CHAPTER TWO
FROM WITHDRAWAL TO PARTICIPATION
A STUDY OF THE FOREIGNER

Surinder Oberoi, Sindi for short, the protagonist of The Foreigner, feeling depressed and exhausted after the previous day's attack of asthma, left alone, reflects on his predicament:

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 could call the search for peace a purpose. Perhaps I felt 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, I hadn't felt like that when my uncle was living. It wasn't that I loved him very much or anything ... 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.¹

Much later in the novel, the same Sindi in a frenzied outburst tells his Indian employer Mr.Khemka who has been critical of him:

You had a clear-cut 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 not 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!²

These two extracts from the novel, both striking for their pathos, poignancy and self-revelation, explicitly and implicitly draw attention to the anguished problems and dilemmas that Sindi is burdened with regarding himself and his life. He sees himself as a lonely perennial ‘foreigner’, an estranged or alienated person, regardless of the place or country he is in, because his sense of foreignness is internal and psychological rather than geographical. He is also acutely aware that he has no roots whatsoever, no anchor to his life, and belongs nowhere as he is cut off from all familial, social and cultural bonds and bearings, and thereby deprived of a shared traditional frame of reference of beliefs and values to give him a sense of belongingness and of direction and purpose to his life. Sindi feels that he is a foreigner as much to himself as to the society in which he lives, and to the outside world. He cannot find any meaning and purpose in his life, and extends to the world, life and human existence itself his sense of meaninglessness in his own life.

The Foreigner tells the poignant story of orphaned Sindi’s experience of a gnawing sense of estrangement and alienation from all meaningful relationship in society, his drifting, along rudderless, and his trying to find a solution to his predicament in what he regards as ‘detachment’ and non-involvement, which ironically exacerbates his sense of loneliness and estrangement. But this is not all of the story. The novel also portrays Sindi’s transcending, his inhibiting egotistical preoccupation with detachment, his realising its true meaning, and getting integrated with society and the world by choosing a meaningful and purposeful course of action. Thus, finally the ‘foreigner’ and the ‘nowhere man’ in the
sense that one who had felt lost in the maze of life is able to arrive 'somewhere and rehabilitate himself in society. The progress of his 'self' may be charted as a movement from self-absorption and self-centered withdrawal from society to a return to it for responsible participation in it. There is also a hint in the novel that he looks to something beyond the empirical world.

The Foreigner is a protagonistic novel and the entire narrative is given the form of an autobiographical reminiscence. The 'I' of the narrative is Sindi the self-reflective protagonist who recounts in the past tense and in the first person the story of his life and from his point of view. He is participant, witness as well as narrator, all rolled into one. His description of any event and his conclusions about it are naturally coloured by his attitudes. Sindi seems to begin telling his story sometime after he has achieved a measure of peace of mind and stability, overcome his foreignness, found a sense of purpose in life and united himself with society. Obviously there is an interval or gap of time between the experiencing protagonist Sindi's encounter with life and the narrating protagonist Sindi's recreation of it as an emotionally charged personal, confessional narrative. In such a situation there is always the possibility of the narrator's becoming an apologist for himself and his past actions, rather than functioning as a faithful and reliable narrator. It is refreshing that in The Foreigner Sindi relates the events of his life and his experiences with commendable condour and sincerity, and gives little room to doubt the reliability of his recollection or reporting. Events, persons and experiences are described as they must have appeared to him when they actually occurred, although at a later stage while interpreting their meaning and significance to himself he must have been naturally influenced by the insights gained by hindsight. However the attempt of Sindi as narrator is to be as honest as
possible. There are occurrences and experiences about which he has no first-hand knowledge—for instance, the truth about Babu Rao Khemka, the mental struggle and confusion he went through before he killed himself. The narrator cleverly makes use of relevant extracts from the young man’s letters to his sister Sheila, letting him speak of the turmoil in his mind about which Sindi has only a partial and superficial knowledge. He also quotes extracts from June’s letter to him about the confusion Babu is creating in her life too. Similarly he faithfully reports his conversations with June, Khemka, Sheila, Muthu and others, to reveal their minds and trains of thought in their own words. Thus the novelist makes an artistic use of the letters and reported conversation of his characters to serve the purpose of fiction.

It is not explicitly stated in the novel what prompted Sindi to undertake this confessional narrative. However, it seems clear from the narrative context that his guilt-stricken conscience urges him to it as a therapeutic exercise to take stock of himself, to cleanse his soul of its guilt, and to know where and how he stands in relation to his society and the world. As the novel has Sindi for its subject as well as its narrator, and traces the different stages of the ‘progress’ of his self towards self-knowledge, it is natural and appropriate that it should assume the form of a spiritual autobiography. Therefore The Foreigner is less concerned with outward events by themselves than by their impact on the sensibilities of the characters. “The centrality of Sindi’s truth being subjective”, as Tapan Kumar Ghosh remarks, “It can be best expressed through his own consciousness and in his own idiom”.3 And hence the appropriateness of using the device of first person protagonistic narrative in the novel, whatever be its inherent limitations.
One of the attractions of The Foreigner is that it has an engaging story, told swiftly and vigorously. Its plot is carefully and deftly designed so that the reader's interest is generally sustained from first to last. In fact the technical competence the novel exhibits is indeed impressive for a first novel, although some parts of it were written in the late 1950s when Arun Joshi was still a student in America and the remaining completed later on in 1966. There is considerable sophistication in telling the story. Instead of presenting a linear narrative — in fact none of the first four novels of Joshi has a linear narrative structure — and a chronological account of the events as they happened, Sindi the narrator begins with a precipitating incident, seemingly sensational, in his adult life, namely the death of his young friend and protégé Babu Rao Khemka in a car accident in Boston. The purpose of placing this incident at the outset is not, as it is supposed by some, to kindle the curiosity of the reader, but to focus attention on a crucial event in Sindi's life. The death of Babu and that of June Blyth, Sindi's lady love, which occurs a couple of months afterwards but not mentioned until later in the narrative, affect him so stunningly and profoundly that he is set on rigorous introspection and critical examination of his pet notions, and finally made to turn a new leaf in his life. The real nature of Babu's death — that it was suicide and not death by accident — and the factors that led to it are insinuated only circumstantially later in the narrative at an appropriate place. All this may smack of a mystery thriller. But it does not take much time to see that the concerns of The Foreigner are radically different from those of a mere mystery story. It does not have none of the suspense such stories generally rely on. The tragic outcome of the Sindi-June-Babu relationship is sufficiently indicated within the first few chapters of the novel. Yet interest in the narrative is consistently sustained by the deeply human interest of the story and the issues concerning living involved in it.
In the very next episode presented, which takes place many months after the tragic events, the scene shifts from Boston in America to Delhi in India with Sindi going there. The narrative takes a zigzag route moving forwards and backwards swiftly, traversing several lands – Africa, England, America and India, but chiefly between America and India, Boston and Delhi – and covering events of the recent past, remote past and the present, all skillfully ordered to make a closely connected narrative. The narrative moves between the events of the past and present so that they may throw light on each other. And the events of the past are recalled not in the order of their occurrence but according the stimulus and mood of the occasion. However the events taking place at different times are so well and closely organized that the narrative focus is never lost. For example, Sindi prompted to recall to himself his painful affair in London with Anna, a minor artist and a woman old enough to be his mother, as he and June rest on the beach at Cape Cod, where they have gone to celebrate his birthday. It is one of several instances to indicate that wherever Sindi may go, he carries with him memories of his past which haunt him. It is for the readers to rearrange the events of Sindi’s life in their sequential order, even as they follow the narrative as he presents it. The appropriateness of this narrative strategy to the protagonist narrator has to be appreciated. Sindi goes from place to place to shake the ghost of his past off his back. His coming to India in the last phase of the novel is to escape from the haunting memories of Babu and June. But he has to realise – which he does at the end – that his redemption lies in his accepting them rather than shutting his eyes to them. Thus Sindi’s experiences are, in the words of Rajendra Prasad, “unified not in terms of sequence and logic”, but in terms of his “experiencing consciousness”. Having gripped the reader’s attention by the opening episode, the novelist lets the details of Sindi’s background, his
relationships and attitudes emerge in due course as and when the occasion makes it necessary.

