Arun Joshi’s novels are built around dark, dismal experiences of the soul. He gave the impression to an interviewer soon after he received the 1983 Sahitya Akademi Award for his last novel until then, that he is stimulated into writing to explore “that mysterious underworld which is the human soul.” There he has frankly acknowledged the influence of Camus and other existential writers on his writing, and has put his own philosophical vision of life into the mouth of Som Bhaskar, the narrative-protagonist of his Sahitya Akademi award-winning novel, ‘The Last Labyrinth’ (1981), as he reminisces Azizun’s song:

... it reminded you of that core of loneliness around which all of us are built. It might have emerged from the slums of Benaras but centuries had gone into its perfection. It rode the night like searchlight lighting up the ruins of an ancient abandoned city with which I, too was familiar. All my life, at intervals, I, too, had flown across its blacked out skies, flapping my weary wings, not able, for all the striving, to chart a course . . . we belonged to the same benighted underside of the world. ¹

The above passage pinpoints in Joshi’s sensibility the terrible existentialist vision only too often to be found in the modernist and post-
modern literature of his time. If anything, it is even grimmer than Eliot's vision in 'The Waste Land,' where the demented barren woman wandering the heaped up ruins of falling towers,

Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal. ²

Representing the ravages of all the ancient and modern civilizations of the world—Judaic and Christian Greek and Egyptian, the Europe of Enlightenment and the British Empire over which the sun never set—invasions "bats with baby faces" to whom she sings a lullaby, fiddling on her long black hair. The bat-face babies in Eliot's image of the wasted world are at any rate perched on the crumbling walls at the violet hour of dusk. The men and women in Joshi's world are fluttering in the dark night in the ruined city of the soul, and failing to find their way despite all their efforts "At once intent and lost."

In one of his fictional observations, Joshi writes “life’s meaning lies not in the glossy surfaces of our pretension, but in those dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish forever.” One can say with conviction that the central subject of the novelist is the dark night of the soul, and his most memorable fictional creations are hopelessly lost, lonely questers after the absurd in the benighted underworld of the inner, dark recesses of experience. As this
interviewer has stated, “he sees lives as labyrinths hopeless mazes where you may get irretrievably lost or discover the shinning secrets at the core of life.”

Joshi is a connoisseur of souls divided against them. Educated mostly in the United States with a degree in Engineering from the University of Kansas, with further specialization in industrial management at the M.I.T. he worked in a mental hospital in the United States where his uncle was a psychiatrist, and dealt with chronic schizophrenics there. This experience was bound to create a strong impression on his young and sensitive mind. It is quite natural, therefore, that the chief protagonists in all his notable works describe an inner life within the underworld of the soul divided against-itself, its aspirations and conflicting urges turned on the will and action—the novelist's search-light carefully scrutinizing it all in full focus. There is a good reason to suppose that there is something deeper than empathy for such characters in the novelist's heart. It is not for nothing that ‘The Foreigner’ (1968), ‘The Apprentice’ (1974) and ‘The Last Labyrinth’ (1981) are all written in the confessional mode, apart from all of them having a schism in the soul as the raison d'être for the confessional account. The purpose of this paper is to study his literary oeuvre from this angle in some detail.

The basis of approach proposed here is found in The Foreigner, his very first novel. The protagonist in this novel, Surrender Oberoi, who narrates the story, is an existential character, rootless, restless, and luckless in a mad,
bad, absurd world. He was born of an Indian father and a British mother in 
Kenya but lost both his parents at the age of five and was brought up by his 
uncle, with whose death some time later, he lost his anchor forever. His life 
led him to London, Boston and New Delhi. But he was a foreigner wherever he went. In a telling phrase, Sindi describes his whole life as being "alone in the darkness."

The two lasting impressions of his life in London, his escapades with Anna, a minor artist separated from her husband, who was not yearning for him or anybody, "but for her lost youth" (167) and Kathy, who left him after carrying on with him for a few weeks and went back to her husband because "she thought marriage was sacred and had to be maintained at all costs" (168) taught him to practice in his detachment and non-involvement in human emotions; which cost him dearly, however, when the final crisis of his life approached as he came to Boston, where he got "involved" in short-lived but passionate love for June, an attractive American girl, inspite of his determination not to get involved.

