

Quest for Identity in Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner*

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Abstract:

Arun Joshi deals with various fictional themes as alienation and involvement, east-west encounter and compromise, existentialism and materialism, and quest and complacency. In his novels, he delineates the spiritual agony of his lonely questers. They are absolutely puzzled fellows restlessly attempting to find their roots and trying to understand the aim of their existence on this planet. A deep study of the novel of Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner*, reveal that the central experience of his fiction is crisis and quest his motif. Sindi Oberoi's journey from detachment from the world to his involvement in it within the *Foreigner*, the novelist depicts Sindi's anguish resulting from his loneliness and his so-called rootlessness. Sindi could be a born foreigner who is trying to detach himself from the world. He makes relationship with variety of girls but with June he is brought face to face along with his hypocrisy, cowardice, vanity and stupidity. The deaths of June and Babu deepen his sense of alienation, but they also act as a perpetual. He comes to India in search of his identity. Throughout his quest after self-realization Sindi experiences pains and eventually he feels his soul to be beginning renewed and purified. He comes to know the aim of his existence on this planet. He realizes the important meaning of the detachment theory as depicted within the Gita that detachment means not renunciation but selfless action. The novel, in its final implication could be a bitter impeachment of both-Sindi's alienation and his distorted concept of detachment.

Keywords: alienation, existentialism, east-west encounter, identity, materialism, quest, detachment rootlessness, self-realization and renunciation.

Arun Joshi is one among the Indo-English authors who gave the new direction the Indian Fiction written in English. His novels are supported the rootlessness of the characters who is often in explore for his identity. It seems that his own experience of living abroad is portrayed in his novels within the variety of various characters. All his novels Joshi deals with the themes of alienation and involvement, East-West encounter and compromise, love and hate, quest and complacency, and existentialism and materialism. His fictional world is revelation of a world where man is confronted by the self and also the questions of his existence. His novels are attempts toward a better understanding of the planet and of himself. He has been influenced by Albert Camus and other existentialist writers. Arun Joshi is an inspired talent, exploring deeper into the moral and spiritual crisis of the contemporary Indians. He is

one among the few most vital Indo-English Novelists who has produced very compelling works of fiction.

His literary career was highlighted by the publication of variety of novels and short stories. The publication of *The Foreigner* and also *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) revealed the making of a superb novelist in him. This was followed by *The Apprentice* (1974) and a set of his short stories under the title *The Survivor* which was published in 1976. Earlier in 1975, he had brought the biography, Lala Shri Ram: a Study in entrepreneurship in industrial management. His next novel *The Last Labyrinth* (1981), won him the Sahitya Academy Award in 1982. His last novel *The City and the River* was published in 1990. Ultimately his untimely death in 1993 reduce his literary career. Arun Joshi has credit of five novels – *The Foreigner*, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, *The Apprentice*, *The Last Labyrinth*, and also *The City and the River*, and a set of stories entitled: *The Survivor*. His novels deals with social alienation, and simultaneously explore within the Indian context some universal questions of human existence and delineate, to use Verghese's words, "the search for the essence of human living". Though his protagonists are alienated from society, they are doing not become indifferent thereto, as is that the case with the protagonists of Camus's *The Outsider*. They still explore for a meaningful stance in life. Eventually they "step out of themselves and question on their consciousness but their own self-indulgent attitude keeping them off from facing the reality."

Indian novel in English has become a primary instrument of art to unfold the emergence of the self as historical entity and has highlighted aesthetically designed conjunction between the self and society. On account of historical reasons, however, Indian English novelists must face unprecedented problems. The best challenge before them is to hunt and assert identity. The displaced person's go after identity may be a commonplace theme in modern fiction, but it's a peculiar pertinence within the Indian context. The way of identity may be a perpetual sustaining creative force during a writer. It might be difficult to comprehend adequately the magnitude of the matter of loss of identity, unless we bear in mind that it's the foundation explanation for all problems. The loss of identity would make someone a pathetic figure.

Quest for identity is that the reflection of any modern man who is with none social, spiritual and personal roots. A

person's identity gives him the strength to survive within the world to correlate along with his fellow beings to grasp his social service. After 1950's, the interest of the Indian novelists shifted from the general public to the private sphere, their main concern being the delineation of the individual go after the self altogether its varied and sophisticated forms.

