CHAPTER-III

The Foreigner
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*The Foreigner* (1968) is Arun Joshi’s novel. It is “one of the most compelling existentialist works of Indian English Fiction”\(^1\). It is inspired by Albert Camus’s well-known novel *The Outsider*. It also reminds one of Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope*, Kamala Markandaya’s *The Nowhere Man*, Anita Desai’s *Bye-bye Blackbird* and Nergis Dalal’s *The Girls from Overseas*, in dealing with Cross Cultures and East-West encounter. The formative part of the novel develops in the backdrop of the West. In response to Purabi Bannerji’s enquiries, Joshi acknowledges that the novel is “a study in alienation”\(^2\) and is based on observation and personal experience. He admits: “It is largely autobiographical. I am... a somewhat alienated man myself”\(^3\). We also come to know, as Joshi himself puts it, that “Some parts of *The Foreigner*, were written when I was a student in America. I gave it up then and completed it later in 1966”\(^4\).

The novel exhibits “the crisis of the present”\(^5\) in the story of Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist. He is thoroughly an existentialist character — “rootless, restless, and luckless in a mad, bad, absurd world”\(^6\). He is “a perennial outsider”\(^7\), an uprooted youngman living in the latter half of the twentieth century. He belongs to no country, no people. He finds himself an outsider in Kenya, Uganda. England, America and India. His
rootlessness is rooted within his soul. Like an ancient curse it drives him from crisis to crisis. Regarding rootlessness he himself admits, I have no roots. He is trapped in his loneliness, which is “accelerated by his withdrawal from the society around him.”

He thus ponders over his foreignness:

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, unless you would 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.

Such a reflection clearly betrays Kierkegaardian thinking which makes him feel an alien everywhere and not to “belong” to any place. His words and behavior create the same impression in all those with whom he meets. June remarks very early in her acquaintance with Sindi: “I have a feeling you’d be a foreigner anywhere”. (35). Sheila tells him when he comes to India afterwards: “you are still a foreigner, you don’t belong here”. (149)

Sindi, a child of mixed parentage born in Kenya of a Kenyan – Indian father and an English mother, Is orphaned at the age of four. His parents met their end in an air crash near Cairo. His uncle in Kenya who
brings him up too dies soon. So long as his uncle was alive, He had felt some kind of security. But the death of his uncle almost takes away every sense of sustenance to his being. He says:

I hadn't felt like that when my uncle was living. It wasn't that I loved him very much or anything-as a matter of fact we rarely exchanged letters-but the thought that he moved about in that small house on the outskirts of Nairobi gave me a feeling of having an anchor. After his death the security was destroyed. (65).

The death of his uncle makes Sindi totally broken and anchorless. In his infancy, he was denied of parental love and affection. He does not have any idea of his parents and the warmth received from them. He betrays Camus's Meursault-like indifference towards his parents. When Mr. Khemka wants to know how they died, he replies with a sting of irony: “For the hundredth time I related the story of those strangers whose only reality was a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs.”(12).

Devoid of unshakable defined roots, Sindi finds himself incapable of receiving any emotional involvement with the milieu of his racial origin. He “is an alien everywhere physically as well as metaphorically”.10 He is a born “foreigner”, a man alienated from all humanity. He confesses, “My foreignness lay within me.”(65) “He grows up without family ties and without a country”.11 To Mr. Khemka and his
daughter he tells clearly, “I hated to talk about my parents, I hated the pity I got from the people”. (11)

“Denied of love, familial nourishment and cultural roots, he grows with a built-in fissure in his personality and becomes a wandering alien, rootless like Naipal’s unanchored souls or Camus’s outsider”.¹² His dilemma is socio-psychological, resulting from social dysfunctioning. His is “a case of sociological anomie resulting in ontological insecurity or the psychosis of engulfment”.¹³ He turns out to be an anomic man, responsible to no one, having no morality, no ambitions, and no purpose in life. *The theory of the French* Robert M. Maclver’s anomie very well applies to Sindi:

Anomie signifies the state of mind of one who has been pulled up from his moral roots- who has no longer any sense of continuity of folk, of obligation. The anomic man has become spiritually sterile responsive only to himself, responsible to no one.¹⁴

O.P. Bhatnagar aptly maintains that, “A strange feeling of aloneness and aloofness- permeates the entire narrative and provides the necessary texture and structure to the novel”.¹⁵ Sindi Oberoi is totally isolated from the whole set-up of society. He describes himself-“An uprooted young man living in the latter half of the twentieth century who had become detached from everything except myself (207). Very clearly he spells out his predicament in his dialogue with Mr.Khemka:
But you at least knew what made an ass of a man; we don't even know that. You had a clearcut system of morality, a caste system that laid down all you had to do. You had a God; you had roots in the soil you lived upon. Look at me. I have no roots. I have no system of morality. What does it mean to me if you call me an immoral man. I have no reason to be one thing rather than another. You ask me why I am not ambitious: well, I have no reason to be, Come to think of it I don't even have a reason to live! (143-144)