In his bid to remain uninvolved, Sindi refrained from responding to June's insistent plead to marry her, and drove her into the arms of Babu Rao Khemka, a doomed Indian student whom Sindi had to receive on his arrival to join college, as a part of his duties as an employee of the foreign student center. Babu turned out to be totally incapable of coping with the American system of education, and Sindi got involved with him also as he intervened
with the Dean to save him from being thrown out of the college for flunking all his courses. Sindi’s detachment led to June, in her proclivity to help those in distress, falling into the pledge of marrying Babu when she found him more and more at sea.

Before the marriage could take place, Babu, who lost his balance when he failed in all his courses again and was thrown out of college, and got killed in a car accident in a fit of reckless, driving, impregnated June. As Sindi says: “When I has come close to gaining true detachment and acted out of goodness, I had driven a man to his death.” (174) In trying to maintain his detachment, Sindi had left Boston and taken up a job in New York. As a typical existential development, when June sought his help and advice, he could reach Boston only to be greeted with the news of her death in the course of abortion. That was his ‘absurd’ fate.

Witnessing the terrible consequences of practicing detachment in America, Sindi decided to leave the country and go to India. “Like many of my breed, I believed erroneously that I could escape from a part of myself by hopping from one land to another,” (174) in another absurd development, on reaching New Delhi, while making a casual courtesy call, he accepted a job in the firm of Babu Khemka’s father where he gets “involved” again in spite of his commitment to “detachment” in shoring up the pieces in the interest of employees as Mr. Khemka’s “empire” founded on consistent tax evasion, goes to pieces! That is where the novel ends.
The above account shows that Sindi is an existential Everyman of our time. As he puts it himself at one place in the course of his narrative, “I saw myself as I had always been. An uprooted young man living in the latter half of the twentieth century who had become detached from everything excepts himself.” (195) He conforms to the copybook concept of Kirkegaardian existentialism that the purpose and direction of life are unknowable. In yet retrospection, Sindi thus approximates to the Kirkegaardian vision:

Lying there in the bed I wondered in what way, if any, did I belong 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… 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 … so far as I knew everybody else did the same thing (61-61)

It is significant that the lines of the juke-box song in the restaurant that touched his heart most after he visited it on getting his papers cleared for migrating to India have a peculiarly existentialist appeal, and most apply to his own life experience.

Who knows?
Where the road will lead?
Only a fool can say. (182)
Thus we find in Sindi a quester after absorb wants, with a schism in his soul. The more his experiences prompt him against involvement, the more he gets involved through love and goodness. The schism is externalized when his Western-educated, rational goodness clashes with the dishonest business ethic of Mr. Khemka and his likes. A type of them is represented to his sensibility in the bitterest mood by the old men of New Delhi he encountered on the morning after Khemka was arrested and his daughter came pleading that Sindi grown up her father's crimes as his own; "I suspected they kept two books like Mr. Khemka one for their neighbors, the other for God.' (209) Another type is ethic consul-general for India who interviewed him for granting his visa, less bitterly than humorously described:

He was a young person who talked like Sir Anthony Eden. He seemed sad and bored like the rest of his staffs and when he talked, rather than look at me he kept his gaze fixed on a portrait of Mahatma Gandhi on his desk. (177)

It shouldn't be mere coincidence that the novelist has put a great deal of himself into Sindi who is, like him, an American-trained engineer and has finally come to work in a business and industrial concern in Delhi. It is also remarkable that the novel has been written in the form of reminiscences of things past, and has confessional tone and style throughout. The extracts from three letters of Babu to his sister, Sheila, are thrown in to deepen the
inner battle raging within the soul of Sindi in respect of Babu by serving the purpose of confirming his hunches regarding the nature of goings-on, between Babu and June as well as what was going on in Babu's soul when he smashed himself to death in the car accident.

Joshi portrays in this novel how a man of extraordinary obsessions is destroyed by his absurd meanderings away from civilization. His story parallels the equally absurd one of the young king who staked his life in the hopeless attempt to sculpt the face of God, the episode echoing the one in The Foreigner where Sindi, in the agony of the battle raging in his soul between the good impulse of sympathy for Sheila and the rational anger at her father's dishonesty, walking the streets of Delhi too early in the morning, when confronted by a patrolling policeman's question, "Are you looking for something, sir?" ruefully replies: "Yes, . . . Have you seen God?" (208)

'The Strange Case of Billy Biswas' is yet another variation on the paradigmatic pattern of the doomed existential quest for values in a mad, bad, absurd world. It holds forth the added attraction for the dark, mysterious forces of the universe like Bilasia the tribal girl and the moon rising out of the dark night that magnetize the protagonist and drive him to the doors of death—the last labyrinth that life holds for man in the existential vision.

