



ATTACHMENT THROUGH DETACHMENT IN ARUN JOSHI'S "THE FOREIGNER"

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Contemporary Indian fiction in English certainly displays an incredible array of talent. Most of the novelists seem to regard India's wealth of literacy and mythical tradition as a wonderful source available to rewrite in the present. Arun Joshi is an excellent Indian English novelist who has given a new dimension and lift to Indian writing in English. Applying the psycho analytical theory, one can notice that the novelist in his works has sketched the human predicament caused by the inner turmoil of man living in the present world. Joshi's books talk about characters who do not have a firm footing and their rootlessness always haunt them with a quest

for identity. They seem to be vagabonds who travel far and wide but with no permanent home of their own. The lack of a hometown makes an individual literally crave for an identity for the loss of one leads to neurotic disasters and leaves one in utter dismay. The confrontations between the alienated self and the sociocultural forces are the main focus of his fictional works.

Arun Joshi's principal characters of his novels are subjected to extreme social, cultural and psychological pressures. It is no wonder that Joshi subjects his protagonists to experience such a crisis of life because the destiny of modern man seems to be so.



In India, the man of recent times leaves his homeland for a foreign place for various reasons. But the main idea behind it is for higher education and better economy. As the good old saying goes, “the other side of the fence always appears greener”, men generally think that there is plenty of room for good education and surplus money. But only after they land in an alien land do they realise their mistake for ‘east or west, home is the best’. It is a firm fact that one will be treated only as a second class citizen in a foreign country apart from his home.

Those who go abroad are slowly pushed to the situation of not looking back. They gradually try to settle down by compromising various factors. The worse condition is when they get married to foreigners. The initial infatuation is soon lost and the matrimonial life is on the rocks. The couple have to adjust a lot mutually and it

would definitely be a miracle if the marriage lasts. But the worst situation is for their off springs for they do not belong to either place. They do not have a real home of their own and once again their exposure to socio-cultural pressures tear them apart thereby making their survival a very difficult one. They undergo traumatic experiences which reflect on their character and career. Their self identity is a big question mark and it is so very distressing that they cannot find the right answer to it. It is only that some of them are able to swim safely to the shore.

Indian English literature initially concentrated more on the themes of struggle for freedom. The then political scenario and its upheavals had a prominent place in the creative works. Infact, the literary pieces were an instrument to project the reality of the situation and to kindle the fire in the heart of the readers regarding India attaining



its independence. The post independence period had its own varied themes in the fictional works. The impact of post colonialism was widely discussed from different dimensions and the public sector was the main focus. But then, the young generation of Indian English novelists shifted their field of interest from a broader sphere to a narrower one – private sphere after 1950. The list of such novelists who had their flag flying high in the mid twentieth century includes Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Manohar Malgonkar, Khuswant Singh and others. The individual being the prime focus, the writers probe into their problems in a deep analytical manner.

Man of recent times has his own neck stifling problems. Globalisation has paved way for both positive and negative aspects. The mundane materialistic existence and the greed for more and more in various

avenues has made man suffer for his very existence. There seems to be a struggle for everything everywhere around the world. The blacks want their freedom; the women want their equality in status; people want to migrate to other places for various reasons. All these have its own commotional and emotional impacts thereby affecting the individual mentally and morally. Man gropes in the dark trying to seek his identity and to overcome his alienation. The philosophy of existentialism dominates the subject themes of many novelists for the predicament of an individual is in such a bad shape. Man is always in search of something or the other but now his quest is for his own self-identity and self realisation.

Arun Joshi has excellently portrayed the very essence of human existence. His novels deal with the inner crisis that a modern man is subjected to today. It is not



only the outward forces that created problems for man. Ofcourse, there are both natural and unnatural calamities that ruin the lives of man externally. But there are internal tsunamis whose waves literally rise upto to great heights and swallow him in the form of isolation, randomness and a sort of meaninglessness in his existence. These abstract enemies attack a man from all sides and corner him in such a way that there seems to be no escape from it. The tensions that has risen with the changing ethos and the often disturbing demands of the individual contribute to his sense of loss of identity. At times, it is highly pathetic to see the individual standing in a helpless manner not knowing what to do in life or how to save. It. Although blessed with all materialistic needs and comforts, his meaning of life is at stake.

The Foreigner (1968) is the first novel of Arun Joshi and it is no doubt that the book is a milestone in the field of Indian novels in English. The novelist has certainly exposed the grave issues like detachment, rootlessness, quest for identity, self-realisation in a most skillfull manner. Also he has not failed to highlight the illuminating cultural heritage and moral values of India as an added feather to the cap. The novel projects the life of the protagonist Sindi Oberoi for whom the vein of aimlessness seems to be running through his wanderings. As such, he is born in Kenya to an Indian father and a British mother and feels that they are no good parents in showering their parental love and care. The collaborated marriage makes Sindhi the scape goat and collapses his life for he does not have a sense of belonging towards any place – neither India nor Kenya. To add fuel over the fire, he loses his parents at the tender age



of four and is brought up by his uncle in Kenya. But he always has a feeling that he has been a neglected child and one can trace the deep pathos in the line discussed to Mr.Khemka about his parents: “For the hundredth time I related the story of those strangers whose only reality was a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs” (12).