Sindi feelingly expresses a peculiar sense of parentlessness: “I only know what it is not to have a father; I don’t know how it would have been if I had one”. (131) After his uncle’s death, he feels unanchored and life becomes a purposeless existence for him. He seems to have no settled aim in life and gets, every now and then, nervous and ill at ease. He confesses: “Talking about myself always makes me ill at ease.” (35) In religion and faith, he may be deemed to be on the way to spiritual sterility. When June asks him if he believes in God, he finds himself in a fix and ultimately shows his leanings towards the negative side:

She asked me again if I believed in God. I said I didn't know, But I supposed I didn't. I thought every Hindu believed in God. Anyway, I can't really be called a Hindu. My mother was English and my father, I am told, a sceptic, hat doesn't seem like a good beginning for a Hindu, does it? (35)

To him it appears as if the world is devoid of God. As he wanders about aimlessly and a policeman, towards the close of the novel, asks
him: “Are you looking for something, sir?”, he replies, “Yes – Have you seen God”? (221). He has “no system of morality”. Morality and immorality do not have any distinction for him. One day in a discussion with him, Sheila says “with an air of stubborn finality” that June was not virtuous as she was not a virgin. Her use of the word “virgin” surprises him and very boldly he asks; “Is that all?” When she nods, he laughs and says: “So you think one of these Marwari girls is really superior merely because of a silly membrane between her legs?” (60) Here Sindi mocks at the sex centered attitude of morality.

Psychologically speaking, a person so alienated and isolated as Sindi Oberoi is bound to be cynical and frustrated. Many of Arun Joshi’s characters of the novel point out that Sindi is a perfect cynic. Babu Rao Khemka, his friend and a student at Boston, writes to his sister Sheila that Sindi is “so terribly cynical.” (55) June’s mother, Mrs. Blyth, tells Sindi: “You are just a cynic, my boy.” (108) His flatmate Karl once says to him, “I didn’t know you could laugh, too” to which Sindi replies: “I can if I’m drunk enough”. (77) Sheila once tells: “You are the saddest man I have ever known.” (148) Sindi himself confesses: “I was cynical and exhausted, grown old before my time, weary with my own loneliness.” (161) Mr. Khemka is not far wrong when he tells him that he is “Living, but as bad as dead”. (145).
Right from his boyhood Sindi gets “tired of living” and “was contemplating suicide”. (174-175). As a student, he grows utterly indifferent as to what he studies and what profession he opts for. At the London University, he has had a brilliant academic career. At Boston, he takes a doctorate in mechanical engineering, but he attaches no special importance to it, and says: “I cared two pins for all the mechanical engineers in the world.” (15) An extraordinarily brilliant student as he is, his professor offers him a place in the college faculty. But he opts for a job in New York from where he comes to New Delhi. When Mr. Khemka asks him what sort of job he is looking for, he opines it should be something that could make me forget myself”(14), and accepts Mr.Khemka’s offer of appointment in his factory “as I got away from myself”. (15) For him, literally all the roads lead to alienation.

Rootless as he is, Sindi’s life takes him from Kenya to London, and thereafter to Boston, and finally to New Delhi. The varied experiences he undergoes illustrate his predicament of sociological anomie and its further deepening into “ontological insecurity” of “psychotic engulfment”. In Kenya he feels restless, insecure and even contemplates suicide “since I was tired of living”. (174-175). With a view to trying his luck elsewhere he leaves for London. Even there he does not fit in. He feels the same tiresomeness and exhaustion. He remarks:
I joined London University, but soon *I got tired of the classroom lectures*, I didn't have any trouble with my courses and I passed the exams creditably enough when they came, but the question that bothered me was very different. *I wanted to know the meaning of my life.* And my classrooms didn't tell me a thing about it. Ultimately, I decided that I needed experience other than studying, and I got an evening job as a dishwasher in a nightclub in Soho. (175)

In London, Sindi feels unhappy about his education, which fails to teach him how to live. He wants to know the meaning of his life. Consequently, he accepts an evening job as a dishwasher in a nightclub in Soho. He accepts this assignment just for the sake of getting an altogether new experience: “*I didn't work to earn money. My mind was full of thoughts and I wanted a different kind of experience to sort my ideas out*”. (175). He works there for three months and thereafter he is transferred to the bar where one night he happens to meet Anna, a woman of “*about thirty-five with dark hair and finely chiselled features*”. (176). She is “*a minor artist who had separated from her husband*”. (176). He has a love affair with her and comes to know, in due course, that “*Anna was not yearning for me or anybody, but for her lost youth*.” (177). She shows that she has fallen flat in love with him, but his response is languid and listless;
We carried on like this for six months. I think she loved me intensely and unselfishly. I enjoyed making love to her and her sadness attracted me, but engrossed as I was with my own self I couldn't return her love. (177).

