Chapter – 2

Theme of Alienation

A Study of The Foreigner
Arun Joshi is undoubtedly one of the few front-ranking novelists in Indian English Fiction. Joshi’s *The Foreigner* (1968) is the first of his five novels which marked a new beginning in the literary circles of fiction writing in Indian English. Joshi was only a student when he started writing *The Foreigner*; there was bloom in his beginning. The novel reminds us of Albert Camus’ well-known novel, *The Outsider*, though thematically both the novels have nothing in common. It also reminds us of Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and The Rope*, Kamala Markandaya’s *The Nowhere Man* and Anita Desai’s *Bye-Bye Black-bird*. A strange feeling of aloneness and aloofness prevails throughout the entire narrative. The novel is about an individual’s struggle to search for a way out of the complicated maze of life which he passes through. Joshi has touched some thought-provoking themes such as alienation, detachment, rootlessness and enduring moral values. The present chapter examines how the people face their aloneness and become alienated. Arun Joshi presents these themes through the protagonist of the novel.

Sindi (Surrinder) Oberoi, the protagonist of the novel, always feels himself lonely and he is not mingled with the society. He is described as a “perennial outsider” by Meenakshi Mukherjee. He doesn’t belong to any country, any people and considers himself as “an uprooted young man living aimlessly in the latter half of the twentieth century.” (TF 164)
The Foreigner deals with the journey of a young man, Sindi Oberoi whose parents met their end in an air crash near Cairo. So his early life makes him a perfect “foreigner”, a man who does not belong anywhere. He is a “perfect example of an Indian who pretended to be a foreigner and behaved as one.”(TF 130) Sindi Oberoi was born in Kenya to an Indian father and an English mother. He became an orphan at an early age; he has no reminiscence of his parents. He is brought up by his uncle who works as an emotional anchor, and “the thought that he [Sindi’s uncle] moved in that small house on outskirts of Nairobi gave me a feeling of an anchor. After his death the security was destroyed. Now I suppose I existed only for dying.” (TF 55-56) He has his education in Africa, London and America. He is brought up in his orphanage, he can not trace out his roots, whether he is an African, an English man or an Indian and feels himself partial and lost his roots remain concealed. He is in the darkness of alienation not knowing where to place him as uncertainty engulfs him,

Perhaps felt that I was a foreigner in America. But then what difference would it have made if I 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. (TF 55)
Sindi feels like an alien wherever he goes, even his words, behaviour let down the sense of alienation. June Blyth, his beloved, rightly remarks at the beginning of their acquaintance,

This 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. May be it’s an Indian characteristic, but I have a feeling you’d be a foreigner anywhere. (TF 29)

Later when he reaches India and comes close to Babu’s elder sister Sheila Khemka, she pointedly says that he does not belong anywhere, “You are still a foreigner. You don’t belong here.”(TF122) It shows that Sindi’s rootlessness, his foreignness is geographical, national and cultural. So he goes on from one place to another. Balachandra Rajan through Kalyanasundram makes a similar statement about Nalini, the protagonist in Too Long in the West,

You won’t fit in. You’ve joined the lost generation, out of place everywhere and acceptance no-where. You’ll always be an exile and an alien, self-created foreigner, a refugee from yourself. You can’t belong. You’ll live in two worlds and fall between two stools.31

Arun Joshi obtains much of the ideas for his theme of alienation from the existential writer Kafka who was by destiny and nature an alien. The protagonist of the novel Sindi Oberoi faces the dilemma
and troubles similar to Kafka himself. The question of his identity bothers him a lot. For where indeed did he belong? As a Jew not quite to the Christian world and as a non-practising Jew, not quite among the Jews. As a German speaking Czech, not quite among the Czechs; and as a German speaking Jew, not quite among the Bohemian Germans. As a Bohemian, not quite to Austria. As an official of a worker’s insurance company, not quite to the working class. He cannot feel at home among his office colleagues, for he knows himself to be a writer. But he is unable to live entirely as a writer either, for he sacrifices his energies to the welfare of his family. But in my family I am more estranged than a stranger. Likewise Sindi Oberoi feels:

Lying there in the bed I wondered in what way, if any, did I belong to the world that roared beneath my apartment window. Somebody had begotten me without a purpose and so far I had lived without a purpose, unless you could call the search for peace a purpose. (TF 55)

