

**HAVING AND BEING: A STUDY OF ARUN JOSHI'S
THE FOREIGNER****DR. BOLLA MALLIKHARJUNA RAO**Asst. Professor of English
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Having nothing to fall back upon in moments of crisis, modern man finds himself alienated not only from his fellow men, but also from himself. The depression of the modern man has been greatly exasperated by the spiritual stress, which is the characteristic of the current era. Arun Joshi's in his novel discusses alienation because of the clash and conflict between the socio-cultural and psychological pressures. The alienation primarily arises in all the novels of Joshi because of social maladjustment and emotional insecurity. Here Joshi's The Foreigner - where the young hero, after experiencing life and love in America, is, back in Delhi, at last persuaded by a humble office worker. Joshi is the most terrifically sensitive and thought-provoking novelist who has addressed alienation and annihilation of modern man. The novels are branded as the theme dealing with nervousness, alienation and the existential predicament of contemporary man. The central characters of Joshi's novels are mentally disturbed and filled with despair, self-hatred and self-pity and regard themselves as strangers in this lonely planet. The concept of alienation is not quite new in the modern world it has been in use in the theological, philosophical, sociological and psychological writings for an extensive while. Alienation means withdrawal, a person removes himself from contact with other people and is alone with his own thoughts. The withdrawal leads to severe maladjustments and gradually expresses more painful and suppresses all emotions and results. The principal concern is to study the sense of alienation in the novels of Arun Joshi that intimidates to crush every sphere of human life. In discussing the theme of alienation in the Joshi's novels, it is mainly concerned, with man's alienation from society, which is the most prevalent kind of alienation, and his alienation from his own self. The most besetting problems that man faces today are the problems of alienation and wisdom of emptiness. To established norms and values, man's psyche generates a contemptuous attitude, which makes him fumble for the meaning of life. The central characters are alien because they are exposed by their either sensitivity or lack of identification with the world.

Key Words: *The Foreigner, America, India, Self, Society, Alienation, Oberoi and Muttu.*

Arun Joshi is a novelist who, more strongly than most, has brought to his work that detachment from the everyday, while still acknowledging its existence, which is perhaps



India's particular gift to the literature of the world. The rising up into the transcendental is a trait that has increasingly marked out his novels from his first, *The Foreigner*—where the young hero, after experiencing life and love in America, is, back in Delhi, at last persuaded by a humble office worker that sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved—on up to *The City and the River*, which takes place wholly in an imaginary land.

Arun Joshi is the most outstandingly sensitive and thought-provoking novelist who has addressed alienation and annihilation of modern man. The novels of Joshi are branded as the theme dealing with fretfulness, alienation and the existential predicament of contemporary man. The central characters of Joshi's novels are mentally disturbed and filled with despair, self-hatred and self-pity and regard themselves as strangers in this lonely planet. The concept of alienation is not quite new in the modern world it has been in use in the theological, philosophical, sociological and psychological writings for an extensive while. Alienation means withdrawal, a person removes himself from contact with other people and is alone with his own thoughts. The withdrawal leads to severe maladjustments and gradually expresses more painful and suppresses all emotions and results.

This creates a rift in the personality that routes to destruction and leaves a scar in the individual. The twentieth century has rightly called the age of alienation, an age of lost values, lost men and lost gods, where man is confused, frustrated, disintegrated and an alienated soul. The massive amount of alienation is highlighted in modern India among the youth and the artists who wrote in post-independence era. Joshi's fiction explores the self-alienation and brings to central focus the way in which the self has to assess its alienation from the family and society. The protagonists of Joshi's novels are hopeless outsiders and barren strangers who live in a bewildered statement and have brought the poignant contests of alienation in his fiction leading the protagonists to an existential choice. Broadly speaking, alienation implies division from family, group, society and even from own self.

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Having nothing to fall back upon in moments of crisis, modern man finds himself alienated not only from his fellow men, but also from himself. The depression of the modern man has been greatly exasperated by the spiritual stress, which is the characteristic of the current era. Arun Joshi's in his novel discusses alienation because of the clash and conflict between the socio-cultural and psychological pressures. The alienation primarily arises in all the novels of Joshi because of social maladjustment and emotional insecurity.

