



Objectivity To Subjectivity In Arun Joshi's Novel: The Foreigner

Deepalakshmi. S Research Scholar (Part-time), Department of English, AVVM Shri Pushpam College (Autonomous), (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University) Thanjavur, India, deepu.shan2004@gmail.com

Dr. K. Sundararajan Associate Professor Department of English, AVVM Shri Pushpam College (Autonomous), (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University) Thanjavur, India

Abstract

Arun Joshi's first novel **The Foreigner** (1968) explored in depth the problem of Sindi Oberoi's sense of emptiness and isolation at being unable to find a meaning in survival. **The Foreigner** is one of the best novels of Joshi. A series of reflections on freedom, suicide, love, marriage, life and detachment are swirling throughout the story. It started as a thriller novel but ended as a mystery. Joshi was very clever to blend and balance the western beliefs with the tradition and wisdom of India without overemphasizing either. The story dealt with the theme of east-west encounter. It is also the study of a young uprooted man who is existing in the end half of the twentieth century; looks out for secure and meaning in his randomly moving life. Joshi had very masterly handled challenging, grave issues like rootlessness, detachment, and frustration, search for better substitute, self-predicament and self-realization. Due to the modern life style, this novel took us to the lower depths of social suffering and agony. The people could be surrounded by thousands and still be lonely.

Keywords: Arun Joshi, west encounter, predicament, identity, detachment.

INTRODUCTION

Arun Joshi had entered into the Indian English Legendary scene with the publication of his first novel **The Foreigner** in the year 1968. It established Arun Joshi as a mature and outstanding novelist. It was considered as a most compelling work of fiction. It holds the attention of the reader constantly. The novel runs over three parts further divided into ten chapters – the first part having four chapters, the second part has three and the last part is eight. **The Foreigner**, Arun Joshi addressed the dark, mysterious realm of individual's tormented consciousness from his hostility from the surroundings, convention and his own self. The signs of isolation: inability, purposelessness, aimlessness, cultural separation, self-estrangement and seclusion are all exposed in the novels of Arun Joshi. Joshi's heroes' suffer a different hunger and the novels under consideration, analyse the severe mental conflict experienced by them. The protagonists

goes through an agonising sense of desolation and indulges in examining to find the cause of their unusual mental suffering. They also tried to find solutions to their problems. The characters try to find themselves, to analyse themselves and their minds. In this process, they question their own attitudes to the activities around them and how they respond to the above situations. Their response are considered as their experiences.

Sindi found himself in the dilemma of a foreigner. In the analysis of the novel, Meenakshi Mukharjee described the hero of **The Foreigner** as a “perennial outsider”(22). The novel is about the struggle of an individual who seeks the way in the complicated labyrinth of life which he passed through. It was a representation of the uprooted hero Sindi Oberoi. Away from his home grounds he regards his past as absolutely meaningless. Life had no hopes for him in the future and he felt that it will be as bleak as the past. The hero was wandering aimlessly to find out the ways of his existence in search of peace, self-identity and purpose of his life. The novel showed the hero’s journey from inaction to action, from detachment to involvement and from delusion to realism.

The novel was written from the perspective of Sindi and described the experiences of the Hero. The novel opened with the death of Babu Rao Khemka, the son of leading industrialist Mr. Khemka, who passed away in a car accident in Boston. And then the story shifted over to Delhi, where Sindi was an employee in Mr. Khemka’s industry. The emotional impact of Babu and June’s death upon Sindi and the further events were interwoven in the form of reminiscence. The juxtaposition of the past and the present, the real and the remembered, fantasy and reality had been added to the suspense. Sindi Oberoi narrated the story in an autobiographical manner. The first person narrative was familiar in Joshi’s fiction. The novel had been divided into main and sub plot. The main plot deals about Sindi, Babu and June and the sub plot of Sindi, Mr. Khemka and his daughter Ms. Sheila. Sindi was left alone at the age of four when his parents died in an air crash. His search for life was the cause of the lack of parental love and care. He was studying Mechanical Engineering in Boston. But he had changed so many jobs for experiences. Sindi met Babu and their friendship begun also with June Blyth. The relationship of June and Sindi was very intimate for quite a long time.

