

RETHINKING DETACHMENT TO INVOLVEMENT IN ARUN JOSHI'S *THE FOREIGNER*

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Abstract

As a first novel Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner* (1968), is one of the most compelling existentialist works on the canvas of Indian English Novels. It is somewhere followed and inspired by Albert Camus's *The Outsider*. Arun Joshi's writings echo the influence of Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre and other existential writers whose characters are seems to be uprooted from society. Albert Camus and Sartre emphasized that alienation was inherent in the evolving character of man's existence as a "stranger" in the world. Like Albert Camus, Joshi's writings are mainly addressed to the isolation of man in an alien world and the estrangement of an individual from himself, the society and the culture. He unravels the different phases of crisis in modern man's life. The hero of the novel, Sindi Oberoi is entirely detached from this world whether it is his social roots or amongst his workplace and friends; he is not fit nowhere. So, this paper will explore reason behind Sindi complete detachment from this self centric society and his involvement as a medium to survive in this world.

Keywords: Detachment, Involvement, Self Centric, Roots

Arun Joshi a great phenomenon and a giant on the canvas of Indian English Fiction have mainly focused on man's chaotic condition in this fragmented world. The novel centers round a young man, Sindi Oberoi whose parental and initial life makes him a complete foreigner, a man who does not belong anywhere. Sindi Oberoi is a Kenya born Indian of an Indian father and an English mother. Orphaned at an early age, he has no recollection of his parents. He is brought up by his uncle and has his education in Africa, London and America. But within him he cannot trace out his roots, whether be it an African, An English or an Indian he feels himself incomplete, lost and his roots remain hidden. He lies in the darkness not knowing where to place him as insecurity overwhelms him:

"Perhaps I felt that I was a foreigner in America. But then what difference would it have made if I 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". (*The Foreigner* 61).

Joshi has taken much of the ideas for his theme of alienation from Kafka who was by destiny and nature an alien but his alienation is slightly different from Kafka in the sense it is slightly materialistic and slightly spiritualistic in the form a hope an involvement. The protagonist of the novel *The Foreigner* faces the dilemma and problem similar to Kafka himself. As Sindi Oberoi feels "in what way, if any did I belong to the world that roared beneath my apartment window" (p.61). He is devoid of the sense of belonging and experiences a feeling of detachment everywhere he goes. Similar is the case in Nayantara Sahagal's novel *A Time to be Happy*, where the protagonist Sanad Shivpal, the son of a rich man is faced with problems of regaining his roots and belonging which is very vividly portrayed when he mourns his fate: "I don't belong entirely to India. My education, my upbringing and my sense of values have all combines to make me un-Indian. What do I have in common with most of my country-men?" (*A Time to be Happy* : 147). Sindi's case is different one, an uprooted individual from his root; he is isolated from the very web of relationship that constitutes society. Sindi' search for unknown takes him to London, Boston and America but his condition never changes. In Kenya he feels restless, even tries to commit suicide. He shifts to London where he has an affair with a minor artist Anna, who is not really interested in him but yearns for her lost youth. Later, he involves with an English woman Kathy, who also leaves him for the sacredness of marriage. These incidents make a serious impact about boredom of life on Sindi's mind and disturb him intensely. Thus he learns to practice detachment and non-involvement in human emotions in order to cope with condition. Sindi's emotional and mental predicament does not permit any respect for the society or religion just like Meursault of Camus's *The Outsider*. He believes that "There is no end to suffering, no end to the struggle between good and evil" (p.43). He feels that his life is purposeless: 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 (p.65).

Sindi's reckless way of life takes a turn when he meets June Blyth in Boston. Their relationship slowly and steadily develops into passionate love. His refusal to marry June can only be looked upon as a mere escapism from being drawn into involvement. The novelist portrays the protagonist's limited understanding. Sindi clings to the false image and deludes himself with the belief that he has attained the spirit of 'detachment'. But June is an American girl with her own idealistic dreams and desires. She is ready to become the wife of an Indian even though she will have to submerge her real identity and values of life. Anita Desai strikes a similar chord when portraying Sarah as a nowhere person in *Bye-Bye Black-bird*, who after marrying Adil "becomes nameless, she had shed her name as she had shed her ancestry and identity". But it is the Indian man June loves, who doubts the values of marriage and attachment. Debating on the necessity of marriage, Sindi comes to the conclusion: "Marriage was more often a lust for possession than anythingelse; people get married just as they bought new cars. And then they gobbled each other up" (p.66).

He believes that in most of the marriages love ended and hatred took its place. The hand that so lovingly held mine would perhaps someday ache to hit me. (p.69). In short he does not "believe in marriage" (p.105). He is afraid of possessing and being possessed by anybody and marriage means both. Sindi's withdrawal from life, love, marriage leads June to Babu, a friend of Sindi and an Indian who is dependence prone. In her sense of sacrifice and love for the mystical. June and Babu becomes a kind of complete of each for the certain time, later, Babu's Indian ways of thinking and June complex nature hurts him and he commit suicide. These incidents change Sindi's life; he thinks life is complete meaningless and futile regrets over the death of Babu considering himself for the death of Babu:

“I turned around and peered at my reflection in the dirty window glass of cheap clothing store. I did look strange. The whole thing had left me baffled. 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”. (*The Foreigner* 8).

After the pathetic death of Babu, Sindi leaves U.S.A. and comes to India to meet Mr. Khemka and Sheila whom he had informed about death of Babu. Here, he is again detached among them with their ideas, thought and point of view. Sindi realizes capitalism is dominated throughout the country, nowhere a place of social equality. Lastly, when Mr. Khemka is imprisoned for tax stealing and Sheila's condition forces him back to the society to help them.

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