'The Apprentice,' the third novel of Joshi, offers yet another variety in evidence of the novelist's skill in the manipulation of his peculiar forte. He is born of a good man, the son of a martyr in the national movement. But when
he goes out of his village to graduate in the life of the crooked world, honesty does not get him even the lowest job, and lie makes his essence as he goes along, choosing the life he leads.

There comes a stage when Ratan takes a bribe, he didn't know why, certainly not because he needed the money, which, quite absurdly led to the death of the only person he loved in this wide world—his childhood friend, the Brigadier. He was a good man when he was first offered bribe—and then he needed money—but he refused. But twenty years later it came to be told to him that he was not a good man, because of the consequences of his taking the bribe when he did not need the money. It illustrates exquisitely the course of an existential career. And his next choice, in order to redeem himself—the grotesque business of shoe shining on the stairway of a temple all unknown to his wife, with his expensive limousine waiting to take him to his office in the Government of India offices, is also his own, and as Sartre would put it, in his choice lies his freedom, and as Joshi wants us to see, there lies his redemption as perhaps Sindi's lies in working in Khemka's office after the "empire" vanished.

It is worthy of critical attention that this novel is also in the confessional mode. As a matter of fact, the narrator in this novel is an insistent confession lists; confession is a factor in his redemption, for Ratan has got hold of a young man an apprentice in the urban life of Delhi, (the same as Ratan himself was over twenty years ago, though now he is an apprentice [148] of
another sort -apprentice of purified life, as it were) as his confessor, and he probably mean? To [each him the crookedness of his world that the youngster is going to enter, or has just entered." This is a trump card in the matter of technique that the novelist has persistently used. It is an indicator of the schism in the soul that is his central theme, his "point of view" as it was.

Ratan's confessional monologue in this novel as a narrative body, does adequately lay out the horrors harbouring his soul. The most horrendous perhaps in the battleground between human good and evil masquerading as pursuit of career that in his inner life is the battle that rages inside himself after he discovered that he was the cause of his friend the Brigadier's suicide, and worse still, that he could have saved the Brigadier's by confessing his crime. It left him cracking, up. Fear of failure is his tragic flaw, and he knows that "there is no fear like the fear of madness. All other fears are common O! Men can you have the hack, he shared. Those who descend into madness descend alone." (129) This is the apex of existential wisdom he comes by, and the defense mechanism he discovers against it is the confessional. The shoeshine business is his confessional unto himself.

Yet another existential aspect of Ratan's labyrinthine life is the dilemma he shares with Sindi on the one hand and with Som and his father on the other. It is the dilemma about God. As a matter of fact Himmat Singh the Sheikh is his mentor. He diagnoses for Ratan the malady—the crookedness of the world; and he discusses the cure:
But if it was God's darkness, he asked, what was the cure? What was the cure of... crooked world. None, perhaps. Revolution, perhaps. Or, perhaps... Perhaps... he seemed to hesitate a long time... perhaps God Himself. God alone perhaps could remove His darkness. But where was God, he cried out again, suddenly! Excited, his voice ringing with despair. What was God? And Where? (145 46)

This uncertainty, this ultimate existential ‘unknowable’ is the lifelong problem facing Ratan. When his boss in the Temporary War Office where he got his first job cryptically answered his question whether he should have accepted the first bribe he was offered, by saying, nothing but God exists, (45) it left him puzzled. And puzzled he remained throughout, for he found a pimp in the pujari of the temple when he wanted to pray for atonement. (124) He never entered a temple again. He sought his redemption through shoe shining at the stairway of the temple. Thus far he could go but no further into a shrine.

The extraordinary novelty of this novel is that in it Joshi, apart from making the exquisite study of the underworld of the soul in people like Ratan Rathor, Himmat Singh the Sheikh and the Secretary, not to say the Minister, as individuals has actually covered social psychiatry. The broader topic of this novel is the rotten soul of a whole generation in a nation, the generation of post-independence India emerging between 1947 and the Chinese war of 1962, in the words of the narrator, "frustrated men sailing about in a confused
society, a society without norms, without direction, without even, perhaps, a purpose." (74) It is a nation of a hundred million men gone existential.