June and Sindi met in the International students association party. June was very beautiful, benevolent and affectionate girl and she had longed for Sindi’s love and care. Tapan Kumar Ghosh’s comment on June’s character in his book ‘Arun Joshi’s Fiction’ makes the condition more trustworthy: “June is a memorable creation of Arun Joshi. She is the first of a group of humane, sympathetic and sacrificial women who play a key role in the lives of heroes, and catalyse their progress towards self-realization. June is aware of the inanity, pretensions and play acting of the people around her” (48). In the beginning, June was the right mate for Sindi, for she had an astonishing control to fascinate others and solution to them of their troubles. Her unselfish anxiety for others was extremely honoured by him: “June was one of those rare persons who have a capacity to forget themselves in somebody’s troubles” (TF 119). This occasional degree of sympathy and the capability to overlook herself in the hopelessness of others discriminates her from him and the rest of the other characters. With June he practiced a new phase of love and affection. But Sindi strained to lock up himself from getting thoroughly intricate with June. June frequently requested Sindi for many outings to

several places, but he had no choice but to go along with her. But Sindi was not ready to accept her love proposal. In spite of his confusion and afraid of human relations, Sindi avoided her. The attachment of human relationship gave pain and suffering. June told him her wish to marry him. But Sindi says, "I was afraid of possessing anybody and I was afraid of being possessed, and marriage meant both" (TF112). He further attempted to explain:

"Marriage wouldn't help, June. We are alone, both you and I. that is the problem. And our 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". (TF 133)

The obstacle in the relationship of June and Sindi was not only the fear of committing himself, but also the sense of alienation in him and of being a foreigner, initiating from the absence of self-possession or of the sense of durability and realism. June was disappointed with Sindi and left him for Babu. The following dialogue between June and Sindi showed why June leaves Sindi for Babu:

June said, "I thought you never loved anybody – except perhaps yourself" (TF 167) When Sindi answers "Don't you believe that I loved you?" (TF 167). June replies "I did at one time, and perhaps still do. But you are so tied up with your detachment, it makes little difference whether you love or you don't ... it just made me sad because I thought I was in love with you". (TF167).

On the other hand Babu attracted towards June's beauty and he wanted to marry her. June comprehended the negative attitude of Sindi and changed her mind to marry Babu. After Sindi's refusal to June, she often met Babu and avoided Sindi. His predicament was clearly revealed when he said, "You had a clear-cut system of morality, a caste system that laid down all you had to do... I have no system of morality. How does it mean to me if you call me an immoral man. I have no reason to be one thing rather than another". (TF 143)

Sindi's anchorless float in the life stream was responsible for his hostility from society, civilisations and anything sophisticated. And his hostility or alienation was the cause of his being indifferent towards his environment, human life and his own self. Such a man with peace neither within nor without, surrounded by riddles of life, was destined to be cynical. Sindi was a cynic. He always said that detachment had given the way for human predicament. But actually, he wanted to attach with people. People who were closed with Sindi known about his true colour. Babu writes to his sister Sheila, "But he is so terribly cynical" (TF 55). Mrs. Blyth, June's mother, calls him, "You are just a cynic my boy" (TF 108). Sindi himself says, "I was cynical and exhausted, grown old before my time, weary with my own loneliness" (TF161). Sindi did not have a desire to be attachment and he wished to project him as a cynic. Anjana Das clearly tells about Sindi,

Sindi is an epicurean, a pleasure seeker. He reveals his merry-making and has illicit relations with Anna, Kathy, Judy...Christine and June. He avoids to marry anyone of them because he convinces himself that he shall remain detached. He even keeps himself aloof from performing daily routine duties. He wants to be freed from any commitment or involvement whatsoever (167)