The Foreigner is organised in three parts, part one being the shortest and the other two more or less of equal length. Part one is preliminary and sets the narrative in motion with Sindi’s brief retrospective recollection of the death of Babu Khemka, his making friends with him and June Blyth in Boston, and his leaving America for good to go to India. This part introduces the chief dramatis personae in this solemn story – Sindi, June, the Khemkas, father, son and daughter – and their essential traits, which are elaborated or dramatically revealed in concrete situations subsequently. Part Two covers on the one hand the growing friendship between Sindi, June and Babu which unexpectedly turns into a tense triangular relationship and the decay of that friendship, and on the other Sindi’s getting unexpectedly and unwittingly involved with the Khemkas and their corrupt business establishment, and the quiet bond of friendship developing between him and Sheila, who tirelessly insists on knowing all about her brother, and why and how he died. In Part Three the problems and dilemmas of Sindi are resolved for the time being, after he learns by the hard way of experience the true meaning of non-involvement and detachment which he had made a fetish of, and chosen to help his colleagues as best he can in a serious crisis without any self-regarding thoughts, and thus participate responsibly in society.

The novel is most appropriately given the title The Foreigner, which may remind one of Albert Camus’s The Outsider. Certain verbal echoes of The Outsider are heard in The Foreigner, says Pratap Chandra Dash. However the parallel between the two novels cannot be stretched far. Joshi’s novel continuously lays stress on Sindi’s sense of being a foreigner wherever he may be and all that goes with it: that is, his feeling of being, isolated
and estranged from society, his fear of involvement and commitment etc. The author extracts from the word ‘foreign’ and its related forms as much meaning as possible exploiting all of its nuances, which are of course validated in the narrative context. The idea of foreignness is kept before the reader throughout. As Rajendra Prasad points out, in “significant spots of the narrative, the word ‘foreign’ and its substantive forms occur so as to make the term not just a label but an inclusive metaphor that governs and controls the narrative”.

Sindi’s sense of foreignness lies at the core of his being, and conditions the course of his life, thought and action, his attitude to himself, to other people, society and the world, until he is exorcised by a fortunate circumstance of his life.

There are other foreigners too in the novel, Karl, Arun and a host of young men and women who have come to America from other countries of the world for study. Sindi’s sense of foreignness is very different from theirs. It has nothing to do with any particular country or even culture, since unlike other foreigners he does not belong to any. His Indianness itself, as it will be shown later, is questionable. He himself has doubts about it. He cannot even be called an exile since he does not belong to any country to have come away from it, nor does he try to identify himself with any. Karl, his roommate in Boston, provides a meaningful contrast. He is a foreigner in America, an Austrian exile and immigrant, an uprooted man who left his home country for good to forget his past. But he is not wholly free from nostalgia for it, although he has no intention of going back. But Sindi has no such feelings for any country. Even when he comes to India, the home of his ancestors, he feels that he is a foreigner there. His foreignness is, as O.P. Bhatnagar points out, “a personal problem of emotions seeking fulfillment in terms of human relations”.

Later in this chapter, in the context of analysing Sindi’s experiences in India, an attempt is
made to compare him briefly with a few “exile” characters of Indian fiction in English to point out what distinguishes him as a ‘foreigner’. Similarly he is also briefly compared with two other fictional characters, Meursault in Camus’s *The Outsider* and Nirode Ray in Anita Desai’s *Voices in the City*, with particular reference to the way they stand in relation to their respective societies so that Sindi’s rather peculiar experiences of estrangement and his final integration with society may be clearly distinguished.

Virtually all the problems and perplexities, complexes, confusions and obsessions of Sindi as ‘foreigner’ have their origin in the circumstances of his birth, parentage, and upbringing. Born of an Indian father and an English mother in Kenya an African country, and orphaned when he was a mere child of four, Sindi is deprived of parental love, anchor and protection. Having lost his parents so early in life he has no clear memory of them, and does not miss them either. They become for him ‘strangers whose only reality was a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs’. He would rather people did not ask him about his parents, although they do wherever he goes. An uncle of his, who takes their place, brings him up. Nevertheless their absence creates an emotional void which cannot be filled, and a deep sense of insecurity, loneliness and impermanence, which colour his entire attitude to himself, his life and existence. With his uncle’s death, the only familial link and anchor he had been left with is lost forever. Left alone without a kinsman and friend he begins to feels that he is a perpetual foreigner to all human relations. His own words cited at the beginning of this chapter adequately substantiate this impression. He has no answer to the growing question within him, “in what way, if any, does he belong to the outside world”? Deprived of parental love, familial nourishment and cultural moorings early in life, Sindi grows up with a kind of cleavage in his personality.
More importantly with the death of his parents so early in his childhood, Sindi is
denied the necessary opportunities to learn to build inter-personal relationships with people.
Only loving parents can give their children a sense of security, provide them emotionally
fulfilling primary bonds, and inculcate in them feelings of fellowship and communion with
other people outside home. With the death of his uncle who had felt greatly concerned
about him, Sindi feels like a stranger left on an alien shore. Yet another and far-reaching
consequence of these familial losses and the consequent deprival of the happiness and
security of all emotional bonds is that Sindi automatically distrusts and shrinks away from
all such attachments. His uncle in his own way contributes to his gloomy view of life and
love. Sindi remembers his listening as a sensitive child to his uncle, obviously a
disappointed man, telling his friends that "To love is to invite others to break your heart". He
develops early in life an aversion for living and even contemplates suicide. His
understanding uncle sends him to London University to study as well as try his luck there.
Thus begins the most impressionable phase of Sindi’s life when he is in his late
adolescence.

Sindi, who is in quest of peace and the meaning of life, is soon tired of classroom
lectures as they do not seem to bring him anywhere near the answers to the questions
worrying him. He wants a different kind of experience to sort out his thoughts and ideas.
So he takes up a job in a night-club where he meets first Anna, a minor artist and a divorsee,
much older than himself but good-looking. After a few months of an intensely passionate
affair with her, he leaves her for Kathy, a married woman, who in her turn leaves him after
sometime to go back to her husband to save her marriage at all costs. There are other
women too going in and out of his life. He even congratulates himself for carrying on with
Julie and Christie at the same time without each other’s knowledge. But Anna and Kathy affect him most. He admits to June years later in Boston: “Anna had fed my vanity and given me a taste for conquest. Foolish and petty as I was, I left her the moment Kathy showed any interest in me”. Only much later the realisation comes to him that he had not loved them at all nor let them love him, because he was totally engrossed in his own self. His encounter with them bring him for the first time “face to face” with pain penetrating everything: “All that I had thought was pleasurable had ended in pain”. While he is aware of the pain he has caused Anna and Kathy, he cannot relieve it. This thought of his helplessness haunts him for long.

For a whole year Sindi struggles to find an answer to his teasing questions about love, the purpose of his life etc. He thinks that he has found one during his stay in Scotland. His wide reading in the library and his discussion with a Catholic priest, together seem to clear up his mind. On a certain morning as he sits on a weathered stone on the top of a hill, he has the experience of a sudden revelation which seem to dispel all his doubts: “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”. When June to whom he is making this confession at a crucial moment of their lives several years after he had this revelation, retorts that according to him “hatred would be much better than love”, he gives her the reply, “Hatred is another form of love. There is another way of loving. You can love without attachment, without desire. You can love without attachment to the object you love ---”. Taken by itself this statement of Sindi’s is certainly profound and philosophical. But one doubts very much whether he has really understood its full implications, though he tells June at the moment that he did follow that way of life. In point of fact, thoughts about
attachment and detachment enter his mind for the first time only after his relations with Anna and Kathy are frustrated and cause endless pain, and not before. It appears therefore that he is generalising not after any dispassionate and mature intellectual consideration but on the basis of his recent disappointing emotional entanglements.

As subsequent events show, ‘detachment’ which Sindi makes his conviction and adheres to obstinately, becomes in actual practice fear of emotional bonds, withdrawal, shrinking away from involvement in society, in short, evasion and escape from responsible action and commitment. Until he is forced to confront the stark fact of the deaths of Babu and June, he scarcely looks beyond himself and his pet notions. On this predicament of Sindi’s Usha Pathania, drawing attention to the root cause of his peculiar attitudes, remarks: “Not having enjoyed the sense of well-being and happiness provided by emotional bonds he remains suspicious of all involvements and makes detachment the creed of his life. His belief in detachment, however, is a mask to cover his inability to reach out to people, to love them, to belong to them and to understand them”. The irony is that Sindi is not aware that he wears this mask to hide himself behind as he is wholly self-absorbed and engrossed in his own self. Had he really understood the implications of the so-called revelation he had in Scotland, he would have known that love of oneself is as much an illusion as love of person and objects. Obstinately adhering to his notion of ‘detachment’ he remains for a few years until he meets and gets involved with June in Boston apparently against his inclination. She subjects him and his convictions to a very severe test and unsettles his self-confidence.
With Sindi’s going to Boston from England as a part of his quest for meaning, the American phase of his experience begins. He meets June by chance at a ball laid out by the International students Association and again later at a beer party for foreign students. It is ironical that this ‘foreigner’ who regards himself as a stranger, an outsider to all society and belongs to no country, and who has made non-involvement and detachment his creed, should have been hired to serve as an ex-officio host to bring foreigners into contact with Americans and help them to adjust themselves to the new environment. On all such occasions he plays the role assigned to him successfully and keeps up appearances. But June, sensitive and perceptive, notices at once the strangeness about him, how he sits hunched over his drink, expressionless, watching the world. She tells him: “There is something strange about you, you know. Something distant. I’d guess that when people are with you they don’t feel like they’re with a human being --- I have a feeling you’d be a foreigner anywhere” (Emphasis added). It is not only June but a few others too who come into close contact with him notice this foreignness in him. In India Babu’s sister Sheila tells him, “You are still a foreigner. You don’t belong here”.