Anna some how gathered that it was her age that discouraged him. Sindi feels no greatness of conscience in leaving Anna and accepting Kathy. He says, “I left her (Anna) the moment Kathy showed any interest in me”. He gets deeply involved with Kathy, an English housewife, who hungers for adulterous love. But Kathy, in turn, leaves him after being with him for a few weeks and goes back to her husband for the sacredness of marriage: “We imagined we were in love with each other, but she thought marriage was sacred and had to be maintained at all costs”. (178). These experiences in London enrich his mind: “The essence of my life in London lay in what I had learnt from Anna and Kathy”. (178). He spends a whole year “wandering through the maze of my existence” for “finding the purpose of my life”. (179). The next summer he makes friends with a catholic priest in Scotland and spends much of his time “discussing religion and God and mysticism”. (179). He comes to have “a revelation, I had almost felt as if I had been infused with a new existence”. (179). He creates an illusion that he has learnt detachment. It so happens that one morning it comes to him in a flash: “All love-whether of things, or persons, or oneself-was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion.
Love begot greed and attachment, and it led to possession". (180). He is of the view that “One should be able to detach oneself from the object of one's love”. (171). He feels that this philosophy of detachment would enable him to meet the challenges of life.

Sindi's life turns over a new leaf when he meets June Blyth, a beautiful, benign, sensual, affectionate American girl at a foreign students' party. June is free, frank, uninhibited and generous, with a Christ in her heart craving to be of help to someone. Sindi loves her deeply and has sex with her. She gives of herself abundantly to him as “She wanted to be of use to someone” (91) and “was one of those rare persons who have a capacity to forget themselves in somebody's trouble.” (119). Her love for Sindi is more than a mere sexual gratification: “We made love with a strange fierceness that was as excruciating in its pleasure as it was painful”, (132), Time and again, she requests him to get married to her: “Let's get married, Sindi. For God's sake, let's get married.” (133). But Sindi is “anomic”, emotionally sterile, responsible to no one, and responsive only to himself. His feeling of nausea, of futility and meaninglessness of life prevails within and without, He replies: “Marriage wouldn't help, June. We are alone, both you and I. That is the problem, and our aloneness must be resolved from within,” (133). He further tells her plainly:
I can't marry you because I am incapable of doing so. It would be like going deliberately mad, it is inevitable that our delusions will break us up sooner or later. (133)

He deceives himself with the notion that he has developed the spirit of "detachment", He further tells her:

There is another way of loving. 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, (180).

Sindi's cold "detachment" estranges June and paves the way for her to go to Babu Rao Khemka who loves her very much. He gives her all that she needs. He is a simple character. He has his roots in Indian soil. His values are middle class values that are choked down in the glossy living of the West. To him, America seems to be a dreamland of free sex, and there is no use of coming to America if one is not to play around with girls. He argues with Sindi: "What is the good of coming to America if one is not to play around with girls?" (23). But he forgets that roots are like fortifications in one's self and they may destroy one in the process of disowning them. Babu, too, turns into a split personality. He loves to enjoy the free life of America. He tells Sindi: "I think it is a wonderful country. I would never go back to India if I had the choice. (95). He
further says: "Sometimes I wish I had been born in America. Not that I have anything against India but there is nothing to beat America". (97). At the same time, he has got his moral inhibitions as he is born and brought up in Indian orthodox background. He loves June intensely, decides to marry her. But his conventional morality comes in the way. He avoids physical relations with her. As she says: "He said he didn't want to do it until after the wedding" (167-68). On the other hand June is accustomed to free sex life of America. She tells him of her earlier relations with Sindi: "She told him that as a matter of fact she had been sleeping with me (Sindi) and, what's more, she had been doing that for a year before she met him (Babu)". (183). At this, Babu suddenly grows pale, calls her a whore, hits her in the face, leaves the flat and drives off blindly in his car to his tragic end by committing suicide.

June, on the other hand, is a complex character. She dangles between Sindi Oberoi and Babu Rao Khemka. She loves Sindi intensely and has sex with him. Repeatedly she requests him to marry her. But his cold "detachment" alienates June from him and paves the way for her to fall on Babu. The following lines from a dialogue between Sindi and June quite aptly shows why June decides to marry Babu.
Are you in love with Babu now?
No.
Then why did you decide to marry him.
I thought he needed me. I had wanted to belong to you, but you
didn't want it. You are so self-sufficient there is hardly any place
for me in your life-except perhaps as a mistress", She added with
a short laugh.
Babu, on the other hand, was on the edge of a breakdown-and
still is for that matter. He needs me and what's more he says so.
He loves me more than he loves himself-that's more than what
can be said for you. In return, I am prepared to give him all that I
have. (167).