‘The Last Labyrinth’ may not be Joshi’s most powerful novel, the Sahitya Akademi award notwithstanding. But one thing is certain. The warp and woofs are closer between this one and his first one. He has put as much of himself in Som Bhaskar in a way as he had put into Sindi Oberoi in another. Som Bhaskar, too, is a Western-educated industrialist. He, too, though an Indian by birth and domicile, and a Brahmin at that, is unable to make head or tail of the mumbo-jumbo of Hindu religion, depending on which his mother sacrificed her life as a victim of cancer, the tantra practiced in the ancient city of Benaras. He, too, is unable to believe in God, and contemptuously treats the idol of Krishna just as a “wooden creature,” (69) and the mysterious disappearance of Anuradha on Janmashtami night due to her impregnable superstition he squarely blames on this wooden creature, as much perhaps as he blames on it his mother’s death. Though he has learnt the business acumen of cornering companies, it is by no means by mastering the business ethic of Khemka, but by relentless application of business administration learnt in the U.S. that even Sindi might have learnt, and which was certainly based on Cartesian logic, father of science and technology.

And yet there are conspicuous variations and notable novelty. The Last Labyrinth can be seen as a tale of two cities, Benaras and Bombay—one symbolizing Western, rational, industrial and technological, the other Oriental,
occult, feudal and treacherous. At one level, it is a story of shrewd Bombay businessman Irving to grab an inefficient plastics company owned by a feudal Benaras Jagirdar, getting involved in "a game of chess," also into winning the owner’s concubine, and capturing the worthless business while almost losing his life to the tartaric maneuvers of the tricky Aftab Rai operating from the mysterious Lal Haveli full of myriad labyrinths, and certainly losing the mistress he desired more than everything else in the world. Detectives are used to trace the missing shares of the company, and the novel has enough of the element of fantasy to pass muster as a mystery novel. It is close in spirit, from this angle, to ‘The Strange Case of Billy Biswas.’

Another remarkable innovation is the symbolism latent in this novel. The Lai Haveli is a symbol of life itself, its last labyrinth of death. Anuradha symbolizes the "elusive, unattainable" in life, Som's "dark and terrible love." (157) Gargi is yet another symbolic, mysterious character who turns the purposelessness of existential philosophy into the mystery of life, in one of her memorable statements in reply to Som "I want, I want," not knowing what he wants, the deaf-mute wrote: 'We are all children trying to reach up to a crack in the door to peep into a room." (214) One can go on and on giving a symbolic explication of this dark tale.

And yet, it is essentially, like any other, a typical novel of Joshi the connoisseur of the underworld of the soul. Som Bhaskar is a troubled soul. He is an insomniac who writes out the novel to relieve the tension from his soul
for a somewhat therapeutic purpose as he uses his womanizing and his boozing. He has a morbid urge for knowing, in which he is a greater incarnation of Sindi or Billy Biswas. This is a sure sign of the schism in the soul. He suffered from voids within, as he puts it in his narrative.

Even though he is married to a beautiful wife, Geeta, whom he loved, and who gave him two children, he is existentially alone, and all his business wizardry is existentially purposeless. Even K. his physician and companion, is of no avail. Not only does he fall hopelessly in love with the mysterious dark beauty, Anuradha, and loses her after possessing her most intensely for a while; there were many more women in his life, and he boozed to shut up the voices in his incurable voids. As he writes in his confessional mood: "I was a womanizer all right, and a boozar, but my womanizing and boozing had not settled anything." (156) As his philosopher girl-friend Leela Sabnis put it, he was “a compulsive fornicator.” (80) He stumbles over wine and women again and again to survive each new existential crisis, as he explains his womanizing in his confessional, talking of his necking with his future wife in his seaside villa:

Watching her I was moved and I took her in my arms. Just like without notice. I had done that to other women, taken them by surprise, not the surprise of a Casanova because, as one of them had explained it for me, something about the deployment and pressures of my limbs communicated that it was not that, but the pleasant, sexual surprise hug of a fellow survivor after a crash-
One of the sources of the schism in Som's soul, perhaps, is two generations of Western education. His father had a bruised soul, for deep-drenched as lie was in Cartesian science, he tried to race everything to the First Cause and, having never got over his wife's death due to cancer after all treatment, had died one day, suffering from melancholia. Som had gone much further, in Western education, his father having spent millions on it. It is a curious fuel that godlessness is a common feature of most of Joshi's protagonists—Sindi, Ratan Rathor and Himmat Singh the Sheikh, Som Bhaskar and his father.