Sindi carries his ‘foreignness’ wherever he goes, and he himself is aware of it, more than anyone else. Lonely, isolated – his loneliness ad isolation being mental rather than physical – and lacking the spontaneity of warmth of one who enjoys being with others, he cannot take pleasure in interacting with people. He extends to society too his creed of noninvolvement, and only keeps up appearances of mixing with people. Even friendship becomes a strain and an unbearable burden, though his capacity to make friends is not in doubt. With ease he makes friends with Karl. However to make friends and to participate in society wholeheartedly freely and fully responding to other people, he will have to go out
of himself, transcend his ego-centricity, and set aside his favourite notion of detachment and non-involvement as he understands them. Such is his self-absorption that he does not feel at any time the desire to belong to some place or society, and therefore does not make any attempt in that direction. Had he done so, perhaps he would have been able to overcome his “aloneness”. But he is not prepared for it and is content to say that “all shores are alien when you don’t belong anywhere”, as though the matter ends there. However one has to admit that he does not talk glibly about it to all and sundry. June is even better than him in that though she is no less lonely, she does not even once refer to it, as it would be seen later. One suspects that Sindi may be nourishing his loneliness and foreignness, without being consciously aware of it. Self-absorption can manifest itself in many subtle ways.

It is clear that in whatever society or company Sindi may be present, he is in it but never of it. Of course, he moves in society with ease, makes acquaintance, and gets on well with them. He plays the expected social roles well and keeps up an outward conformity. One could even say that his behaviour in society in exemplary. But he has no ambition of any kind to rise in society, move up on the social ladder or seek advancement in his profession. The American ideal of success, self-development, individual and material advancement which infects many a outsider visiting America, hardly affects him. Not only is he not lured by it, but he is even opposed to it. Therefore he does not seek social life on his own, nor has any ulterior motive when in society. In India, he is obliged to be present at many social gatherings and parties of the affluent, because of his association with the Khemkas. He views them all as inane and senseless exercises of those who cannot be alone and are afraid of being so. To be alone is to confront oneself, which is not easy. Because of his indifference to success, and his desire to be aloof and non-involved, Sindi is least
worried about social recognition, social expectations, or social acceptance, no matter in whatever place or society he is. Therefore he does not openly clash or come into conflict with society. He makes no gestures of protest or condemnation against social demands and expectations, even though he is sharply opposed to them. Moreover Sindi is no rebel. There is nothing for him—family or society, caste or community—to rebel against. Therefore Joy Abraham’s remark that “we fail to see in him any zeal to fight society for its cramped and convention-bound values…” is beside the point. Until he gets involved with the Khemkas and their dubious affairs, and takes by choice the side of Muthu and other hapless employees, he cannot be said to get into open conflict with any one in particular.

There is another aspect to Sindi’s estrangement and foreignness. Because he does not belong anywhere or identify himself with any particular country or culture, he does not happily experience any cultural displacement or culture shock—which Babu Khemka, for instance, experiences in America—even though he moves from one country to another of different cultures. His redemption from the malaise which afflicts him, and his integration with society takes place when he frees himself from self-absorption and supports selflessly and actively the cause of his fellow-employees.

When Sindi goes to America from England, only the theatre changes but his burdens remain the same. During the first few years he remains detached, free from desire, and non-involved, or so he believes. He mistakenly views his non-involvement and aloofness as freedom, because they actually make him a prisoner of his ego rather than free him. His self-deception and self-absorption parade as detachment. The fortification of detachment he had so carefully and laboriously built around himself to shelter himself against involvement in society and against all encroachments on his jealously guarded self begins to develop
cracks from the moment June enters his life. With the time the cracks widen. During their very first chance meeting at a party she affects him in an "unusual way",\(^20\) as no one else had before. He just cannot resist her charm, which has the overwhelming effect of an "avalanche" on him, which he can scarcely stop.\(^21\)

June is a complete contrast to Sindi and points up his deficiencies. She is all that he is not, and "could not hope to be".\(^22\) That may be the very reason for his being drawn to her. She too has her share of pressing problems in life to contend with, some of them similar to his and no less serious. As good as an orphan, her father having left her and her mother when she was still a child, she has courageously reconciled herself to his absence. She too feels lonely and insecure and finds life to be purposeless. She is aware of the inanity, pretension and hypocrisies of the people around her. But she has no illusion about herself or the world. There is a transparent honesty about her. She has no pretensions and no claims of any kind to make on her behalf. She admits that she has no clear aims in life except that she wants "to be of use to someone".\(^23\) Instead of brooding like a introvert, which Sindi is, over her unfortunate lot and generalise about life like Sindi, she earnestly attempts to take within her limits a positive attitude to life and people, which is revealed in her spontaneous gestures and actions. She radiates warmth wherever she is and has a flare for making friends spontaneously and quickly even with strangers. That is how both Sindi and Babu become her friends.

June likes to meet people and be sociable, though she is far from being a socialite. Humane and empathetic to an unusual degree she can forget herself and think of others to share their distresses and make herself useful to them as best she can. She attends the
parties intended for foreign students probably because she understands instinctively their need for a friendly hand in a strange and alien country. But her self-effacing explanation to Sindi is: “I like meeting people from different countries, especially from Asia. They are so much gentler – and deeper – than others”. Obviously in her informal and spontaneous altruistic activity, she finds meaning and purpose to her life and an answer to her loneliness. In one of her letters to Sindi’s she writes: “I do so much want to be of help to someone, Sindi. Without that life would seem so empty”. As Sindi recalls,

June was one of those rare persons who have a capacity to forget themselves in somebody’s trouble --- (she) was essentially so uncomplicated a person that whenever she saw somebody in pain she went straight out to pet him rather than analysing it a million times like the rest of us.

It is this very human quality in her that brings together her and Sindi first, and her and Babu Khemka afterwards. Ironically it also brings about finally her undeserved and tragic end because of the egocentric deficiencies of those whom she trusts and tries to help.

June is drawn to Sindi as irresistibly as he to her. Before long their acquaintance develops into an emotional involvement, love and intimacy. She appears to be entirely different from all the women he knew before. He becomes deeply sensible of her undiluted love and concern for him, and even feels vain about it. With every passing day he becomes more and more fond of her, and goes through all the familiar motions and phases of an ardent love, experiencing, pleasure, desire, longing, jealousy, hatred and possessiveness, all clear signs of his involvement. And yet it is both surprising and puzzling that he should have stubbornly resisted June’s appeal that they should get married and establish a loving
union. The reasons for his resistance are complicated and confusing as a number of contrary and conflicting strains get mixed up in them. Sometimes Sindi gives the impression of one who wants to have the cake and eat it too.

Uppermost in Sindi’s mind is his philosophy – if it could be called one – of detachment and non-involvement. His fear of involvement and his determination not to get involved come what may, runs as a refrain in the novel, even as he gets drawn to June as if by a magnet. He warns himself more than once that he should not get involved with her. Ironically, he is aware that the “commitment” was made the moment he had seen her at the dance.27 His consciousness of his involvement much against his convictions and his apprehension about its inevitable outcome begin more or less at the same time. His being deprived of happy emotional bonds and security because of his orphaned childhood must have something to do with his reluctance to get involved. But the pressing proximate cause is his experiences of disappointing emotional entanglements in England which brought acute pain to all concerned. Memories of those experience coupled with a sense of guilt continue to pierce his mind. Having made ‘detachment’ and “non-involvement” the rule of his life he likes to believe that he has found a remedy for his problems, and “conquered desire and the pain it had brought (him)”.28 This belief implies a faith in his self-sufficiency. He feels secure under this illusion until he encounters June who poses the stoutest challenge to his confidence and conviction. Their growing intimacy exposes how brittle his defenses are.

Whatever Sindi’s apprehensions be regarding emotional entanglements and their outcome, with June he finds himself “in a strange world of intense pleasure and almost
equally intense pain". As for her, her relationship with him is a very serious matter. Therefore the question of marriage figures frequently in their conversation, and she suggests, even urges, that they get married. But because of their sharply opposed views, they arrive nowhere. Sindi desires detachment and withdrawal from all involvements, but she wants and seeks them. If his detachment is tarnished by his self-absorption, her desire for involvement borders on her losing herself in his happiness. She is afraid of being selfish. Her views on marriage are clear and unambiguous. Marriage for her is both love and motherhood, and she wants to be the mother of Sindi’s children.