Such a decision of June seems to be based on her practical wisdom.
No doubt, the man she really loves is Sindhi. As She affirms: "You are
beautiful, Sindi, beautiful as a God. I don't think I can even stop loving
you". (182). Her love of Babu is merely a stop-gap arrangement. It is only
on ad-hoc basis.

The dilemma of June's character makes her an interesting study. It
has already been shown how she is truly devoted to Sindi. But Babu
throws himself so much on June that it is certainly painful for her, to deny
love to Babu. But her personality is torn from within. She tries to release
her tension through love with Sindi. As the following extracts show:
I want You, I [Sindi] said.
She said nothing but got up and went into the bedroom. She had been sunning herself and her tanned body was lovely as a rose in the dim light. We made love with a strange fierceness that was as excruciating in its pleasure as it was painful. And then just after the final moment her body was thrown into a paroxysm of spasms. She shuddered under me in a thousand convulsions gasping for breath. She bit into my shoulder until blood came out and then suddenly I discovered that she was crying. I put my arms around her and tried to calm her down. She bit her lip and tried to hide her face in the pillow. Then something seemed to break within her and she burst into uncontrollable sobs.

It is all so meaningless, Sindi. So utterly meaningless. All we do is get into bed and....... Her sobs choked her off.

I patted her hair mechanically. She was right, dreadfully right. After some time her body ceased to shake and she wiped her tears. (132-133).

After Babu death when she comes to know herself being pregnant, she feels utterly frustrated. Having no other alternative available she undergoes an operation for abortion which results in her untime by shocking death.

An objective analysis of events clearly reveals that Sindi Oberoi is responsible for the death of both-Babu and June. It is, really, his false and cold “detachment” that leads to the tragedy of Babu and June. When Babu comes to know that June has been sleeping with Sindi and has been yielding to him, he goes out immediately and kills himself in a car.
accident. His Indian morality is terribly hurt. In a way Babu's death signifies the destruction of oriental innocence in the strange ways of the Western world. Sindi knows that he, actually, has killed Babu. He himself confesses:

All along I had acted out of lust and greed and selfishness and they had applauded my wisdom. When I had sought only detachment I had driven a man to his death.(6).

June accusingly tells him [Sindi]: “Look, what your detachment has done”. (184). June, too dies later. Sindi has physical contacts with her in the name of 'detachment'. He says: “when I made love to her it was not in lust or passion but in a belief that I was helping her find herself”. (182). Detachment becomes a misty notion with him. He makes love in a detached manner: “Love without fooling yourself that the things you love are indispensable either to you or to the world”. (180). No doubt, Sindi and June are deeply in love with each other. Although he loves her with “a strange fierceness” (132), he does not accede to her proposal of marriage. He holds that he is “not really cut out for marriage” (111), that marriage is “one big illusion that has been pounded into them by society” (112), that “Nothing even seems real to me, leave alone permanent, Nothing seems to be very important” (113), and that “Death wipes out everything, for most of us anyway, All that is left is a big mocking zero”,

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(114), To him, “Good things and bad things appear to be the same in the long run of existence”. (114). He seems to be conscious of the meaninglessness of human life. An awareness of the absurdity of human existence can be clearly traced in his reflections repeatedly. As Ionesco says, the “absurd” is.

That which is devoid of purpose-cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless.  

Sindi’s response to June’s proposal of marriage only heightens the absurdity of human situation. His such an act falls in line with the heroes of great existentialist writers like Sartre, Camus, Ionesco, Pinter and a few others,

Sindi declines June’s offer of marriage simply because he does not want to get “involved” (90) in any affair. He gives himself the air “to remain detached under the circumstances”. (126). He tries to explore further:

I tried to speculate about these things objectively, not realizing that objectivity was just another form of vanity. I tried to imagine the worst and then persuaded myself that it could really not happen. Underlying all this was an assumption that June would not leave me, not for Babu anyway. What would she find in Babu that I didn’t have? (126).
Here Sindi is wrong. It is natural that after his refusal she would be
drawn towards Babu, Sindi's cold detachment alienates June from him
and sends her to Babu who badly needs her. She is betrothed to Babu,
Sindi is jealous of him. He is equally jealous of June for leaving him for
Babu. But he finds himself too weak to possess her. He simply telephones
her and requests her to dine with him one day. But she refuses: "I'm sorry.
Sindi I will not be able to see you anymore, I mean not as I used to. Babu
and I are getting married soon". (138). He further asks her on telephone:
"Can't I see you just once"? She answers in negative: "No, Sindi, I am
sorry". (138). At this he puts down the receiver, presses his face against
the cold, hard metal of the telephone and cries. He looks upon himself as
the victim of "a tremendous illusion" (208) and feels that his experiences
of life have wronged him. The so-called "detachment" immediately
vanishes and he feels utterly miserable. He feels in a state of just one long
coma: "I suppose the edge of pain was so intense that it left me
completely numb." (150). He starts visiting, off and on, the places where
he had been with her like a typical lover under the grip of romantic
frenzy: "Here is where we met, here I bought her a book, there she
wanted me to kiss her, and my heart would sink with the burden of my
memories and I couldn't help whispering to myself, "My darling! Oh, my
darling!"" (150). These words mock at his carefully cultivated philosophy
of detachment as these are not the words of “one (who) should be able to detach oneself from the object of one's love”. (71).