His cynic attitude was dominated while he had spoken about the love and marriage. He told to June, “I didn’t quite know except that whatever I had seen so far in life seemed to indicate that marriage was more often a lust for possession than anything else. People got married just as they bought new cars. And then they gobbled each other up” (TF 71). He said that love possession was worse than no love at all. In his cynical way he tells June,

“Absence of love does not mean hatred. Hatred is just another form of love. There is another way of loving. You can love without attachment, without desire. You can love without attachment to the objects of your love. You can love without fooling yourself that the things you love are indispensable either to you or to the world. Love is real only when you know that what you love must one day die” (TF 180).

This passage helps to understand Sindi’s case, his withdrawal from the world. It is based on Lord Krishna’s message of detachment in **The Bhagavat Gita**. In **The Bhagavad Gita**, Chapter II-Verse 62:

“Dhyāyatoviṣhayānpuṁsaḥsaṅgastēṣūpajāyate
saṅgātsañjāyatekāmāḥkāmātkrodho ’bhijāyate

While contemplating on the objects of the senses, one develops attachment to them. Attachment leads to desire, and from desire arises anger”. (para 1-2)

Sindi realized that objectivity consisted in getting tangled with the world. So he decided to act without any desire. Sindi had reached his meaning of detachment because he considered this world to be only illusion not a permanent. Sindi had seen a lot of illusions in life. The world appeared to him to be hectic and he saw nothing real in life. He told to June obviously, “Nothing ever seems real to me, leave alone permanent. Nothing seems to be very important” (TF 113). Therefore he wanted to know the real and his relationship with it in the manner of an Indian sage.

After that, he loved her at the same time he had the fear of attachment consequently he avoided June. June married Babu. Once Babu knew June’s relationship with Sindi, he got angry and died in a car accident. June also passed away during her abortion. It can be resolved that if June hadn’t passed away, Sindi would surely have wedded her. Several unpleasant practices taught Sindi that detachment was a chief barrier in the route of charming life. Sindi felt deep regret and sorrow over his character in forcing June and Babu to death.

Sindi moved to India where he worked in Mr. Khemka’s concern as personal assistant. The novel ended with Sindi’s acceptance to run the office of Mr. Khemka, who was behind the bars for cheating the income tax department. Mr. Khemka and Sheila had asked so many questions about Babu’s life in United States and his relationship with June. While answering her question, Sindi tried to hide the fact about Babu’s death intending not to expose the darkest part of his life. They considered June as responsible for his death; this suspicion aroused because of Babu’s letter. But on the contrary, in the process of narrating the past, the reality was revealed and everybody was allowed to know of Sindi’s confused inner self. But Sindi convinced them. Afterwards he joined as a personal

assistant to Mr. Khemka to help him in all his works. Sindi got disappointment by the approach of life and set of morals followed by Mr. Khemka and his friends.

Sindi observed the dishonesty and phoniness of the modern society in India and in America. It was like his understanding at the communal gatherings at Mr. Khemka's house. He found gatherings to be a bit of a deception with people sipping, acting and talking of money – undertaking nothing meaningful. In America, Sindi did not absorb the culture of the people there. When he had an opportunity to attend a party or to go to public place or to buy a ticket, he remained an ex-officio host or an alien. He had the feeling of alienation, solitude and anxiety.

Sindi loose his hope of life while seeing the awful conditions of Muthu's life. Sindi was shocked with Muthu's expression to the misery of his life that "But it becomes difficult to remain calm when you find so many children going hungry most of the time" (TF 238). The poverty, the rejection and powerlessness of the employees made Sindi to take up the sticks for them. He was stunned to find the employees in an earthly anxiety of Sheila and Mr. Khemka. Khemka was arrested by the police following an income tax raid in the office. He was accused of a fraudulent action against the Government and filed a false accounts. He decided to make Sindi as his scapegoat for his action. But Sindi said that an individual should accept the charge of one's deed: "Mr. Khemka had to suffer for his own action" (TF221). Khemka's arrest and Sindi's dismissal left the employees deserted with the constant threat of liquidation hanging on them.