Sindi’s views on marriage and bringing forth children are all tangled up and are corollary to his pet notions of detachment and non-involvement as he understands them. Actually they are blend of self-pity, cynicism, withdrawal and escape from commitment to responsible action. His views expressed on different occasions but chiefly on the Christmas night to June during a crucial conversation, may be summarised thus: He does not believe in marriage. It is more “more often a lust for possession than anything else”. He has no faith in love either, and marriage is not love, but “one big illusion” that society has pounded into people. If there is anything worthwhile in love, marriage and in bringing up children as June believes, “Death wipes out everything”. And finally, “Nothing ever seem real to me, leave alone permanent. Nothing seems to be very important --- Good things and bad things appear to be the same in the long run of existence”. When this conversation between Sindi and June is on in his room, a spider is seen on the ceiling of the room walking upside down from one corner to another, exploring his inverted universe. Finally the spider having lost its hold of the ceiling it falls on the floor, as if to symbolise the sheer pointlessness and futility of their discussion as well as the aimlessness of Sindi’s
life. His views on love, marriage and life, granting that he holds them honestly, indicate that he disregards the value of human relations. His detachment becomes a euphemism for self-isolation, indifference, selfishness, and evasion of moral responsibility. It would have made him a rank hypocrite had he been conscious of it. At this stage of his life, the faith he expresses in detachment and non-involvement is not the result of any really deep and dispassionate thought and inner spiritual growth, but of ignorance and self-engrossment. He has to pay a price — a heavy price at that — before he can realise the true meaning of detachment and non-involvement and the social and personal responsibilities that necessarily go with them. The process towards it begins with young Babu Rao Khemka entering his and June’s life, and the real test of his favourite ideas commences.

Babu, the only son of an industrial magnate, comes to America for studies, and for a time he is under Sindi’s care. June finds him affectionate and sensitive. But he does not have a mind of his own, and depends excessively upon others and looks for their approval. Young, immature, inexperienced, and ignorant, he makes a number of irrelevant comments and airs his views on America and India, which could be irritating. But his “naivety” and unselfconscious expressions of his feelings attract June. Coming from a protected, strictly conservative and conventional home background, he entertains for a while romantic fantasies and illusions about the glamorous and permissive life in American society. While he is able to adjust himself gradually to the new social environment and overcome his initial loneliness, and put on an American accent, he miserably fails to cope with his studies. Sympathy and pity for his pathetic helplessness, and his moral dread of his father whose great expectations he may disappoint, make June get closer to him, chiefly to be of some help to him. This coincides with Babu’s falling in love with June with a dog-like devotion.
It is one of the ironies of her life that she should be drawn to him. Sindi’s firm rejection of her almost desperate appeal that they better get married and his dogged adherence to his views on love, marriage, and detachment, propel her towards Babu.34

With June and Babu growing closer to each other with the likelihood of them marrying becoming evident to Sindi, the already developed cracks in his barricade of detachment widen. Sindi suddenly becomes afraid of losing June. Caught in a dilemma he struggles hard to clarify to himself what should be his course of action in this situation. And he arrives at the painful decision that there is no going back on the path he had chosen, but “wait” and “stay still” and let the events to take their course. But for him it is no waiting in tranquillity and detachment, as thoughts of June getting closer to Babu continue to harass him. He begins to see that he has allowed June to slip out of his hands, though in his self-centredness he at one time believed that she would not leave him, certainly not for Babu. Self-pityingly he views himself as a points man “who realizes with dismay that he has put the train on the wrong track and there is nothing that he can do about it”.36 June’s position is made very clear in a letter she writes him when he is away at New York:

I have been seeing Babu frequently since you left. He seem to be in such low spirits most of the time that my heart aches for him --- I think he needs me. I want to be of use to him. Perhaps, as you would say, it is all a illusion : one can never be of use to anyone. Perhaps I am being selfish. All I know that I find a strange peace when I am soothing him. I do want to be of help to someone, Sindi. Without that life would seem empty37 (emphasis added).

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Sindi’s attempt to “rationalise” the situation arising out of the June-Babu relation, and view it “objectively” only betrays his self-deception. It is anything but objective. He assumes that June has gone to Babu only temporarily and would certainly come back to him. In case she chooses to leave him, he thinks he can bear the shock as he had withstood similar shocks in the case of Kathy. This line of thinking gives him such false self-confidence that when June anxiously seeks his advice because Babu has been driving her to exasperation by depending on her overmuch and expecting from her much more than she can ever give, Sindi fails to give her any helpful advice. Moreover, brushing aside her renewed and desperate appeal that they should get married, he lectures to her at length on their “aloneness” which “must be resolved from within”. As for their getting married, marriage is a delusion and not a solution to the “lonely meaninglessness of their lives”.38

After this meeting with June, Sindi finds himself in a state of mental confusion, strain, and internal turmoil. He wants her badly and longs for her return to him, although he knows that she will not. Thoughts of June preoccupy him wherever he is. His love for her is streaked with hatred and anger, that he has becomes “possessive, selfish and greedy – all that he had struggled against for years”, he himself realises. And the logical explanation he gives himself for June going to Babu inevitably, bring him no comfort. It never occurs to him that he could have saved the situation by “offering marriage as a price for retaining her”. The illusory hopes he confidently entertained for long about June’s returning to him sooner or later are shattered when she inform him that she is going to marry Babu soon.39

For June however, relations with Babu becomes a long drawn-out agony and reach a breaking point. He grows jealous, petty, irritable, and suspicious of her conduct. He is no
longer the “naive lovable, little boy”. In her helplessness once again she seeks Sindi’s help and advice. He is not surprised at her plight but concludes that there is little that he can do, since the “dream” that both of them entertained has ended inevitably: “what could I, who had so little control over his own destiny and actions, do to stem the tide whose course was set long ago”? This is clear evasion of responsibility and reveals that he continues to be locked up in his own kind of “dream”. Yet he goes to meet her to console her in her distress “at least perfunctorily”. In her presence, when he has to be most detached, he behaves no better than selfish and lustful man causing irreparable damage to June, Babu and finally himself. As Tapan Ghosh points out, “His latent desire to retrieve June from Babu, to possess her and to prove that he still holds the key to her happiness, is stirred”. He advances to himself a self-deceiving argument that June wanted a gesture of love from someone she trusted, and that act of benevolence performed in a spirit of detachment to help her to find herself. The mask of detachment falls to pieces, revealing an egotist.

Babu’s suicide baffles Sindi. His self-confidence is rudely shaken. He has no answer to June’s accusation, “Look, what your detachment has done”. But still he persists in believing that when he “had come close to gaining detachment and had acted out of goodness”, he had driven Babu “to his death”. Nevertheless he is possessed by a sense of guilt. But it is rather strange that he views June as an “accomplice” in the murder of Babu. Actually she is the worst suffer and victim in the triangular conflict, caught between one man’s self-deceptive and obstinate adherence to ill-understood and misty detachment, and another’s ignorance, immaturity and utter incapacity to understand the codes morality of American society different from those of his own society, and courageously stand by the girl of his choice.
With Babu's death Sindi cannot be any longer his old self. He feels that it has drained something out of him. With this self-estrangement all his confidence in the world is lost. What is worse all his cherished beliefs and theories are disproved at one blow, and he is left “alone and naked” with nothing to rely on. A sense of vacuity and sterility possesses him. Working on the research project brings neither escape nor solace. Dogged by guilt and stripped of all defences and supports in the face of existence, Sindi is possessed by an urge to roam the streets of the world again, to start his life afresh, experiment with himself and continue his search for meaning in life, which he had almost forgotten. He does not particularly care where he would go. All that he wants is a place where he is free from the memories of his past and where he is not recognised. Subsequently he has to realise that no one can escape his past, and it cannot be redeemed by changing places of residence. Arbitrarily by the toss of a coin he decides to go to Delhi. It is obvious that he is still very much attached to himself. Moreover he is yet to realise the sheer fallacy in his notion of detachment. What he resolutely cultivated for years chiefly to overcome painful memories and his sense of the meaninglessness of life, has only made him shirk responsibility and resort to inaction and evasion. Effectively his “detachment”, as he is to realise later, is another name for “inaction”.

Sindi’s decision to go to India by the flip of coin tossed by the bar tender, would make it seem a gamble. But he probably sees in his gloom the pointlessness of being clever and of taking precautions and making plans in advance. What he seems to know for certain is that he must leave dead wood behind and take a plunge, mentally prepared to face the situation as he approaches them. If that is so, then it is, as Usha Pathania remarks, “an unmistakable progression” towards relating himself to others, to the world, transcending
his narrow, isolated selfhood. But this is just the beginning of the process. Sindi has still a long way to go.

