreigner in Kenya, London, Boston and New Delhi. He is so much engrossed with his estrangement that his bright career prospects and enviable academic achievements are worthless for him. The result is that his foreignness manifests in mental traumas and agonies.

Impressed by the authenticity and understanding of inner turmoil of human beings, Meenakshi Mukherjee aptly comments:

“ The Foreigner is the first Indo-Anglian novel to deal with a genuine human predicament without compromise and without clichés, since Anita Desai's Voices in the City”.²⁴

Being frustrated and baffled Sindi does not realize that mere changing international boundaries is of no use to find any solution to his alienation. His alienation must be resolved within. He himself knows this fact, when he says to June, “we are alone, both you and I. That is the problem. And our loneliness must be resolved from within.”²⁵

Gradually in the company of Muthu, a low paid employee he realizes that detachment does not mean an escape from duty or isolation but it means devotional sacrifice and involvement. Human suffering teaches him real meaning of detachment and also purges him.

Conclusion

A modern man fails to attain the true meaning of life, the essence of human existence due to the loss of moral values, customs and tradition of the society. And on the top of it all comes due to his disbelief in love and human values. Deprived of ancient wisdom which made life meaningful, the present man shrunk in spirit and is doomed to live in confusion, frustration, disintegration, disillusionment and meaninglessness. In his maiden novel `The Foreigner` Arun Joshi tries his best to delineate the predicament of the Modern man who is confronted by the self and questions of his meaningful existence in this absurd world.

Devoid of love, familial nourishment and cultural roots, Sindi grows with a built in fissure in his personality. As a result he is wandering alien, rootless like Naipul`s anchored souls or Camus`s outsider. He is, in fact, an anomic man, a consequence of social maladjustment or emotional insecurity. Like Camus, Joshi seems to be trying to make his hero simultaneously a `portrait, mask and mirror of the modern man, baffled as much by the loss of parameters to judge right from wrong due to the lack of moral values.

In this novel Joshi seems to say that the modern man can be saved from mental traumas and agonies by a sensible approach to the problem, sympathy with the oppressed and beliefs in human virtues such as love, justice and mercy.

Thus Arun Joshi presents different facets of crisis in modern man`s life and records his traumas and agonies with a rare competence and gravity in this novel.

The Foreigner has a strange feeling of aloneness and aloofness, associated with the modern world; it permeates the entire narrative and provides the necessary texture and structure to the novel.

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