All this reveals that Sindi makes love to several women-Anna, Kathy, Judy, Christine and June—and enjoys sex with them under the bogus garb of “detachment”. It is his pompous philosophy of “detachment” that alienates June from him and sends her to his friend Babu Rao Khemka and, thus, Sindi is brought face to face with his hypocrisy, cowardice, fear, jealousy and stupidity. June’s tragic death after the operation for abortion makes him restless. Further rootless and lonely, drifting into meaningless uncertainties about life and existence and “the abominable absurdity of the world”. (202). Her death acts as a tragic “peripeteia”. It brings about a sudden change of fortune as it dawns on him:

Detachment at that time had meant inaction. Now I had begun to see the fallacy in it. Detachment consisted of right action and not escape from it. The gods had set a heavy price to teach me just that. (204).

We see him, now, on the right path of “becoming”. He comes to learn by bitter experience that true detachment “consisted of right action and not escape from it” which is the lesson that the Gita teaches us. When Sindi comes back to India, he sees “a bronze figure of dancing Shiva”. (14). He is held in a supreme ecstasy: “I was struck by the intense beauty
of the divine dancer. America, India, Egypt, all mingled behind him in aeons of increasing rhythm”. (14). The archetypal image of the dancing Shiva speaks of Arun Joshi's Indian heritage. It also expresses the paradoxical character of eternal oriental truth as Shiva is both 'Rudra' (destructive fury) and 'Shiva' (benign force).

The protagonist Sindi is a quester *incognito*. He has been undergoing a complete overhauling. He has been passing through a process of death and a new man is being born within him, He wants to leave America to escape a bit of himself “that appeared the most decayed”. He is in search of a new place, a place other than he lived in: “I only wanted a place where I could experiment with myself”. (185). He proposes to go either to Nigeria or to India. He comes to India hoping to get “a place to anchor on this lonely planet” (186), but his hopes are not fulfilled. To him, India seems no better than America. He remarks:

> In truth it had only been a change of theatre from America: the show had remained unchanged. I had met new people with new vanities. They merely had different ways of squeezing happiness out of the mad world. (202).

He is horrified by “the stagnant deadness” (219) of the Indian scene dominated by people like Mr. Khemka- “man of the world, municipal councilor, Chairman of many committees, dynamic entrepreneur. Master of ceremonies, darling of the astrologers Owner of a growing
empire”. (220).

Sindi joins the Khemka Industries but appears “so strange” (142) to Mr. Khemka to whom he tells: “My set of experiences has taught me a reality that is different from yours”. (142). He finds himself a stranger in India to both the corrupt rich man and the poor exploited labourer. He finds that the common people “have the benefit of their delusions, their delusions protect them from the lonely meaninglessness of their lives” (133). But Sindi has no such “delusions” to base his hopes upon. He has not been “fortunate enough to have been born with their simpleness of mind”. (45). He undergoes a series of innumerable experiences: “The feeling of my nakedness in the hands of existence grew with every passing day and a strong urge possessed me to once again roam the streets world”, (185). His existentialist quest and “experience myself” (185) simply add to his loneliness and meaninglessness of life. Mr. Khemka takes him to “bad as dead”. (145). Sheila considers him “the saddest man I have ever known” (148) and tells him plainly. “You are still a foreigner. You don't belong here”. (149)

A fresh crisis comes in the life of Sindi when Mr. Khemka is sentenced to jail on playing fraud with income tax accounts. The workers of the firm persuade Sindi to take over the charge of Khemka's business invoker to save their starvation. It is at this critical juncture that we find
him on his way to becoming wiser. His understanding deepens when he associates himself with the poor and starving A new man, who is more humane and merciful, is being born within him. We see that Sindi having finished his packing late in the evening, goes to the station to reserve a seat for Bombay. Before he goes to sleep that night, he takes “a general stock” of himself:

In many ways I had been a waste ... I had started adult life as a confused adolescent awesomely engrossed with myself, search wisdom and the peace that comes with it. The journey had been long and tedious and still was not over the future? In an ultimate sense, I knew, it would be meaningless as the past. But, in a narrower sense, would perhaps be useful tasks to be done, perhaps were lucky, even a chance to redeem the past. (234).

