

## DEPICTION OF SELF IN ARUN JOSHI'S *THE FOREIGNER*

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### **Abstract**

Arun Joshi's debut novel, *The Foreigner* (1968), revolves around Sindi Oberoi, a man of Indian and Western parentage who experiences profound alienation—geographically, culturally, and existentially. Raised in Kenya and educated in England and the U.S., Sindi perceives himself as a perpetual outsider, a “foreigner anywhere,” unable to anchor himself in any society. His rootlessness is not just about place; it is a deeply internal condition, a detachment from the self, others, and life's meaning. Narratively built around flashbacks, the novel charts Sindi's relationships—with June, an American woman, and Babu, the son of his Indian employer—whose tragic deaths intensify his existential void and complicate his journey toward identity. Symbolically, his detachment becomes self-delusion; his attempts to remain aloof end in isolation and self-betrayal. Ultimately, Sindi embarks on a quest for self-realization. *The Foreigner* thus portrays the psychological turmoil of cultural hybridity, the existential isolation of modern life, and the potential reconciliation through inward transformation rather than external belonging.

**Keywords:** self realization, cultural hybridity, self delusion

Arun Joshi is a great giant in the arena of Indian English Literature, adds a wider dimension to the genre of Indian fiction in English like the theme of self, human and humanity in his novels. His fictional world is characterized by the issues of the individual which is embodiment of mass in general way shown through a crisis of the self in an emotionally disturbed environment. Joshi's first novel *The Foreigner* (1993) depicts the loneliness of the protagonist Sindi Oberoi and explores the individual's anguished consciousness of being separated from the common mass. The story is about a young person, Sindi Oberoi who has twice detached from his country of birth. Since he has no strong bondage and he calls himself an alien. Sindi Oberoi in *The Foreigner*, an Indian Kenyan who returns to India after many years in the West, lacks involvement in the life he heads. *The Foreigner* opens in a morgue where Sindi Oberoi has to identify his dead friend, Babu Rao Khamka who has died in an accident. Babu was his friend and even more than that whose death brought Sindi on the bitter ground of reality.

Sindi's relationship with Khemka, throwing together the past and the present, the real and the remembered, the world of imagination and of reality. Of mixed background, Sindi has to be haunted by the reality of rootlessness and restlessness too.. At the same time, the inner struggle in him makes him refuse to accept the proposal of marriage with June whom he loved and probably real cause of Babu's death. On his return to India, Oberoi, still a foreigner, is given a job by Khemka's father in his firm. It is Sheila, Khemka's sister who gives him a sense of commitment in life Oberoi. So, this paper will explore inner agony of Sindi Oberoi who is rejected everywhere and he wants to achieve tranquility and attachment and these are the urgency of general mass.

As an intellectual movement that exploded on the scene in mid-twentieth-century France, "existentialism" is often viewed as a historically situated event that emerged against the backdrop of the Second World War, the Nazi death camps, and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, all of which created the circumstances for what has been called "the existentialist moment" (Baert 2015), where an entire generation was forced to confront the human condition and the anxiety-provoking givens of death, freedom, and meaninglessness. Although the most popular voices of this movement were French, most notably Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, as well as compatriots such as Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the conceptual groundwork of the movement was laid much earlier in the nineteenth century by pioneers like Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche and twentieth-century German philosophers like Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Karl Jaspers as well as prominent Spanish intellectuals José Ortega y Gasset and Miguel de Unamuno. The core ideas have also been illuminated in key literary works. Beyond the plays, short stories, and novels by French luminaries like Sartre, Beauvoir, and Camus, there were Parisian writers such as Jean Genet and André Gide, the Russian novelists Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky, the work of Norwegian authors such as Henrik Ibsen and Knut Hamsun, and the German-language iconoclasts Franz Kafka and Rainer Maria Rilke. The movement even found expression across the pond in the work of the "lost generation" of American writers like F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, mid-century "beat" authors like Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsburg, and William S. Burroughs, and the self-proclaimed "American existentialist," Norman Mailer (Cotkin 2003, 185).

In this novel *The Foreigner* the writer has 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. He is always in search of self which he has to look for in order to maintain his identity as a human who is the part of this Human World. 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".  
 (TF 61).

Joshi has taken much of the ideas of self and human which is an integral part of this society from Kafka who has given concept of alienation of self is slightly different from Kafka in the sense it is slightly materialistic and slightly spiritualistic in the form a hope, an involvement. In this novel *The Foreigner*, the protagonist of the novel Sindi Oberoi is an embodiment of an individual who prominently represents the whole mass of this cosmos. Sindi this in novel *The Foreigner* faces the dilemma and problem similar to Kafka 's hero, as Sindi Oberoi feels "in what way, if any did I belong to the world that roared beneath my apartment window" (p.61). Perhaps, those questions that Sindi raises about himself is not about him rather questions of each and every soul who is in search of an unknown and mysterious thing in order to survive them. He is devoid of the sense of belonging and experiences a feeling of detachment everywhere he goes. Similar is the case in Nayantara Sahgal's novel *A Time to be Happy*, where 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" (TF, 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" (TF,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 anything else; people get married just as they bought new cars. And then they gobbled each other up" (TF.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". (TF.69). In short he does not "believe in marriage" (TF.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”. (TF 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. Now, we come to the conclusion this novel *The Stranger* presents before us a bitter but a real picture of humanity and society where people like Sindi is bound to suffer, though he involves himself in earnest quest for life sustaining values but is not able to overcome the miseries of his life completely. Ultimately, like other individual who suffer and control their passion in order to cope with prevailing condition before them, Sindi realizes that one is ought to be responsible for one's own action and thus involves himself in lives. Consequently, Sindi's realization is not only assertion of an individual but it is the realization of whole mass and humanity which make them committed and a dedicated human like Sindi Oberoi. Moreover, other characters like Babu, June, Anna and others feel conflict in their life because of socioeconomic and political which are prevailing all around restrict them and not allow to take their decision independently. Conclusively, Sindi and other characters struggle and suffer to survive in this world, though they are panic and faces bitter and crude reality of this cosmos but they try to maintain their survival and hence it present before us a symbol of humanity that survive, human that save and self that exist.

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