As Sindi makes all arrangements for his departure to India and feels an immense sense of relief, June’s letter brings him the shattering news that she is carrying Babu’s child. She herself appears to be at the point of mental collapse. This letter of June’s is remarkable for its restraint, its total freedom from self-pity and melodrama. It may be remarked here itself that one of the attractive features of this novel is Arun Joshi’s restrained handling of all emotionally charged situations. In general it may be said that he avoids overwriting and elaboration. The entire letter of June is a testimony to the strength of her character. The postscript in it – “I so much want to see you again and talk to you and touch you” speaks volumes about her need for Sindi’s help and support in the trying situation. Sindi’s reaction and response to the letter are a contrast to her exemplary restraint. He is shocked, angry and even indignant at all those responsible for June’s predicament, in particular Babu, his father and sister and his entire civilisation. It is astounding and most deplorable that instead of going at once to be of help to her in that hour of greatest need, he prevaricates and procrastinates. Though the urgency of her appeal for his help is unmistakable, he thinks of plausible arguments to put off his going to Boston. When he delays his visit by four days he does not inform her about it because it is only a “minor change”. When there is another from her reminding him of his promised visit, he feels guilty a little, but it seems pointless to explain to her his delay over the phone, as he would be going there anyhow. Such dilatoriness cannot be accidental but betrays his persistent tendency towards withdrawal, evasion, and inaction. It also smacks of a certain cowardice.
When Sindi actually makes it to Boston and to June’s house, it is too late. June is dead and had died of an abortion two days prior to his visit. Her death has a stupefying effect on him. He reaches the very nadir of his meaningless existence. Her death takes him to the very depths of despair. Unable to stay any longer in her house, he walks to the river as the dawn breaks on the dark waters, a situation reminiscent of the morning in Scotland years ago when he climbed to the top of a hill and has, as he believed, his first insight into detachment. Now as he watches the sun rising out of the womb of the universe, symbolically suggesting the dawn of a new awareness in him, the dense fog surrounding his notion of detachment and its fallacies is lifted: “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”. The recent experiences leave him a sadder but wiser man. But he is yet to travel considerable distance before he learns to translate into action this new knowledge and wisdom, which are still merely theoretical. Dispensing with ‘inaction’, which is another name for perverse and passive neutrality, he has to learn to choose what is right according to his best lights and act on it. In other words, he must learn “to relate himself meaningfully to the outside world and apply his hard-earned wisdom to real life”.

The next few weeks Sindi spends before leaving for India are a period of intense and uncompromising introspection for him, however painful and abrasive the experience be. For the first time he confronts his own reality:

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 except myself. Where Kathy and Anna had taught me to be
June's death finally broke my attachment to myself. It was here that my hope lay. (emphasis added).

In his self-analysis he does not shy away from any of his lapses and failures, from what he has done and what he has failed to do in his drifting life. He views it as therapeutic exercise. The novelist uses two suggestive analogies for Sindi's self-analysing mind and experience. Sindi sees himself as a guilty offender on trial in which his own conscience sits in judgement, and summons all those connected with him and finally himself to testify. He also sees himself as a totally sick patient spread out on a table being minutely probed into with a sharp scalpel by an indefatigable surgeon, who cuts out the rotten parts and cleans his soul. This exercise, free from self-pity, drives home to him his fatal error being absorbed in himself all along in the name of detachment, which brought about the unnecessary and avoidable deaths of Babu and June. June stays on his conscience constantly to remind him relentlessly all that she has meant to him. How much lonelier he has become with her death becomes clear to him when he finds that while he wants to talk to someone about her and thereby make her memories less painful, he has practically none to talk to: "--- as usual, I had no friends" (emphasis added). This process of self-examination is no doubt lacerating to Sindi, but it proves salutary, edifying and purifying, and helps him to gain self-knowledge.

With Sindi's arrival at Delhi the Indian phase of his experience begins. How and why does he come to India, and what does he really look for there or does he look for anything at all, has to be clearly grasped to understand the nature and significance of his Indian experience to him and his development. Had the coin tossed by the bar-tender had shown 'heads' instead of tails, Sindi would have gone to Nigeria instead of India. That is to
say, his coming to India is fortuitous rather than by conscious design and choice. The immediate impulse to leave America is to get away from himself and his memories, and to escape Babu’s ghost. Which stalks him wherever he goes. Though he knows about his Indian ancestry, he does not regard himself as an Indian, though many take him for one. He makes this point sufficiently clear to those who show any interest in him and his nationality. In coming to India he does not feel that he is returning home. Actually he is homeless, and has no home to go away from or return to. It is not a return of the native in his case. He does not seek to establish links with the country of his ancestors or discover or acquire an Indian identity for himself, as most exiles from their homeland are likely to do on returning home. Sindi does not feel the need to belong anywhere. It is true that when it is decided that India shall be his destination, he looks forward “to visiting the land of (his) ancestors with an interest (he) had not felt before”. However, he knows precious little about India but for the “wisps of the culture (his) uncle and aunt had conjured up when (he) was a boy”, with the hope that “they could give (him) a place to anchor on the lonely planet”… To supplement his hearsay knowledge of India, he pores over the pages of a guidebook on India, probably intended for tourists. Only once in a particularly gloomy reflection he refers to his Indian origin only to dismiss it. And he does not hope to find nor does he look for an anchor to his life in this country.

To know what is distinct about Sindi’s coming to India after a very long sojourn in the West, his relation to the land of his ancestors, and the problem he faces to adjust himself to the Indian environment and integrate himself with Indian society, he may be briefly compared with a few “exile” characters in Indian fiction in English. Though there are several of their tribe, just a few examples would suffice for the present purpose: Krishnan
of *The Dark Dancer* and Nalini of *Too Long in the West* both by B. Rajan, Srinivas of Kamala Markandaya’s *The Nowhere Man*, Adit of Anita Desai’s *Bye Bye, Blackbird*, and Ramaswamy of Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope*. Each of these characters presents a different aspect of the problem of returning home. The comparison attempted here is solely restricted to the motives, which urge them to return home and the consequences and complexities of their return of failure to do so. All the novels mentioned above have as a dominant motif in them the ‘East-West encounter’ as it is generally termed. But unlike them *The Foreigner* is not a novel on this theme, though a strain of it is occasionally seen in it. Whatever is said about American and Indian attitudes in the course of its narrative are incidental and not elaborated as not strictly relevant to the main thematic concern of the novel. Clashes and conflicts of interests take place at a personal level rather than national and cultural level.

All the characters chosen for comparison are Indian by birth, parentage and upbringing, go abroad for different reasons, and after some years either return home to India to face challenging problems of adjustment, belongingness and identity, and eventually reintegrate themselves with their society, or nostalgically long for their home and merely express their intention to return home at a future date. To begin with Krishnan and Nalini of Rajan’s novels, they go abroad for higher studies, Krishnan to Cambridge and Nalini to Columbia. As both belong to a somewhat conservative and conventional South Indian society, they experience during their stay abroad inter-cultural tensions and clash between the traditional values they had been brought up in and the new values that education in an alien society has bestowed on them. Both are altered and particularly impressed by the importance attached to individuality and selfhood in the West. On homecoming they feel
alienated and uprooted from their native society and find it difficult to relate themselves to their social and cultural environment. Yet they are eager to revive their sense of belongingness to it and reestablish their original identity. Krishnan's experience in this regard is more complex and even agonising than Nalini's. The narrator explains his predicament thus: "... he (i.e., Krishnan) was coming back but not to an identity, a sense of being rooted ... He was coming back to an indifferent sky, an anonymous teeming of houses, the road striking far over into a distance which not even the clenched thrust of the temple could make real". Even his place of birth appears irrelevant and meaningless to him.55

Nalini's predicament on homecoming is similar to Krishnan's. Before she went abroad, Mudalur her place of birth and upbringing was intimate and peaceful. She felt that she belonged to that village and had her identity there. But on her return, the place appears isolated, frightening and unapproachable.56 Both Nalini's and Krishnan face acutely the problem of readjustment, and have to reevaluate the terms of life they face afresh. However, they are able to resolve their dilemmas and reunite themselves with their native surroundings as their roots in their social and cultural environment remain unviolated. But it does take much effort. Nalini's is a much less complex case. She admires America no doubt, but no so much that she cannot remember her own home in India.57 Her American experience bring her supreme self-confidence so that when she has to choose a husband for herself, she goes against all caste restrictions and conventions to prefer a barber from her village because he represents for her the “reality which is India".