During the night, the temperature suddenly drops and by dawn it starts raining: “It was the first of the monsoons, carrying a freshness and coolness that was a change from the humid heat of the previous day”.(234) The shower, as in T.S, Eliot's The Waste Land, is a fertility symbol. It symbolises the stirring of life in Sindi. It is a, reawakening, his rebirth his regeneration. After the rains when the sky is clear, he goes to meet Muthu. The sky symbolises the light of knowledge that will dawn Sindi. Muthu becomes the human voice of the divine truth. When Sindi says that he does not want to get involved, Muthu replies: “But it is not involvement, sir. Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting
involved”. (239). It is Muthu, a man in “a pathetic situation” (237) and “perplexed” (236) who drives Sindi on the right lines. Human suffering purges and purifies him. Muthu is human suffering personified. It is this suffering in the shape of Muthu that drives Sindi from indifference to participation and from detachment to involvement and leads him to conclude that “for me [Sindi], detachment consisted in getting involved with the world” (239). Mohan Jha rightly remarks:

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.17

Sindi, now, sticks to Muthu's words: “Still, the old, nagging fear of getting involved with anything, anyone, was pushing through the mists of reason—a line of reasoning that led to the inevitable conclusion that, for me, detachment consisted in getting involved with the world”. (239). Now, he finally understands that detachment does not mean inaction, escape or alienation; it really stands for right action, devotion and involvement: “Detachment consisted of right action and not escape from it”. (204). Muthu is really a ‘Karmayogi’. It is from him that Sindi learns the secret of non-attached action or “nishkam karma” of “karmayoga” as propounded in the Gita.
Now, Muthu's meaning of detachment prevails on Sindi and he takes over the management of Mr. Khemka's business. He is led on "to concentrate on decisive action." (242). He speaks almost in the phraseology of the Gita as he utters: "The fruit of it was really not my concern". (242). Sindi's "decisive action" of taking upon himself the responsibility of saving Mr. Khemka's concern brings him and his total staff peace, prosperity and happiness: "By the end of the first month sales had begun to look up and the situation improved generally as a result". (242). Certain misgivings that Sheila has about Sindi are now over and they try to understand each other better. Sindi feels "amused by the random absurdity" (243) of his present involvement. He has learnt from experience that it is not inaction or escape but right action or involvement that turns out to be genuine detachment, the state of 'sthiraprajna' of the Gita, having the stability of mind and that 'yoga' of selfless action which alone can redeem man.

At times, Sindi concludes like a Vedaantin: "All love-whether of things, or persons, or oneself-was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion. Love begot greed and attachment, and it led to possession". (180). He seems to believe in "Brahma satyam jaganmithya" (God alone is truth, the entire world is illusion). He considers this world to be "mithya", only illusion or 'maya'. He tells June: "Nothing ever seems real
to me, leave alone permanent. Nothing seems to be very important”.

(113). He wants to know “the real”. He tells June:

One morning I had gone for a walk. I climbed a hill and sat down on a weathered stone. The sun had just risen and the valley seemed strangely ethereal in the clear light. Suddenly, I felt a great lightening, as if someone had lifted a burden from my chest and it all came through in a flash... Birth and death are real. They are the constants. All else is variable... According to the Hindu mystics there is a reality beyond all this. But I don't know. I would like to know someday. (179-180).

Muthu suggests Sindi that “Maya” [illusion] keeps the reality hidden and tells him that some persons “mistake the action of their senses for their own actions. It is all Maya”. (46).

Sindi comes to realize that detachment, in the true sense of the term, should not only be from the world and its objects but also from one's own self. One can be of some use to others only when one is really detached from one's own self. Sindi is led to understand that actually he is the cause of Babu's and June's death. He rightly remarks:

I had learnt to be detached from the world, but not from myself. That is when that fatal error was made that ultimately led to Babu's and then to June's death. (207).

He has to struggle too hard to get freedom from the fear of involvement. He says:
Still, the old, nagging fear of getting involved with anything, anyone, was pushing through the mists of reason—a line of reasoning that led to the inevitable conclusion that, for me, detachment consisted in getting involved with the world. (239). At Muthu's request, he takes over the management of Mr. Khemka's business but works in a detached manner, as he says: The fruit of it was really not my concern. (242).

He becomes, more or less, a 'shtitaprajna', abandoning attachment whatsoever as per Lord Krishna's preachings in the Gita.

Sindi's life undergoes various changes and he happens to experience different facets of life at different stages. Basically he is "a foreigner". (149). He has been a vain young man, a sad lover, a jealous competitor, a mechanical engineer, "a philosopher" (151), "a saint" (146), "a conceited little squirt" (159), "cynical and exhausted. grown old before my time, weary with my own loneliness" (161), a "lusty beast" (164), a pretender, a person having "so little control over his own destiny and actions" (171), "an uprooted youngman" (207), "a perennial outsider"¹, "an alien everywhere physically as well as metaphorically"², a narcissist, a liar, "so heartless" (230), selfish and "awesomely engrossed with myself" (234), "an ungrateful upstart" (228), and what not? But, finally, Sindi Oberoi becomes "Surrender Oberoi" (242). He settles in his business. He also settles in his life with Babu's sister Sheila. Although there were certain misgivings in the beginning, they try to understand
each other. Sindi is “sorry” (243) for Sheila, and says: “I had a feeling we were just beginning to understand each other. (243). The following lines of the dialogue are expressive of an amicable settlement between Sindi and Sheila:

I didn't think you would come back. Nor did I. I thought you had become too detached to get involved in this mess. A smile played at the corners of her mouth. I too smiled, amused by the random absurdity of it all. (243).