Sindi Oberoi in *The Foreigner* has been always lonely and effortlessness in the world of alienation to find a meaning in existence. His dilemma is socio-psychological, deprived of familial nourishment, cultural roots and affection in his very roots; he grows with a built-in



fissure in his personality and becomes a wandering alien. Whatsoever encounters him notices this foreignness in him. He felt as an alien belonging to no place and his words and behaviour created the same impression. He is a man without roots and remains a foreigner, whether he is in London, in Boston and in New Delhi. After his parents were killed in Cairo in a flight accident, his uncle in Kenya brought him up, and consequently, he could not consider himself belonging to any country in particular. Sindi's origin and early life made him an ideal foreigner, the man who did not belong anywhere. He narrates:

“I wondered in what way, if any, I belonged 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 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 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 sense of foreignness makes him alienated and transcends barriers of geography, as it might appear on the surface. It propels him from on crisis to another, sucking the wake of several other people. Like other foreign students in the United States, Sindi could not consider himself an ambassador of his country because he considers it as a perfectly hilarious and even the bartenders never consider him as an ambassador where he more poignantly experienced the feeling of alienation. *Sindi Oberoi* is alien everywhere physically as well as metaphorically, but this alienation is that of his soul which made him careening on a very different track. When Mr. Khemka, a businessman in India asks about his family, he desperately remarks that he had mentioned for the hundredth time the story of the strangers whose only reality was a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs.

The novel attempts to explore the unique consciousness of Sindi in being an outsider in the gamut of society and his frustration of failure in finding a meaning of existence. Therefore, he was a man who did not have his roots anywhere in the globe. The Foreigner relates how Sindi, an immigrant Indian, blinded by his own detachment in the course of his search for meaning and purpose of his life wherever he lives. He was bound to become cynical, misogynistic and detached with alienation and restlessness.

As a study in alienation, The Foreigner explains Sindi's embarrassment projection of himself as a permanent foreigner, an existentialist exile and a stranger to himself, engrossed with the enigmatic nature of life. Instinctively, his arduous voyage through several nations, relationships and experiences provides him with a new perspective, which helped him to arrive at an understanding of life. He acquires mental equanimity and redeems himself of his detachment and alienation with disinterested involvement.

His alienation from the world is similar to many existing heroes in the west suffer from. His restlessness is rooted within his soul like an ancient curse and drives him from crisis to crisis. Trapped in his loneliness, Sindi is accelerated by his withdrawal from the society around him and feels like a miserable alien that left him pale and exhausted. Sindi is lonely, anxious,



depressed and dependent person who is painfully aware of the mess and is oppressed with the sadness of living. In this struggle for survival, he finds himself in a wilderness.

As a student of Engineering at Boston meets June, an American girl, at a foreign students' gathering. June is a woman craving to be of help to someone. His sense of detachment and restlessness is evident when June asks Sindi where he was from. This reaction provides a clue to his alienation: Everybody always asked me the same silly question. "Where are you from?" as if it really mattered a great deal where I was from?" . Sindi looked uncomfortable at the very beginning of the encounter with June, when she says:

"There is something strange about you, you know. Something distant. I'd guess that when people are with you they don't feel like they're with a human being. May be it's an Indian characteristic, but I have a feeling you'd be a foreigner anywhere".

June came into close contact with Sindi and remarked at the very first moment that he would be a foreigner everywhere. In India, Sheila also reminded that Sindi is the saddest man. He himself confessed that he was cynical and exhausted, grown old before his time, weary with his own loneliness.

To Sindi nothing ever seemed real or very important. His disgust with his own life is expressed by him in very strong terms and it was the sum of a lifetime striving. To solve this problem of existence, he joins London University but its solution evades him. Sindi suffers a lot in his search for meaning and purpose of life. Again, he puts the question to his professor on the eve of his departure for India: how does one learn to live a life? He realizes that his foreignness lies within him as a force, which would not let him integrate himself with others. A physician advises Sindi to have a girl for companionship after diagnosing his sense of loneliness. To some extent, his love for June does some remedy for his loneliness but his love is detached and consequently, he feels alienated from her. June has a strong love of Sindi. June thought that marriage would bring them together, but he does not believe in marriage which is overpowering, less repulsive as it implies there is very difference possession than anything else. People got married just as they bought new cars. And then they gobbled each other up. He believed that love that wanted to possess (in marriage) was worse than no between love and pity. Nowhere is his cynicism more in evidence than in his attitude towards love and marriage. He said in June that he "didn't believe in marriage" because marriage was often a lust for love at all. One should be able to love without wanting to possess, otherwise you end up by doing a lot more harm than good. Sindi tells June:

"Marriage wouldn't help, June. We are alone, both you and I. This is the problem. And your aloneness must be resolved from within. You can't send two persons through a ceremony and expect that their aloneness will disappear. I can't marry you because I am incapable of doing so. It would be like going deliberately mad".