And then, there is the clash of cultures. Som could never understand the superstitious faith of his mother in Krishna (she thought He would cure her cancer), nor of Anuradha in the astrology of Bcnaras sadhus, and the tantra-mantra goings-on in Aftab Rai's Lai Haveli, To Anuradha, after she is lost, he can only make the pathetic prayer of a defeated existentialist:

Anuradha, listen to me wherever you are. Is there a God where you are? Have you met Him? Does He have face? He speaks? Does He hear? Does He understand the language that we speak? Anuradha, if there is a God and if you have met Him and if He is willing to listen, then, Anuradha, my soul, tell Him, tell this God to have mercy upon me. Tell Him I am weary. Of so many fears: so much doubting. Of this dark earth and these empty heavens. Plead for me, Anuradha. He will listen to you. (222-23)
Som Bhaskar is as lonely an existential man as any. Like Ratan Rathor, he, too, generalizes on the loneliness of all men, in his earlier-quoted narrative comment on Azizun's song, which is used as the theme song for this paper, and may well be the theme song of the fiction of Joshi, the industrialist who writes to know and, in an existentialist tone, claims to be a stranger to his own writing.

Joshi’s ‘The Foreigner’ is, as Khushwant Singh put it, a “compelling” work of fiction, which moves through the mazes of the past and the present and which penetratingly records a grim but productive encounter with life. This novel may, be considered as a love story, as a literary representation of rootlessness, or as as an artistic triumph that unifies feelings and ideas, characters and events, the prose and the passion of life into an articulate whole. It may as well be interpreted as a corruptions corroding our social fabric, on population explosion, and overcrowding in India amidst poverty, hunger and disease, and on the denial of right to people in spite of our declared democratic and socialistic polity. It is not at all difficult to see what Sindi speaks to Mr. Khemka at one particular point in the book is not prompted by his anger alone; comes also out of the depth of experience:

It is not I who should be ashamed of, Mr. Khemka, but you yourself. ... It is you who have swindled those miserable wretches in rags who push carts on your streets and die at
It is you who have been telling lies and fabricating documents just so that you could air-condition this ostentatious house and throw gigantic parties for the horde of jackals who masquerade as your friends. (215)

Besides, The Foreigner has a palpable existentialist orientation on which, with necessary qualifications, may be looked upon as a study in innocence and experience. Born of an English mother and an Indian father in Kenya Sindi Oberoi is orphaned at the age of five when his parents die in an air crash, and all that he remembers of them “strangers” (11) as he calls them—is “a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs.” (11) He receives his education in Kenya and England, and at the time we meet him in the book who already a mechanical engineer, doing his Ph.D. in Boston. Sindi is indeed a highly trained person who in the course of time gets doctorate in his own discipline, but far more than anything else he is an individual who strives to discover “the meaning of [his] life” (165) and while journeying through the tensions and turmoils of life, is driven into evolving his way of looking at things. The story of his life at the age of twenty-five has been a saga of bitter struggles and failures disappointments.

Though not a young man in a hurry, Sindi seeks direct encounter with and first-hand experience of life. He works as a dishwasher at a nightclub in Soho, but even “amidst the clatter of pots and pans and
clouds of steam" (166) he keeps on probing the mystery of life. Later, he works as a barman at the same club, and there he gets his first taste of sex with Anna and Kathy. The "essence of [his] life in London," (168) as Sindi openly acknowledges, lies in what he learns from them.

A tireless seeker of truth that he is, Sindi continues, "wandering through the maze of [his] existence," (169) looking for a solution to the seemingly intractable problems of life. It is in his search for truth that he also works at a small village library in Scotland and holds serious discussions with a Catholic priest there. And it is in the very same Scottish village that one morning "a revelation" (169) dawns upon him, infusing him with a new vigor and making him realize that one "can love without attachment, without desire." (170) This philosophy of detachment, of desirelessness, he hopes, would enable him, substantially enough, to meet the strains and challenges of life.