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Krishnan’s is a case of divided self. He is anxious to belong to his place and his people. Significantly he introduces himself as ‘V.S. Krishnan, humble student of belonging’, which implies the difficulty of the task. He re-enters a society where traditional forms of reunion and familial obligations are very important. He as an individual counts far less than his contribution to the stability and security of their home. Much against his inclination he accepts an arranged marriage and enters civil service to please his father. After his marriage both his wife Kamala and he are made aware of their position and privilege in the ruthless hierarchy of the family rather than what they are to each other. Marriage intended to integrate him with the family, does not rouse in him a sense of belongingness. His participation in the non-cooperation movement too does not bring him this sense. Kamala, as a traditional wife, is self-effacing, and believes in right action rather than what is regarded as happiness. For a time Krishnan is fascinated by Cynthia, her stubborn individualism, her insistence on the importance of the self, her sense of fairness, and her liberal humanism. He oscillates between asserting his individuality and his conformity, between Cynthia, and his wife, and tends to incline towards Cynthia. But his relationship with her breaks down because of the basic difference between them. He returns to his wife who to drown her own unhappiness is at Shantipur serving selflessly the riot-ravaged people there. Although she dies, Krishnan in his reunion with her regains his sense of belongingness and identity.

The careers of Krishnan and Nalini follow the pattern of departure from home to an alien country, experience of clash of values and the consequent loss of identity and belongingness, returning home estranged and uprooted, and finally after much struggle rediscovery of identity and rehabilitation in one’s native environment.
Of the other three "exile" characters, Srinivas, Adit and Ramaswamy, all of whom wish to return home, Srinivas just cannot do so, Adit sets out on his return voyage home but full of misgivings, and Ramaswamy intends to return, but when it is not indicated. Srinivas's is the most pathetic case. Suspected as underground activists in the nationalist struggle against the British, he and his wife Vasantha are forced to leave India. Strangely, they settle in England, the very land of the oppressions. Of the two sons born and brought up there one is killed in the world war, and the other marries an English girl and becomes one with the society of his adoption. But Vasantha dreams of returning home, to India. Srinivas can neither identify himself with England nor can he make up his mind to return home, though he cannot forget his homeland. After the death of his wife, he cannot keep his ties with his own culture intact and becomes confused about his bearings. The rapidly increasing racial discrimination in England makes him feel alienated further in spite of his long stay there. With his son deserting him, his isolation and estrangement is complete. He becomes totally rootless, having lost his identity. He desires to but cannot return to India where all the robust lifelines he had once, self-respect livelihood, family cohesion, are destroyed forever. Only in memory and waking dreams can he return to India. Lonely, desolate and alienated, he becomes a permanent exile, and dies "a nowhere man looking for a nowhere city".59

Anita Desai's *Bye Bye, Blackbird* is also concerned with Indian immigrants - 'black birds' - in England and their complex emotional relationship with the lands of their birth and adoption. Adit and Dev, unlike Srinivas and Vasantha (*The Nowhere Man*), go to England voluntarily. For Adit, something of an anglophile, England is the land of
opportunities, and of economic and social freedom. He acquires an English wife. But all that he can find there is the job of a small clerk in a tiny tourist agency. Out of homesickness he goes back to India once only to return in a few months to England, because he cannot find anything better than a ruddy clerking job. Back in England he learns to be indifferent to the insults hurled at the Asiatic immigrants. His friend Dev, once a bitter critic of England and things English, having come to England for higher studies, surprisingly develops a liking for the country even though he has to seek a job before he can ever study. He chooses to remain there because he sees vistas opening for love, success and joy. Adit’s nostalgia for home increases and reaches a feverish pitch though he tries to belong to England. And he decides to return to India his “natural condition” and “true circumstance”. As he takes a realistic view, he has misgivings about the problem he and his English wife have to face on returning to India, especially the acceptability of the English wife by his people, and society, the future of their child-to-be born, and the regaining of his identity and belongingness. Even then they set out on their homeward voyage without any assurance that it would be a successn.60

Ramswamy of The Serpent and the Rope is different from the exile and expatriate characters considered so far. He is the most self-conscious and complex of the tribe. He is firmly rooted in the tradition and culture of India and is even conscious of his Brahminical heritage. His one consuming passion is to quest for the knowledge of the Self and the Absolute of Sankara’s Advaita Vedanta. He goes to France to research on the Albigensian heresy. He drifts away from the orthodoxy of his boyhood by falling in love with Madeline and marrying her. He hopes to return to India after obtaining his doctorate. But things take unexpected turns. His marriage fails and has to be legally dissolved. Meanwhile his two
visits to India, the prior for the obsequies of his father and the second for his sister’s wedding, renew his awareness of his roots in India, his Indianness, and familial ties and responsibilities. Despite his sensitive and appreciative awareness of European culture and tradition, he cannot overcome his feeling of being a foreigner there. But paradoxically in spite of his longing for India, he feels that he would be a stranger there were he to return. Moreover there is no one he can return to, as most of his worldly ties are cut off. Moreover the India of his conception is more of an idea of his mind than a geographical entity. His sense of his being an exile is exacerbated by this view of India. Thus Ramaswamy experiences a peculiar and complex tension between his foreignness in Europe and his rootedness in India. However as his quest after the Absolute needs a Guru who alone can vouchsafe the vision of Truth, he intends to make Travancore where his Guru lives his ultimate destination. But when would he undertake this pilgrimage is uncertain, it is not likely in the near future.

Among the exile characters considered above, Sindi may have some faint resemblance to Ramaswamy, in so far as he too is an intellectual and learns to look for something beyond his egotistical self. Compared with their predicaments Sindi’s lot seems to be in many ways a fortunate one. He has no nostalgic memories of any country or society to haunt or trouble him. When he comes to India he has no expectations of any kind about the land to be gratified or disappointed like the others. He has no family and therefore has no familial obligations or responsibilities to fulfil. Having been a foreigner from the start, he remains one in India too after his arrival there until things take a fortunate and different turn without his effort and help him to get integrated with Indian society.
When Sindi comes to India he brings along with him all his problems just as he took them to America from England. Now he has the additional burden of a sense of guilt. His coming into contact with the Khemkas and getting employed in their business enterprise proves in the long run a real turning point in his life. As yet there is no perceptible change in his general attitudes, especially regarding detachment. His tendency to withdraw and evade action persists. However he maintains cordial relation with his employees and avoids any conflict or confrontation with them to be left in peace to himself.

Thanks to his association with the Khemkas, Sindi is able to observe their numerous affluent friends, their mode of life and values. He is sickened by their snobbery hypocrisy and their chasing after money recklessly regardless of the means employed. He was equally critical of the American ideal of success and material advancement. Now he can be frankly and unhesitatingly critical of the Khemkas and their money chasing tribe, because he still remains an outsider, a foreigner, and has no stakes whatsoever. Though he says more than once that he has no system of morality, he has had always a sense of justice, fairplay, right and wrong, and been consistently opposed to unscrupulous ways, because of his innate humanity and sensitiveness to human suffering. His cynical observation to June on the machine he had developed in America was that it "will throw twenty thousand people out of work and make them feel so small they will go home dead drunk". In India he sees such rank poverty and exploitation as he had not seen either in England or in America. From the time he is associated with the Khemkas and their circle, his social conscience begins to stir though rather slowly and sluggishly to start with. It takes several more months before it can become active, and meaningfully so. Only then he can hope to be integrated with society.
At the office of the Khernkas, Sindi is very much the foreigner, he does his work competently, but not as one who belongs to the place or feel for those he works with. His reaction to Ghosh the income-tax man and his talk of a proletarian revolution, is one of indifference. Even when he realises that Khemka’s tax problem is serious, he remains indifferent: “I was not involved”. If Ghosh is a ‘menace’, he “Couldn’t care less” (emphasis added). Ironically by an unexpected turn of events, the threat posed by this very Ghosh becomes instrumental in getting Sindi involved by his own choice with the destiny of the Khemkas, their business enterprise and employees. By then he has been in India for a whole year. One summer morning Sindi watches from his office window some labourers heaving in the hot sun huge concrete poles. He reflects: “At the end of the day they would get two rupees or perhaps three. Mr. Khemka, it was said, made thirty thousand a day --- It was a sad sight. The workers’ clothes were falling off in rags and sweat poured off their backs as if they had just had a shower. What was the point in all those big men like Mr. Khemka talking about God and pain so long as half-naked men had to wrestle with a beastly mass of concrete under a scorching sun? “And all for three rupees a day”. Sindi’s conscience is pricked: “There are my people --- yet I moved among them as if I was a stranger. I wasn’t alone ---”. His conscience is deeply touched and there is also a momentary identification with the labourers whom he observes sympathetically from a distance. But that is not enough. This shock of recognition is not powerful enough to urge him towards right action. Nevertheless his becoming sensitive to the plight of the exploited and poorly paid workmen may be seen as a step in the right direction towards his final integration with society.
When Khemka’s office is raided and all records are seized, Sindi’s reaction to this sudden development is that he does not want “to be dragged into the mess”. He is indifferent to the panic of his fellow employee and leaves the office abruptly. When Sheila pleads with him later to take the blame upon himself and save her father who has been arrested on charges of fraud, Sindi firmly turns down her plea, though he feels sorry for her. His considered reply to her is:

Mr. Khemka had to suffer for his own actions. In the past I had tried to put the consequences of my actions on others, or presumed to take over their actions on my own. Both had boomeranged. In the end, both had done more harm then good.