Sindi has misconstrued the term detachment and his notion of detachment is just a euphemism for non-involvement and thus shirks the most needed responsibility towards June. This coldness is not a symptom of his lack of love towards June. Actually, speaking he loves June but shies away from complete integration with her and also suspects whether his



relationship with Anna or Kathy could be called love. His amorous liaison with Anna and his dalliance with Kathy fill him with a haunting sense of the futility of human relationships. Even June pities that Sindi has never been in love with women – a fact that he later confesses to Shelia. A triangle of self is revealed when his relationship with June is objective and he tries constantly to avoid any type of involvement with her, but when Babu gets ready to marry June a strange desperation grew upon, Sindi with an uncontrollable word cautions Babu:

“Listen Babu, “don’t do anything in a hurry. Women are desirable creature, but they can also hurt you. We all make use of each other even though we don’t want to, in your part of the world you marry only once in a lifetime. It is quite a serious matter. Don’t just rush into a wrong thing for a temporary need”.

Sindi realizes the importance of June only when she leaves him for Babu. He realizes a mixture of sadness and rage grew as if two high voltage electrodes had taken root in his head and each of them kept spitting venom into his brain. He looks up himself as the victim of a tremendous illusion, the so called detachment vanishes, and leaving all his rage drained and only sadness remained. It is at this stage that the awareness comes to him that by not acting according to his true nature, by not integrating himself completely with her, and by acting with detachment, he had alienated himself from his own self – for he did love her and cried when she refuses to see him. Right from the beginning, he is oppressed by a desire to find the meaning of life. He explains the shocking experience thus:

“Babu’s death had drained something out of me. It was my confidence in the world. At one blow, most of what I had cherished in life was taken away. Babu had kicked out all my beliefs and disproved my theories. I felt like a desert or like a vast field of naked oaks in winter time. I felt more alone and naked in the world than I had ever felt before”.

Babu’s death took Sindi’s confidence in the real world which was once considered beyond good and but now produced evil on a gigantic scale. It was this detachment made him much more alone and naked in the world that he never felt before. Sitting in a remarkable crowded room, he feels lonely and like sitting in his own tomb. In his vanity of foolishness, he thinks of himself as a peacock. The real Sindi is not of the cynical image he wishes to project, the real Sindi is not lonely individual wanting to love and be loved, but afraid of committing himself. His predicament is a tangible reflection of the modern man’s condition. The severest blow to him is the death of June, which occurred while trying to abort Babu’s child. This incident made him puzzled enough that made him face to face pain. He realizes the absurdity of his theory of detachment that had caused the death of two persons intimate to him.

Sindi clings to a false image and deceives himself with the idea that he has developed the spirit of detachment. His bright career prospects and enviable academic achievements are of no avail because, from all around, he is overwhelmed by a nagging sense of loneliness and the chaos of his being. He reminisces: “Detachment at that time had meant inaction. Now I had begun to see the fallacy in it. Detachments consisted of right action and not escape from



it. The gods had set a heavy price to teach me just that”. Sindi’s utter confusion pricked of conscience and sense of remorse are evidently manifested in the following words:

In short, I was seized with the problem of once again putting together all that had happened to me and coming to grips with life. For twenty years I had moved whichever way life had led me. I had learnt much on the way. I had learnt to be detached from the world, but not from me. That is when the fatal error was made that ultimately led to Babu’s death and then to June’s death.

This painful experience weighed heavily on his heart in the primary stage and abruptly becomes detached from everything, except himself. Following the death of June, Sindi’s agonizing sense and loneliness deepens when he realizes that he had no friends. Actually, there was a temporary bond of love with June. Her memory lingered with him like an incurable ulcer and finally breaks his affection for himself. June’s death finally broke Sindi’s attachment, strangeness, loneliness and the search for detachment who ultimately suffers bewildering agony. For the first time in his life, he endeavours to seek solution to his problems from within by ascertaining the meaning of life. A powerful impulse to start his life afresh overtakes him. In such a state, only a flip of a coin decides the future course of action. He is leaving for India in search of a place to anchor on this lonely planet.