The vagrancy of Sindi's life seems to have out in the repose of his companionship with June Blyth during his stay in Boston across the Atlantic. Sindi and June are intensely in love with each other, but much as he loves her with "an unusual fierceness," (108) he does not react favorably to her proposal -of marriage. In fact, he maintains that he is "not really cut-out for marriage," (105) that marriage is "one big illusion that has been pounded into [people] by society," (106) that nothing "ever seems real to [him], leave alone permanent," that death “wipes out everything, for most of us anyway," and that all “that is left is a big mocking hero." (107)
Sindi seems to be "lost in the usual sense of the world," and to him "good things and bad things appear to be the same in the long run of existence." (108) At the same time, he does also question the usefulness of American affluence and achievement. Not unexpectedly, June's mother, Mrs. Blyth, calls Sindi "a cynic." (102) It is true that initially he does not have the courage to say "no" to June, and yet the truth is that he does not want to get "involved" (85) in any such affair, and as such declines her offer of marriage.

All the same, it is not at all surprising that in spite of his desirelessness and "the steady tranquility" of his being, "the eternal joker" (118) snickers within him, for Sindi is jealous of Babu Rao Khemka who is infatuated with June and has decided to marry her. No doubt, Sindi tries to assure himself that June would never leave him, at least not in favor of Babu; even so: he feels rattled. Nevertheless, he is as much shocked and pained by Babu's death as by June's, and he decides to leave America the moment he completes his project in New York.

Sindi wants to move on either to Nigeria or to India so that he could "experiment" (175) there with himself. It is not obsessively, at least in a substantial way, he feels that his experiences of life have wronged him, and it is natural that while thinking over "the abominable absurdity of the world" (191) he looks upon himself as the victim of "a tremendous illusion." (197)

Slowly but surely, Sindi comes to realize that detachment does not mean "inaction" but "right action," (193) that for an uprooted young man like
him, living in the latter half of the twentieth century, detachment should not mean attachment to none except himself, and that in order to be able to put together the broken pieces of his life and to come to grips with it, he would have to start a new. He finds it difficult to absolve from the self-inflicted charge of having destroyed both Babu and June, and though he comes to India, "the land of [his] ancestors," purely as a matter of chance, for he might have gone to any other country, what he does really try to seek is an "escape" from a part of himself, from the nightmarish quality of his experience in America. (176)

In New Delhi, as Sindi joins the Khemka's Industries on the proprietor's own request, he misses practically no time in taking "a general stock" (221) of himself, for his memories come surging back to him in a maddening procession. He has learnt enough from his experiences so as to be able to assess his position. "I have sinned," says Sindi to Mr. Khemka, "and God knows, I have paid heavily for them." (216) And it is quite in keeping with his present mood that we find him musing upon the course of his life:

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. 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. (221)
Mr. Khemka may look upon Sindi as a "strange" (134) character, "as bad as dead" (137) even though living, but he is well on his way to become a wiser, a more humane person. It is the nature of human distress and suffering, of which Muthu, among others, is a living image, that drives him from detachment to involvement, from indifference to participation, from neutrality to commitment, and as Muthu says and Sindi sees, detachment consists in "getting involved with the world." (226)

Sindi takes upon himself the onerous responsibility of saving Mr. Khemka's disintegrating industrial empire, and he concentrates on "decisive action." (228) And though Babu's sister, Sheila, has certain misgivings about Sindi, yet they make a beginning to try to understand each other better. Sindi does feel amused by "the random absurdity" (230) of his present involvement, and yet he has learnt plentifully from his experience that it is involvement, and not detachment, that can and does redeem man.