Sindi’s reply is as clean as it is candid, and free from ostentation. It indicates that he is not evading responsibility, and has grown inwardly further. This decisive reply of his has significant implications for his future conduct.

More explicitly though tactlessly Sindi tells the same thing to Khemka himself who wants him “to admit” his faults. To the enraged and frustrated employer who orders him out of the home, he says: “I’ll go --- But you can’t get rid of your sins by just turning me out. They will stalk from every corner just as they have stalked me. We think we leave our actions behind, but the past is never dead”. In this frank revelation of himself Sindi tells himself as much as Khemka that they have to reap the consequences of their actions and there is no escape from them. To Sheila who wants him to stay on he says that he has to go because he does not want “to get involved”. But this is not, it should be noted, the “non-involvement” that he vociferously preached and practiced earlier. It is neither a mere show of bravery nor a hasty decision though quickly taken.
Having found a job in Bombay after some months' effort, Sindi returns to Delhi to pick up his things. Before going to sleep he takes a general stock of himself, of what he had been and become since his days of confused adolescence, when he was "awesomely engrossed" with himself "searching for wisdom" and the peace that came with it. The past though largely wasted had its lessons to teach him. The future is likely to be as "meaningless as the past". Yet "there would perhaps be useful tasks to be done; perhaps --- - even a chance to redeem the past" (emphasis added). This brief introspection is specially significant. For one thing Sindi looks at himself with better detachment than before. For another, unlike in his introspections in the past, he now looks forward to the future inclined to making himself useful to others. That is, he is willing to act rather than seek excuses to evade. That is why when the next day Muthu asks him to take over the office he is in the frame of mind to consider the suggestion however hesitantly. His inclination to be useful to others must have been strengthened by his observation of the deplorable conditions under which Muthu and a host of others like him have been living. It is an eye-opener. On earlier occasion he had seen only from a safe vantage point the slums across the street, the bundles of soggy humanity in rags and naked children rolling in pithy pools of rain water. Now he sees at close quarters the "shabby scurvy slums", "uncovered sewers", "hillocks of soggy trash" and "hordes of naked or semi-naked children" squatting on them, and the one-room tenement of Muthu in which a dozen people, one of them tubercular, live in. They impinge on his consciousness at once. With Muthu's restrained account of the conditions of the Khemka enterprise, the gloomy prospect of imminent unemployment before the employees, makes a further impact on him.
To Muthu's request that he should take over the office to set things right, Sindi's natural and habitual reaction is that he has "no desire get involved". His "old, nagging fear of getting involved with anything, anyone" asserts itself for the moment. It is then that Muthu in a quiet voice but "firm with conviction" tells him, "Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved". The profound meaning of these seemingly paradoxical words slowly but surely sinks into Sindi's resisting mind during the long silence that ensues Muthu's suggestion. His reasoning points to the "inevitable conclusion" that for him "detachment consisted in getting involved with the world" why Muthu's briefly spoken suggestion goes home to Sindi can be appreciated if it is remembered that it comes from one who knows first-hand what it is to be involved and shoulder responsibility. He does not speak as one who reads from a textbook of precepts. His words have the weight and authority of personal experience. In spite of the desperate condition of his life he does not lose faith in life and does not forget his duty and responsibility to his family and others. His unpretentiousness and transparent sincerity do make an impact on Sindi. He reveals to Sindi, as Usha Pathania remarks, "the real meaning of life which one finds in developing sympathetic understanding of the needs of the other person and responding to them warmly". Muthu's words are an implicit reminder to Sindi of his responsibility and obligations to those he has worked with.

After listening to Muthu Sindi is obliged to think afresh on the course of action he should adopt. At one time he believed that "one does not choose one's involvement". Now in consenting though hesitantly to Muthu's suggestion "to give it a try", if he so desires, Sindi exercises a conscious moral choice in his life between the two alternatives open to him. It is most appropriate that Sindi does not elaborate on giving his consent. This

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is unlike his earlier tendency to wax eloquent on detachment and non-involvement. The occasion calls for doing rather than talking, as the problem to be tackled is clear. What matters now is his readiness to act as best he can. Sindi’s meeting with Muthu brings about a very important and quiet change in his attitude to the real pursuit of his life. He has found a purpose for his action and a goal to his life. In former days, faced with a crisis, his tendency was to move to a new place. Now he decides to stay on in Delhi, where he is, as long as he is needed. He cancels his departure to Bombay to take up a new job. And then, significantly and to the surprise of his servant, he unpacks his things and puts them back “as neatly as possible in their old places”. This simple and prosaic act has the force of a symbolic gesture, affirming his newly discovered sense of purpose and belonging. It also hints that he has begun to set his house in order.

The next morning at the office Sindi is overwhelmed by the “accumulated despair” of his fellow employees, and the “massive suffering” that lay behind their “expressionless faces” and “vacant eyes”. He is struck by the enormity of his responsibility and the challenge to be faced. It seems as heroic and impossible a task to infuse new life into a ruined enterprise as rescuing a sinking ship and taking it ashore. Even so, he applies himself to his task in right earnest, in a spirit of humility concentrating for the first time in his life on decisive action irrespective of the result: “The fruit of it was really not my concern” (emphasis added). Sindi, who has been growing though not steadily through the different phases of his life, now reaches the culmination of his growth. He has learnt to free himself from being absorbed in himself. In his desire to be selflessly useful to others, he has ultimately succeeded to forget his separateness, and achieved emotional wholeness and meaningful relatedness. Sindi ceases to be a foreigner the moment his fellow employees
seek his help with unqualified faith in him. Thus he finds the place and the people to belong to. His integration with society becomes possible from the time he decides to involve himself in responsible and meaningful action gladly sharing the burden of his colleagues without any thought of personal gain or loss. He realises that when one lives in a society, participation and sharing of responsibilities becomes obligatory and morally necessary. Moreover where right and wrong, justice and injustice are concerned, to remain neutral in the name of detachment would be moral perversity. Therefore the passive neutrality he practiced all the years will not do now, and tantamount to abdicating responsibility. Thus at long last he finds an anchor to his life. Life no longer appears absurd and meaningless. Meaningful action would not be possible in a meaningless world. In this way, Sindi Oberoi having begun his life as a ‘nowhere man’ finally becomes a ‘somewhere man’, as he does arrive somewhere, and his integration with society takes place quietly and unobtrusively.

Does the resolution of Sindi’s dilemmas and his rehabilitation in society come about much too soon, or sooner than expected, and without adequate preparation? It is properly motivated and convincingly rendered. Some reservations have been expressed in this regard by Meenakshi Mukherjee in a review. Endorsing her opinion Tapan Ghosh says “that Sindi’s transformation comes a bit hastily and --- the plausibility of Sindi’s action when he takes over Khemka’s office and performs the almost impossible task of steering it --- out of danger, may be questioned”. M.K. Naik goes a step further to say categorically that the ending of the novel is “neither adequately motivated nor prepared for earlier”. To cite just one more opinion, Harish Raizada says: “One is unable to understand whether he takes up this responsibility because of the persuasion of Muthu --- or because of his secret love...
for Sheila ---". It may be remarked that Sindi does not play hide and seek in matters of love.