On reaching India, however, he feels for the past twenty years, he had learnt to be detached from the world but not from himself. In the aspect, Sindi is a contrast to the protagonist of Joshi’s another novel *The Apprentice* and even to Meursault in Camus’s *The Outsider* who are both alienated from themselves. Accordingly, with the new knowledge regarding detachment, he resumes his journey like the barren woman in Eliot’s *The Wasteland* who wanders over the heaps of ruined towers. He is a ruined soul wandering through the dark labyrinths of life which reminds of loneliness around. Sindi is just a fictional representative of the uprooted young men of the modern age divided against themselves and thinks he has no social life, but alienated life and it could be called whatever name one wished. At first, he mistook detachment to mean inaction, but now he begins to see the fallacy in it. The neutrality between right and wrong, according to Dr.S.Radhakrishnan, is a sign of moral perversity. To the credit of Sindi, it must be said that he is not an inhuman monster bereft of all emotions and denuded of all human values and virtues.

Sindi gets a god-sent opportunity to redeem him in India and shows his capacity for regeneration where some pity still resides in the deep recesses of his mind and joins as an Assistant Manager in Khemka’s factory. Muthu, a normal worker in Mr. Khemka’s factory, who is able to better understand the basic substratum of human consideration for others, persuades him to take over the office for the sake of the poor people, when after an income tax raid, Mr. Khemka is under a trial and there are rumours of his firm being confiscated by the government. Sindi, not being totally devoid of emotions, could not maintain his non-chalices for long.

The visit to Muthu’s house changed his whole attitude towards life and others when he finds Muthu to support his own family and the family of his own brother, who is unemployed, which enabled him to understand the real meaning of life. When he says that he does not



want to be involved, Muthu, an almost uneducated person in comparison to Sindi, teaches him the distinction between detachment and involvement. Muthu tells Sindi: “Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved”. After meeting Muthu, he feels a major change is discernible in his attitude towards the real pursuit of human life.

Finally, he reaches the inevitable conclusion to concentrate on decisive action, the fruit of which is not being his concern. Sindi’s pre-occupation with self begins has weakened now. Consequently, he is able to empathise with the poor workers in Khemka’s Enterprises.

Sindi shows a positive attitude to various situations and problems in life. His search for the meaning of life ends and engages himself in the battle of survival that the workers of the factory could not have won without his help and guidance. He decides to infuse new life into the ruined business of Mr. Khemka and thus uplifts the employees who earn the daily bread of their families. He is lucky enough not to find absurdity and estrangement as the ultimate condition of life, and shows a tremendous capacity for transcendence. Such an enlightened attitude of Sindi not only minimizes psychic conflict arising out of the feelings of loneliness and worthlessness, but also creates one of the deepest forms of human happiness and shared enjoyment.

There are other characters too, who are quite alienated in *The Foreigner*, Babu Khemka feels alienated from June and commits suicide. His father, an awful bully, is alienated from his son who is taken only as a pawn rather than a human being with individual traits. He can be considered as the first among Joshi’s alienated foreigners who turn inwards to overcome the sense of futility and discern a world of meaningful relatedness within themselves, however limited it may be. The reason for his failure is not difficult to get. As he himself suggests: “Life is not a business account... once your soul goes bankrupt, no amount of plundering can enrich it again”. Towards the end, he becomes oriented towards duty without selfish desires. He takes up a line of reasoning that led to the inevitable conclusion that detachment consisted in getting involved with the world.

Indisputably, most of these images give the impression of loneliness, separation, hypocrisy, coldness, corruption, disease, death and the absence or individuality, honesty and universal human values.

Joshi’s characters reflect the Odyssey of a restless soul. Four images are the externalized, concretised, articulated forms of one’s inner feelings and are the tiny holes through which the readers can have a peep into the characters’ beings. The images thus help in crating throughout his novels an atmosphere of alienation, forming a backdrop as it were, and facilitating the work of the artist in depicting such alienated characters. Arun Joshi gives the impression of a rebel who fights against the greed, violence, shams, and hypocrisy of the people and in the process alienates himself and his art from his fellow creatures.

Joshi also gives the impression that his art is not social minded as he does not give any suggestions for the individual’s integration with society. To counter this change one can say that the very fact that Joshi portrays such a society is an example of his concern with the evils of society and hence an unmistakable evidence of his social consciousness.



The inner conflict of an individual is really his inner relations to the outward conflicts. An artist is not at all a preacher and it is not his task, like a physician to prescribe remedies. The image of alienation is used by Arun Joshi, as a myth and the protagonists act as alien either to the civilization or to themselves. The central characters are alien because they are exposed by their either sensitivity or lack of identification with the world.

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