The need for a sense of identity is so vital and imperative that man couldn't remain sane if he didn't find a way of satisfying it. Man may be defined as the animal that may say "I", that may bear in mind of himself as a separate entity. In line with Eric Fromm, "Man, being torn off from nature, being endowed justifiably and imagination must form an idea of himself, must say and to feel: "I am I" (The Sane Society 59). The human child features a natural tendency to develop its power to amass a way of identity. All strivings of man are attempts to search out a solution to his existence. Many substitutes for a really individual sense of identity were probe for and located. Nation, religion, class and occupation serve to furnish a way of identity. "I am a Canadian", "I am a Hindu", "I am a peasant" are the formulae which help a person experience a way of identity, after the initial clan identity has disappeared and before a really individual sense of identity has been acquired. The necessity to feel a way of identity stems from the very condition of human existence.

Arun Joshi is one among the Indian Novelists, who takes up the problems and problems faced by a person within the present global world. Globalization is meant to be the most effective philosophy as far as business is worried but life has become difficult within the present scenario. So as to search for better life, man has uprooted himself from his own culture. Materially he perhaps achieved all the comforts, but during this bargain he has lost his mental peace. Arun Joshi depicts in his novels, particularly in *The Foreigner* that man can attain materialistic comforts but his rummage around for peace remains unachievable. This search makes man to struggle as Sindi Oberoi in *The Foreigner* to attain the peace which according to Joshi is feasible only through complete detachment from himself, which makes him plan to others. There are moments within the protagonist's life when he realize the futility of life which is one among the essential problems of existentialism philosophy but Joshi suggest the way to make this life useful. With the publication of his very first novel, *The Foreigner*, Arun Joshi emerged on the Indian English Literary scene. It established Arun Joshi as a mature and outstanding novelist. *The Foreigner* has been regarded as "one of the foremost compelling existential works of Indo – English Fiction". The novel takes us to the depths of human suffering and therefore the inferno of existential agony, which becomes more acute in his subsequent works. *The Foreigner* is, within the main, the study of "an uprooted

young man living in the latter half the twentieth century", who looks out "moorings and a meaning in his randomly drifting life." It is a poignant portrayal of Sindi Oberoi's unhappy and meaningless existence. Arun Joshi explores the individual's anguished consciousness of being isolated from the full apparatus of social conventions and moral proprieties, and his attempt to understand and face with dignity the abominable absurdity of the planet.

Sindi Oberoi may be a man without roots so he feels lost, alien and alone wherever he goes. He fails to perceive any meaning or purpose in life. Born of a Kenyan-Indian father and English mother, He is orphaned at the age of four when his parents met their end in an air crash near Cairo. Their only reality for him is "a few wrinkled and cracked photographs." Empty parental love and affection in his very childhood, he becomes broken anchorless. With the death of his uncle, who brought him up within the absence of his parents, Sindi has lost his emotional anchor forever. Against this background of emotional rootlessness, the assorted incidents of Sindi's life appear more comprehensible.

Arun Joshi stands out as a highly significant novelist. He is a conscientious writer who experiments with the medium of the novel as an expression of the existentialist predicaments and dilemmas of his protagonists as they struggle to grapple with moments of acute spiritual crisis. Joshi emerges as a novelist not within the tradition of Austen, Dickens, Anand, Narayan, Kamala Markandaya or Bhabani Bhattacharya, but rather one within the line of decadence of Kafka, Camus, Sartre and Bellow, Elison and Malamud. His main characters are in search of their lost self, their identity. Arun Joshi, just like the existential writers, is passionately concerned with man's feeling of alienation and anxiety in life. But he differs from the western existential writers within the sense that in him the existentialist dilemma, the anguish of alienation and therefore the absurdity of situation never remain the ultimate predicament. He is also different from Indo- English writers like Raja Rao or Sudhin Ghosh, who set back renunciation because the ideal mode of Indian life, and anchor their novels to some Indian belief. He doesn't accept alienation or absurdity because the contingent condition of human life. Rather than that his central motif is quest, and everyone his heroes are questers and seekers.

Joshi's presentation of the tormented and conflicting self of the contemporary man has added new dimensions to the Indo-English novel. His novels have a universal imperishable importance for his or her affirmative eloquent message for the humanity and there lies his inimitable talent astounding originality. His protagonists seriously rummage around for meaning and definition of life through a process of active experience, generally resulting in

the belief that only love, compassion, sincerity, courage and fidelity to one's own self can counter-balance the sense of meaninglessness and sterility in modern life. Arun Joshi's constant faith within the possibility of positive affirmation sets him but a number of the existentialists whose rummage around for values always remains open-ended. Despite his contribution of only five novels and some short stories to the Indo-English writing, Arun Joshi seems as a bright star within the galaxy of Indo-English Novelists.

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