Muthu was the clerk of Mr. Khemka's factory. He requested Sindi to charge of the office for the workers sake. One day Sindi went to Muthu's home. His family was in the hands of poverty. A single man Sindi who take care of his and his brother family. Sindi lost his hope on life. He refused to take charge of the company. He had no wish to get involvement. Muthu replied, "Sometimes detachment, lives in actually getting involved" (TF 239). Muthu's life had made a drastic change in Sindi's life. Muthu, an uneducated man, taught Sindi the distinction between detachment and involvement. He cancelled his visit to Bombay. Sindi accepted to take over the administration of the caged Mr. Khemka's business for the sake of "the accumulated despair of their weary lives" (TF240). Despite Sindi's sight on detachment, he was not mourning of emotions and human values.

It was a challenging situation to Sindi, "I felt as if I had been dropped on a sinking ship and charged with the impossible task of taking it ashore" (TF 239-40). Sindi worked in a truly disinterested manner: "The fruit of it was really not my concern" (TF 242). He came to learn that true attachment had been lied not in the withdrawal from the world but involved with. His earlier detachment had been replaced by the unselfish attachment. His new direction in his way of life and thought, he gave a new orientation to his name too and instead of Surinder Sindi, he called himself "Surrender Oberoi" (TF 242).

Sindi's sincere action returned him and his company's harmony and happiness. Sindi was engaged with the longing to serve others with desire and happiness of soul. This approach was not only lessen the feelings of solitude and insignificance, it created the human happiness and enjoyment. To Sheila's question of his staying with the company, he replied, "I don't know. As long as I am needed. I suppose" (TF 243). At last he flourished in absorbing the erratic and desirable worth of overlooking his discreteness and distinct identity. The self-complacent approach of those who were devoted to the consuming

mode of existing did not last for very long. A quest for true reality concluded one achieved the state of a happy co-existence and organization with his associated humans.

Definitely, Sindi's journey was not over. He felt, "I took a general stock of myself. In many ways the past had been a waste, but it has not been without its lessons... And the future? In an ultimate sense, I knew, it would be as meaningless as the past. But, in a narrower sense, there would perhaps be useful tasks to be done; perhaps, if I were lucky, even a chance to redeem the past" (TF 234). This passage obviously exposed the degree of change that had come over him. He believed that past could not be redeemed. Now, his realisation of the purposelessness of the past, he felt the necessity to change it by worthwhile tasks. He was a sad and sceptical but wise man who was able to look at life exactly and undemonstratively with a vision to do something noteworthy.

The chief theme of the novel was commitment to life and action as opposed to submissive detachment. Here Joshi seemed to follow the theory of karma yoga (discipline of action), portrayed in the second and third chapters of the Bhagavad Gita, that one's exact was to work only, and never to its produces. The fruit of action should not be the purpose, and attachment should not be the reason to inaction. Sindi, the protagonist's journey to this consciousness, proved Krishna's preaching in The Gita that with the growth of knowledge and purity in oneself. Actions became effortless and selfless. The individual self-became the final self and well-intentioned actions achieved selflessly ultimately lead to freedom.

Works Cited

Joshi, Arun. (1972). *The Foreigner*. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks.

Das, Anjana. (2007). "Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner*: From Existential to Karmayog". *Indian English Fiction*. Ed. Agarwal, K.A. Jaipur: Book Enclave.

Ghosh, Taban Kumar. (1996). *Arun Joshi's Fiction – The Labyrinth of Life*. New Delhi: Prestige Books.

Mukherjee, Meenakshi. (1971) *The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian English novels in English*. New Delhi: Heinemann Educations Books.

Swami Mukundananda .*Bhagavad Gita*, <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/2/verse/62>.