Sindi Oberoi is exposed to various cultures of various people for he has his education in East Africa, London and America. But nowhere does he experiences a feeling of attachment. On the contrary, it is ‘alienation’ which chases him throughout and keeps haunting him driving him madly depressed. Sindhi then leaves for England where he takes the first step towards self realisation. The harrowing experiences of life and the trials and tribulations have made him seek something larger than mere academic benefits. Although he is the prime

youth of twenty five years, he has experienced such sad struggles in life. But it is obvious that sweet are the adversities of life. His bitter experiences of failures and disappointments in life have indeed given him a steadiness and he is not in a hurry to patch up things. He was very much perturbed while living in Kenya but became a little enthusiastic about life after his arrival in England. He comes in contact with Anna and Kathy who are like the oasis of his dry and desert like life. He has a deep relationship with Kathy but she leaves him so as to keep her matrimonial bondage in good shape. His commitment to Anna is also short lived.

Although, Sindhi is burdened with the sorrow of broken relationships, he still tries to look for a meaningful solution to all his problems. The Almighty seems to make him cut off from all sorts of bindings



whether it be person or place. This sort of detached lifestyle creates a hollowness in him and he tries by all means to fill up the pits. Regarding this, he shares or rather discusses his emotions with a catholic priest at a small village library in Scotland. He joins a job at a library in Ireland where he finds enough time to read and think. After repeated musings, he comes to understand that one can love and live without attachment and desire. Sindhi then goes to Boston, America for academic perusal (engineering course) where he meets June Blyth. He develops an intense relationship with her and seems to be head over heels in love with her. But when she demands for a permanent manner of setting down in life in the form of marriage and creating a home of their own, Sindhi hesitates. His feeling of self alienation does not allow him to get involved so easily. But his hestitaion has its own consequences.

June is deprived of love and marriage by Sindhi and to overcome her frustrated mind or rather to soothen her moral wounds, falls in love with Babu Rao Khemka, an Indian student in America. But he is threatened by his father, Mr.Khemka who is a prosperous businessman of New Delhi that he will be deprived of all his property, if he marries a foreign lady. The bonding between Babu and June is not a strong one and hence the binding chord is easily broken. One day when Babu enquires June about her whereabouts, she discloses her relationship with Sindhi. A combination of anguishness, dismay and distress compels Babu to drive his car at a high speed and the end result is a fatal accident. It is a general notion that 'misfortunes never come alone'. To her horror, June realises that she is pregnant after the death of Babu. She tries to seek the help of Sindhi but in vain. When he



visits her flat after so many months, he is shocked to know of her death during abortion. He tries to develop a sort of sense of detachment so that he can forget the sad memories. Moreover, he could no longer be a part or associate himself in the sorrowful events. He leaves for India and searches for a job.

Fat and destiny have a prominent role to play in the lives of man. It so happens that destiny drives Sindi to the office premises of Mr.Khemka where he seeks a job just for the reason of being Babu's friend. Being a broken person mentally, Sindi tries to start a new life in India. But the feelings of uprootedness always lurks in himself that he is not able to stand firmly anywhere. Also, the harrowing experiences of the past haunts his memories and do not allow him to experience a calm, composed

life. Echoing the very words of him from the novel:

In many ways the past had been a waste but it had not been without its lessons. I had started adult life as a confused adolescent, awesomely engrossed with myself searching for wisdom and the peace that comes with it. The journey had been long and tedious and still was not over (221).

Sindi is a confused individual. He has messed up his entire life by having no control over his actions. In the name of detachment, he shirks from his responsibility and indeed it is a sort of escapism. While working with Mr.Khemka, the disaster comes in the form of income-tax investigation and the share investments of



the employees are at stake. In the great hindu epic **The Ramayana**, a small creature like the squirrel helps the mighty Rama in its own way. Here too, the well educated Sindi is enlightened by one Muthu, a worker in the industry who teaches him the value of being attached in a detached manner. Sindi is made aware that as a social animal, he is not to remain aloof and isolated from the society but has his own commitment as a civilian. Sindi takes charge of the factory and saves the lives of numerous workers. At length, the protagonist experiences a feeling of contentment; it looks as if he has stopped shedding tears after he has involved himself in wiping them from the eyes of others. He understands the true meaning of detachment. For all his initial alienation, he has at last earned the right to suffer for others and this care for others gains perspective, a self-validating context. The education of

existential man can be learned only through encountering the absurdity of experience.

The protagonist emerges out of the clutches of misery and pain as a complete human being who is going to lead a fulfilled life. He has learnt the art of converting the agony of life into pure ecstasy. He has experienced pain and alienation in such a manner that he can understand the meaning of joy, happiness and fulfillment in the fullest measure. Sindi is distinctly different from the mindless multitude that surrounds him and he experiences the existential angst which results in a relentless search for fulfillment and it ultimately ends in his realisation of the values of the noble virtues of compassion, understanding and benevolence towards his fellowman. Thus, his quest for identity is at length quenched and his understanding of being attached in a



ELK
Asia Pacific Journals

ELK Asia Pacific Journals – Special Issue
ISBN: 978-81-930411-2-3

detached manner gives a new dimension to his life.

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