Sindi experiences “in the inferno of existential agony,” and he identifies “man’s uniqueness and loneliness in an indifferent and inscrutable universe.” To him he has no meaning of human existence at all. As a result, he becomes passive to the events of life. He is confused about his life and he feels that class-room lectures do not slake his thirst. He says his wish to his Professor, “I wish I had been taught how to live, Professor.” (TF 132)
In search of roots, Sindi keeps on changing places. Sindi’s search for himself takes him from Nairobi to London to Boston and then finally to Delhi. In Kenya he feels restless, even contemplates suicide. He moves to London to study engineering. Soon he is fed up with class-room lectures after finding them unable to satisfy his queries about his life. Sindi says “I wanted to know the meaning of my life. And all my classrooms didn’t tell me a thing about it.” (TF 142) Ultimately, he decided that he needed experience other than studying. So he joins in a night club in Soho as a dishwasher. Here he has an affair with a minor artist Anna, who has been separated from her husband. She is around thirty-five years but looks much younger and attractive. She is not really interested in him but yearns for her lost youth. Later, he becomes involved with an English woman Kathy, who also leaves him for the holiness of marriage. This affair too goes on for a few weeks; and only leaves on experience of intense sexual activity. Here, Kathy leaves Sindi for “she had to go back to her husband” and “she thought marriage was sacred and had to be maintained at all costs.” (TF 144) These incidents leave a mark on Sindi’s mind and disturb him intensely. Therefore he learns to practice detachment and non-involvement in human emotions. His open discussion with a Catholic Priest in Scotland makes him realise that:

You can love without attachment, without desire. You can love without attachment to the objects of your love. You can love without fooling yourself that the things you love
are indispensable either to you or to the world. Love is real only when you know that what you love must one day die. (TF 145)

Sindi believes that “There is no end to suffering, no end to the struggle between good and evil.” (TF 39) His emotional and mental predicament does not permit any respect for the society or religion just like Meursault of Camus’ The Outsider. Sindi feels that his life is meaningless: “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.” (TF 55)

Sindi always feels “I suppose I existed only for dying; so far as I knew everybody else did the same thing. It was sad, nonetheless.” (TF 56) Once talking to Khemka he emphasizes:

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 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! (TF 118)

Sindi leaves for Boston with the purpose of doing Ph.D degree in Mechanical Engineering. Here Sindi’s extravagant way of life takes a
turn when he meets June Blyth “at one of those balls the International Students Association laid out every year.” (TF 21) June is attracted by Sindi because of her beauty and resemblance with Kathy. Their relationship gradually develops into intense love. June suddenly expresses her desire to him that “Why don’t we get married?” (TF 90) Sindi refuses and says: “I am not the right kind of man for you. Some people are not really cut out for marriage.” (TF 91) His refusal to marry June can only be looked upon as a mere escapism from being drawn into involvement. The novelist Arun Joshi depicts the protagonist’s limited understanding. Sindi clings to the false image and deceives himself with the belief that he has attained the spirit of ‘detachment’. But June is an American girl with her own idealistic dreams and desires. She is ready to become the wife of an Indian even though she will have to submerge her real identity and values of life. Anita Desai strikes a similar note when portraying Sarah as a nowhere person in *Bye-Bye Black-bird*, who after marrying Adit “becomes nameless, she had shed her name as she had shed her ancestry and identity.” But it is the Indian man June loves, who doubts the values of marriage and attachment. Debating on the necessity of marriage, Sindi becomes to the conclusion:

Marriage was more often a lust for possession than anything else. People got married just as they bought new cars. And then they gobbled each other up.” (TF 60)
Sindi considers that in most marriages love ended and hatred took its place. He feels: “The hand that so lovingly held mine would perhaps some day ache to hit me.” (TF 63) In short he does not “believe in marriage.” (TF 60) He is afraid of possessing and being possessed by anybody and marriage means both. June realizes the negative approach of Sindi, she decides to prefer Babu. Babu is a friend of Sindi and an Indian who is prone to depend on her. In her sense of sacrifice and love for the mystical, Arun Joshi’s characterization of June finds a common thread in his later novels in as much as Bilasia of The Strange Case of Billy Biswas and Anuradha of The Last Labyrinth. According to Hari Mohan Prasad, “She is a symbol of ‘the sensate culture’ striving towards the ‘ideational’.” Her inner motive finds itself exposed in her desire, “I like meeting people from different countries especially people from Asia, They are so much gentler – and deeper – than others.” (TF 29)