Sindi seems to unlearn the so-called code of detachment and learn, by and large, from his experience. That it is involvement that can and does redeem man. Mohan Jha rightly remarks that the change in Sindi's life from detachment to involvement is certainly “a study in experience”.20 Graham Greene's Mr. Heng in The Quiet American tells Fowler: “Sooner or later... one had to take sides, if one is to remain human”. Sindi too, takes sides and commits himself to action as he finally chooses to be human. It is this settlement with the self that yields peace and satisfaction in life.

The novel, no doubt, is full of instances and descriptions that make it read as an existentialist quest to find a meaning in the meaninglessness and absurdity of life. For an insecure man like Sindi, everything is purposeless. He turns out to be a thorough going absurdist to whom this world is full of suffering and life is all disillusionment. He is brought face
to face with his stupidity and hypocrisy. He fails to apply a check on his senses but talks of practising detachment. He is a man of false conduct and can be rightly called a hypocrite.

The protagonist Sindi is a typical representative of the contemporary man who, irrespective of all sorts of scientific and technological advancements of the modern times, finds himself in a tragic mess. He is a foreigner in the true sense of the term, with all bonds of love and social relationship disintegrated. Hence, his life is all hellish and there is no end to his suffering. The loneliness of the contemporary individual is well articulated by Arun Joshi in the novel:

We'll see you then, she called. They waved and drove off. So they would see me, would they? That is the loneliness of our times, I thought as I rode up in the elevator. Strangers promise to see you without even knowing your name. You are a king in a deck of kings, shuffled and reshuffled, meeting fifty one similar kings but never saying anything sensible, never exchanging names. (197)

Grace Stuart rightly remarks:

There is Heaven when one goes out to one's neighbour, and Hell when one turns back to oneself. Hell is the state of being without affectionate relationship. One may go through circle after circle of Dante's Inferno, down and down, and although there are always crowds there is never relationship.
Sindi's fallacy of detachment is a mask to cover his inability to belong to people and have a proper understanding of them. He finds himself utterly naked in the hands of existence. He moves around the streets of the world with the feeling of loneliness. His agony deepens when he realizes that he has no friends indeed. Vyvyan Richards rightly remarks: “Isolation and neglect are men's hell: fellowship is heaven”.

He is a foreigner not only in Kenya, London or Boston but equally a foreigner in India too. This is the irony of his predicament. In the social parties at Mr. Khemka's house:

Old men grown fat with success came with their plump wives. They drank and then they had gorgeous dinners. They talked of money and how to make more of it. They left the impression that they could buy up anybody they wanted. ... the fat men left me with a distinct feeling of being out of place (17) and further as Sindi says: I would become aware of my own loneliness. (17).

It is only after his meeting with Muthu that Sindi's attitude towards the meaning of human life gets completely overhauled. Muthu's request to Sindi to take over the charge of Mr. Khemka's business leads him to take “a general stock” (234) of himself and compels “to concentrate on decisive action” (242) that instils an altogether new sense of belongingness. He visits Muthu's home and is moved by the “pathetic situation” to see his daughter in her frock much “dirty and too large for her” and his wife suffering from tuberculosis that “gets rather bad in
(that) weather.” (239). He cancels his visit to Bombay where he has been given a job. His instantaneous actions affirm his new found sense of belongingness:

I went to the station and cashed in my ticket to Bombay, then went home. After dinner, much to the surprise of my servant, I unpacked my things and put them back as nearly as possible in their old places. (239).

All the time he has been “pushing through the mists of reason—a line of reasoning that led to the inevitable conclusion that, for me, detachment consisted in getting involved with the world”. (239). We see how Sindi, the ontologically insecure outsider, comes to learn the real connotation. The anomic wanderer ceases to be a wanderer anymore. He takes the most heroic decision to infuse new life and freshness into the most decayed concern of Mr. Khemka. He transcends his selfish motive of self-interest and self-conceit and is thoroughly prepared to help all the employees of Mr. Khemka's business who have been earning their family's daily bread by working there, He earnestly desires to serve the needy and the poor whole-heartedly. Such an attitude makes his nature too full of the milk of human kindness, It minimizes psychic tensions arising out of the sense of loneliness and ushers into a sense of belongingness that yields human happiness and shared enjoyment. Vyvyan Richards rightly remarks:
Every touch of kindness that opens one's isolated self to others and theirs to us, begins to enrich and perfect our being.\textsuperscript{23}