In the preceding pages, the different stages of the changes that come about Sindi’s understanding of detachment and non-involvement have been traced with evidence from the text. The first major step is his realisation that “detachment” does not mean inaction and withdrawal but “right action”. It takes more than a year for him to reach the next stage of development that detachment also means “involvement” in the world when necessary, but without any thought of the fruits of one’s endeavour. During the intervening months his social conscience is stirred and his concern for others has gradually awakened to make him more keenly aware of human suffering than before. Thus he is gradually motivated and prepared for his final change or transformation. And the impact of Muthu on him, particularly the remarkably restrained and self-effacing manner in which he makes his suggestion, cannot be underestimated. The process of his final transformation begins well before he is called upon to save the Khemka enterprise. He does not become a man of action overnight. When the suggestion for action comes from Muthu and others, he identifies himself with their course, and together with their steady cooperation he endeavours to set things right in the business enterprise without worrying about the result. In the process he also finds a solution for his perplexities. The issue here is not whether Sindi really performs the impossible task of saving the battered enterprise, but how does he respond to the call for help, and how does he relate himself as a consequence to the world. All this is fairly clear from the fictional context.
Muthu’s timely reminder to Sindi of his responsibility to act in a critical situation and help his fellow employees points directly to the teaching of the Bhagavadgita about ‘action’ (Karma). Similarly Sindi’s realisation that it is imperative for him to act although the fruits of his action are not his “concern” clearly echoes the well-known teaching of the Gita, Karmanyevadhitkaresti mā phalāṣu kādācana (Chapter II, Verse 47). This is one of the profound concepts of the Gita, which have become great common places in India and part of Indian consciousness so that even an ordinary and unsophisticated man like Muthu can allude to it without self-consciousness and with conviction. The spirit of the Gita informs this novel and some of its key concepts form a part of the novel’s thematic texture. Before Sindi came to India, he had some acquaintance with the concepts of the Gita. Possibly it was one of the several books he read during his stint in Scotland. Probably he picked up his favourite ideas of “detachment” and “non-involvement” from his reading of it. But his own career until his meeting with Muthu and others clearly demonstrates how inadequate his understanding of the Gita concepts was, and what a travesty he had made of them at one stage of his life. His moral and spiritual growth however depends upon his painful and experiential realisation of the fallacies in his understanding of ‘detachment’ and their disastrous consequences, and on his discovering the true meaning of responsible action in a spirit of detachment. Therefore one cannot agree with R.S. Pathak’s view that the concepts of the Gita are “grafted on the usual stuff of existential literature”.81 As C.N. Srinath shows, Joshi by his “deft handling” of the philosophical concepts has transmuted them into “fictional enactment”.82

Pathak has also said that The Foreigner “presents detachment as a possible panacea to life’s problems”.83 And Tapan Ghosh, having pointed out how deeply Joshi is influenced by the Gita in general and in “the formulation and resolution” of Sindi’s
problem in particular, expresses the view that "one may read the novel, not without justification, as an illustration of the Karmic principle propounded by Lord Krishna in the Gita". Such statements as these, even when expressed cautiously as Ghosh does, could be misleading in that they may shift the focus from the concrete particular that the novel is to the general idea contained in it or that may be inferred from it. The Foreigner presents in concrete terms the story of particular individual the ups and downs, the failures and frustrations of his life, and his efforts to resolve his personal problems through experiential understanding of the true meaning of detachment and right action without expectations. It is not a novel about the human predicament as such, though it may have implications for it. Therefore to say that the novel presents detachment as a cure-all for life's problems is to blur its focus. There is little warrant on it for such a generalisation. Similarly, to view the novel as an "illustration" (emphasis added) of the Karma principle is to emphasise the general rather than the particular. Whatever concepts of the Gita are present in the novel are inseparable from the experiences of the protagonist as he muddles through life. He grasps their meaning as best he can according to his limited knowledge and experience of life. They have to be seen strictly within their fictional contexts in which they appear. It is significant that neither Sindi nor Muthu invokes the Gita and its concept of niskāmakarma.

Before bringing this chapter on The Foreigner to a close, it remains to compare briefly Sindi with two other fictional characters, Meursault in Camus's The Outsider, and Nirode Ray in Anita Desai's Voices in the City. The focus in this attempt at comparison is on how each character views his particular society and sees himself in relation to it. All the three are concerned with the ideas of detachment unlike Sindi, the other two are outsiders to
society by choice though for different reasons. For philosophical reasons Meursault becomes an "outsider" or 'stranger' and an absurdist. Certain familial circumstances and disappointments impel Nirode to go out of his society deliberately and even take to a bohemian life to defy all of its accepted conventions and beliefs.

The resemblances between Sindi and Meursault, who are frequently linked together by critics, are only superficial, their experiences of alienation and estrangement being fundamentally different. Sindi's experience has already been analysed in detail. Meursault is a far more complex character and very unusual too. His attitude to his mother and her death, his lady love Marie, his work and finally his trial on charges of murder, reveal how he differently looks at life and society from most people. Though he feels concerned about his mother's death and does his duty on the occasion, he does not feel close enough to her to be carried away by grief or observe the period of mourning. He enjoys Marie's companionship but the usual claims of love have no power over him. His reply to her question whether he loves her, is a frank "no". He would rather not marry, but if she wants to, he would go along with her wish. He declines the offer of a better job in Paris because he is not interested and is without any ambition. He is no romantic rebel against society and its norms. He is just being honest to himself, living from day to day unself-consciously without any hopes and expectations, schemes and plans. He makes no demands on life. His indifference to all of them is his reply to what he believes to be the indifference of the universe. It is his conviction that this indifference frees him from all human ties. It explains his attitude to his mother's death, his relations with Marie, his trial and its consequence. He is convinced of the absurdity of his existence in an absurd world. Therefore he rejects supernatural consolation and prayer for God's mercy offered by the chaplain before his death. Meursault's detachment, breath taking in its courage of
conviction and strength, is woven into his very being and determines his outsider attitude to all aspects of life. In comparison Sindi’s view of detachment and non-involvement, before he discovers their true meaning and significance especially to life to be lived in society and in this world, appears puerile. He realises that as long as one lives in society, he has his duties and responsibilities towards it, which have to be fulfilled as they are morally binding.

Nirode presents a contrast to Sindi as well as Meursault, as he is of a different mint altogether. He is an angry and anguished young man, intelligent, sensitive, artistic in temper, but cynical, unhappy, and restless. He is disappointed with his family, which is traditional but decadent and disintegrating fast. He is sharply opposed to the superficial, materialistic values of metropolitan life and its decadent traditional culture. He is sensitively aware of the general degeneration of moral values, and disgusted at the prevailing social corruption and debasement of human sensibilities. In a spirit of defiance he rejects his family, his society and all of its accepted norms and conventions, and chooses loneliness which he believes would enable him to safeguard his individuality and the integrity of his self. He affects indifference and non-involvement in life, and does not want to be responsible for any thing in life. He loathes the world so much that he consciously opts for a bohemian life. His anger is understandable but not the descent into the bohemian world. There is something morbid about his detestation of the world and withdrawal from it. But the death of his loving sister Monisha by suicide, has a shattering impact on him. It cuts into his delusion of detachment, and it also frees him from the contempt he had for people. This experience of Nirode’s is similar to Sindi’s response to the death of June. He is restored to a reverence for life and people.
Sindi in his attitude to people, society and the world, stands somewhere between the two extreme positions of Meursault and Nirode. Beginning as a rootless, lonely foreigner, a nowhere man conscious always of his foreignness, he finally arrives "somewhere", and becomes an active and responsible member of a community of people, sharing with them whatever life offers. He learns from personal experience the fallacies in his understanding of the concepts of "detachment" and "non-involvement", and discovers their true meaning and significance for his life as well as all life. Having found meaningful and sustaining relationships, personal and social, a tangible and purposeful goal to his activities, he develops a healthy attitude to life freed from his initial obsession with sickness, morbidity and death. He also discovers his humanitarian self and his identity as an individual and social being, aware of his moral obligations to those with whom he lives and works. Thus Sindi Oberoi the "foreigner" finds his home, transformed into a conscious responsible being.
Notes and References


2. Ibid, pp. 135-36.


10. Ibid, p. 78.


14. Ibid.


17. Ibid, p. 141.


23. Ibid, p. 86.

24. Ibid, p. 32.


27. Ibid, p. 70.


29. Ibid, p. 82.

30. Ibid, p. 86.


32. Ibid, p. 67.


34. Babu does not appear an impressive person by what he says or does in the company of Sindi and June. In fact as days pass by he even gets on their nerves, although June holds on to her sympathetic attitude to him. To present him in a more sympathetic light and set the balance even, the novelist gives a glimpse into the confusion, distress and agony he goes through before he kills himself by inserting into the narrative at an appropriate place some relevant extracts from Babu’s confessional letters to his sister Sheila.

35. The Foreigner, pp. 117-118.


38. Ibid, p. 126.

42. Ibid, p. 162.
43. Tapan Kumar Ghosh, p. 57.
44. The Foreigner, p. 172.
47. The Foreigner, p. 181.
49. Tapan Kumar Ghosh, p. 60.
50. The Foreigner, p. 195.
51. Ibid, p. 196.
52. Ibid, p. 17.
54. Ibid, p. 20.
57. Ibid, p. 103.
61. The Foreigner, p. 162.
63. Ibid, p. 42.
64. Ibid. pp. 197-98.
65. Ibid, p. 199.
68. Ibid, p. 218.
69. Ibid, p. 221.
70. Ibid, p. 43.
74. The Foreigner, p. 44.
75. Ibid, p. 226.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid, p. 228.
78. Tapan Kumar Ghosh, p. 64.
84. Tapan Kumar Ghosh, p. 38.