Who is Sindi Oberoi? And what is he really like? Is he just "a foreigner," (141) a vain, young man, a sad and jealous lover, a trained engineer, an expatriate Indian, a "philosopher" (143) a "saint," (138) an escapist, "a conceited little squirt" (151) as Babu Khemka calls him, a pretender, a "cynical and exhausted" (152) person, grown old before his time and weary with his own loneliness, an alienated, rootless being, with no God and no morals to bolster him up, a "lusty beast," (155) a narcissist who loves only himself, a
person with absolutely no “control over his own destiny and actions,” (161) a liar who fabricates a string of lies, a sadist, a masochist. or "an ungrateful upstart ?" (215)

Sindi may or may not be any or all of these; his case may be different, as it really is, from that of Alden Pylee in Graham Greene’s ‘The Quiet American’ or that of Query in Greene's ‘A Burnt Out Case,’ but he is certainly no comedian, no Brown, Smith, or Jones, as we find them in Greene's The Comedians. The transition in Sindi's life from detachment to involvement, from the role of degage to that of engage is certainly a study in experience. In Greene's The Quiet American, Mr. Heng tells Fowler: "Sooner or later . . . one has to take sides, if one is to remain human." Sindi too takes sides and commits himself to action, for he has chosen to be human.

Son of a prosperous business magnate, Babu Rao Khemka goes to Boston for higher training in engineering. All that his father wants him to do is to get properly educated and return to India to look after his own business concerns. Ever since his childhood he has been fed on the hygienic diet of morals; even so, he does not apply himself to his pursuit with the seriousness that is expected of him. He falls in love with June Blyth the moment he sees her in Sindi's company, and his soaring love for her later sets solidified into his proposal of marriage with her. Their marriage, it seems, would have materialized without any delay, but it has to be postponed because of Babu's repeated failures at the examinations and his subsequent expulsion from the
university. It is said about his heroes: ‘men engaged in the meaning of life’. 4

It is really unfortunate that at this critical moment in his life Sindi receives yet another shock from an otherwise serious-minded and well-meaning June who, being incensed by his petty suspicions makes candid confessions with regard to her emotional and physical involvement with Sindi. And it is in this state of wild desperation that he dies in a car accident.

It is not at all difficult to juxtapose Babu's "innocence," (182) his "naiveté" (92) against his father's "stupidity," "wretchedness" (182) and "childish pomposity." (213) The more Babu speaks to June Blyth about his wealth and grandeur at home, the more does she consider him to be "a sweet little boy." (96) It is true that she decides to marry Babu because Sindi rejects her proposal of marriage, but she accepts Babu's offer of marriage chiefly because she feels that she has to help him and to be "useful" (124) to him.

I had not yet quite understood Babu. He was naive and a stuffed shirt and a snob and yet he was sensitive and affectionate. He may not have had the wisdom to discriminate between pain and happiness but he had enough affection to overcome somebody's pain, at least temporarily.

Sindi fears that his naivete would destroy both him and June, which does indeed come true. Babu and Sindi are quite "different" (96) from each other, for while Babu represents the fragility, the brittleness of innocence, Sindi stands for the toughness and durability of experience. His first novel explores in depth the problems of Sindi Oberoi. It has been remarked: ‘A
strange feeling of aloneness …permeates the entire narrative and provide the necessary texture and structure to the novel.¹⁵

Written in the first-person narrative mode, ‘The Foreigner’ initiates us into an elitist world dominated by drinks, dance and clubs, by jazz and rock'n roll, by sex and psychoanalysis, by economic, political and military crisis, by discussions relating to mysticism and skepticism, socialism and capitalism. And though this world is darkened occasionally by the shadow of want, hunger and distress, still it remains a world of glamour and sophistication.

It is true, as M.K. Naik comments, that Sindi’s transformation from a detached person into a committed individual is “neither adequately motivated nor prepared for earlier” and that “the ending of novel thus appears to be botched up.”³ And yet, much as we regret this shortcoming, we do not fail to notice that the seminal idea behind what happens in the novel is the burden of rootlessness. We may or may not look upon ‘The Foreigner’ as the portrait of an artist as a young man; all the same, this study in innocence and experience offers us, if not the complexity of Blakean dialectics, at least the freedom of choice in the existentialist sense of the term.

The foregoing analysis shows it in unambiguous way that Arun Joshi’s novels highly take up the pertinent issues closely associated with the questions of human predicament. He provides possible solution of these queries though his protagonists and other characters that are always in quest. They undergo variegated experience in their life and ultimately the realization
dawns on them that escape cannot be the possible solution. Finally I would like to say that one should live one's life in all its shades to have its full meanings. Joshi presented the various themes of Indian society.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Arun Joshi. The Lost Labyrinth’ 1981, Oriental Paperbacks, New Delhi, pp. 54-55.


3 M.K. Naik, Aspect of Indian Writing in English, Macmillan publication House, New Delhi, 1979, p. 125.