Sindi, the alienated protagonist, finally arrives at 'peace within and calm around', He settles with the business, with Sheila and, above all, with himself. To quote Hari Mohan Prasad, "From Boston to Delhi has been a journey from alienation to arrival, from selfishness to sacrifice, from an anomic responsible to himself to a member of mankind, from being to becoming".\textsuperscript{24} When Sheila asks how long he plans to stay with the company, he replies: "I don't know. As long as I'm needed, I suppose". (243). To quote Usha Pathania,

In his interpersonal relations, he ultimately succeeds in imbibing the rare and enviable quality of forgetting his separateness and individual identity. The journey from America to India has been a long journey indeed. He has reached his destination. The most coveted goal of peace within and around, emanating from a meaningful existence and a sense of belongingness has been attained. He is no more afraid of love of freedom, of growth, of change, of the unknown; he becomes himself.\textsuperscript{25}

Sindi has ultimately discovered, what Erich Fromm calls, man's "own nature, and with this self-knowledge he has ... entered manhood. For he is the only creature who is able to say not only 'no' to life but 'yes' and to make for himself a life that is human. In this decision lie his burden and his greatness".\textsuperscript{26}
As the mutually contradictory tendencies for 'having' and 'being' are always present within human beings, Sindi is no exception to it. But towards the close of the novel we see how in him the desire 'to have' is replaced by the desire 'to be', to give, to sacrifice, and to share with others.

Arun Joshi, seems to approve of the latter phase of Sindi's life which is thoroughly Indian, steeped in rich Indian heritage and the teachings of *Vedas*: “Aa no bhadra kratavo yantu vishwatah”, that is, “Let all the noble thoughts come to us from all sides”, At this stage, Sindi's search for authentic existence ends, He eventually achieves the state of a happy co-existence and harmony. He not only settles in his business but also with Sheila and, above all, with himself. This is “a pursuit after awareness-the Advaitic method of searching for one's identity which is typically Indian”,\(^ {27}\) O. P. Mathur rightly views Sindi's quest for identity as a 'yatra', a pilgrimage from “Existentialism to Karmayoga”.\(^ {28}\) It brings about a moral growth in Sindi. It is, certainly, a step towards right direction, towards the supremely blessed state of human existence as exemplified in the last verse of the *Rigveda*, the English rendering of which is the following:

Let your aims be one and the same; Let your heart be joined
together May your mind be in accord, and At peace with all, so
may you be.\(^ {29}\)
Sindi, at the end of the novel, turns out to be a pure human being, who is ready to sacrifice, to share with Muthu, Sheila and other factory men, with 'hearts' ‘joined together’, so his mind rests ‘in accord, and at peace with all’. For him, there is peace within and peace around. “Having become a 'Karmayogi' he finds his equanimity and salvation,”30 in the land of his ancestors. Ultimately, he comes to terms with his “foreignness” and concentrates “on decisive action” (242) of taking over the business of Khemka's concern as “there would perhaps be useful tasks to be done” (234) in the future, and, thus, he would be lucky to have “a chance to redeem the past”. (234). We see how there is altogether a change, an upward movement, in the character of the protagonist. He comes to realize the change in the concept of “detachment”. Previously, it was a mere illusion. Now, he is led to “the inevitable conclusion that, for me, detachment consisted in getting involved with the world”. (239). The false notion of detachment is altogether destroyed. Now, he begins to move on constructive lines, the path of 'Nishkam-Karma' (non-attached action) of the Gita as a “karma yogi”.

Throughout the novel, the idea of “foreignness” is kept before the reader. The insecurity, remoteness, alienation, and transitoriness associated with the word “foreigner” form the entire edifice of the novel that portrays the protagonist's sense of metaphysical anguish at the
meaninglessness and purposelessness of the human condition. These existentialist notions have been so cleverly handled by Arun Joshi that the novel is never allowed to have an overdose of philosophy.

The foregoing analysis shows that Arun Joshi makes use of existentialism, *Vedanita*, the philosophy of *karma* and Lord Krishna’s concepts of ‘detachment’ and ‘involvement’ in *The Foreigner*. It is to the credit of the novelist that induction of these philosophical ideas does not mar the aesthetics of the work. Joshi suggests that there is misery and strife in this world caused by misconceptions of certain ideas and that one can carve one’s way out of this impasse through a sensible approach to problems. While apparently deriving from the existentialists and the absurdists, his understanding of human situation has uniqueness and novelty of its own, which the study of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* in the next chapter clearly shows.

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References


3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.


9. Arun Joshi, The Foreigner (New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1968), 65. All further references are to this edition. Page numbers are documented parenthetically immediately after the citation.