Babu sees America as a heaven for indulgence in free-sex and where many a dream finds expression. Once Babu argues with Sindi, “What is the good of coming to America if one is not to play around with girls?” (TF 20) Joshi describes Babu as a dreamer who lived in a world of dreams. June and Babu come closer to each other with realization that their desire and attraction for each other is mutual. Not like Sindi, Babu belongs to an orthodox Indian family, measures a woman’s honesty on the basis of her virginity. Babu loves June and decides to marry her but it recurrently worried by jealousy and
suspicion. In an argument with June, Babu comes to know that she has been sleeping with Sindi. He is terribly shocked and rushes into his car violently, deciding never to return. Ultimately he kills himself in a whirl when he comes to know of June’s infidelity. We observe that although Babu pretends to have embraced the American mode of life and values, yet he cannot leave behind his embedded Indian value in respect of virtue of chastity and fidelity in an American girl. Arun Joshi depicts Babu’s sense of Indianness through his love for his elder sister Sheila and fear for his father Mr. Khemka who is the dictator of the family. We observe the remarkable filial awe of Babu when he fails in the examination and frustrates the expectations of his father. He tells Sindi: “what would father say when he comes to know about this? They would all be ashamed of me.” (TF 95) Joshi presents Babu as a person who does not have an individuality of his own. He is only the shadow of his sister and father and though he agrees to marry June, is not bold enough to put the fact before his father. Later he can not bear the infidelity of his beloved and ends his life in an act of cowardice. It is clear that the lure of the West makes him abnormal and ‘Maya’ (illusion) in the form of June destroys him. So Joshi shows the fickleness and ambivalence in the temperament of both Sindi and Babu. We perceive that both fear to make a resolution of their own as they swing between the sense of detachment and filial awe, “If Babu’s hair thin morality is indiscreet, Sindi’s detachment is unwise. While Babu is incapable of making resolutions Sindi doesn’t make them because the pain of breaking them is too unbearable.”36
O.P. Bhatnagar also states that “They were two aspects of the same psychology ... one foolish, the other unwise. One was under-controlled, the other over-controlled. Both were basically cowards.”

Like Meursault of Camus’s *The Outsider* he always feels bored with the world and like Neil of Philip Roth’s *Good bye Columbus*, does not want to shoulder even ordinary responsibilities. That’s why Sindi shies away from marriage in order to be free from responsibilities that it would bring in its wake. Here the novelist Joshi brings to our notice the protagonist’s lack of confidence and faith in himself. After Babu’s death June accuses and Sindi says, “Look, what your detachment has done.” (TF 148)

One day Sindi comes to know through a letter from June who is pregnant with Babu’s child. Then he thinks a lot and decides to marry June. But when he reaches there he finds June dead during an attempted abortion. Thus Sindi’s sense of detachment turns out to be a mental disaster to him and it intensifies with the death of June and Babu. He confesses,

All along I had acted out of lust and greed and selfishness and they had applauded my wisdom. When I sought only detachment I had driven a man to his death. It all seemed very logical now that it had happened. A few hours before it would have seemed so improbable. You never expect death to hit somebody you know.” (TF 8)
Sindi starts feeling “more alone and naked in the world than I had ever felt before.” (TF 149) Thus we find that as Radha remarks “the armour of indifference and non-involvement which he wears is made of wax. The slightest warmth of love melts it away leaving him naked and helpless.”

Originally Sindi mistakes detachment to mean inaction but we see in it, detachment consisted of right action and not escape from it. “The gods had set a heavy price to teach me just that.” (TF 193) Joshi gives us the first clue of Sindi’s self knowledge through the realization of his past blunders.

His brief visit in America makes Sindi realise that he has become status less, nameless and has lost his identity. He loses the capacity of existentialistic choice; a flip of a coin decides where he has to go. Through this incident the novelist tries to depict the meaningless existence of the alienated hero, Sindi Oberoi. He wants to resolve his dilemma from within by knowing the meaning of life:

America had taught me all she could and now it was time to leave. 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 of the world. I didn’t know where I would go or what the future held for me, but one thing was certain: my search had to continue. I had solved some of the questions life had posed for me; but many more remained to be solved..... I
only wanted a place where I could experiment with myself.

(TF 149)

In search of a new life, to forget his horrific past Sindi leaves for Delhi, the native place of his ancestors. Sindi accepts a job as Personal Assistant to Mr. Khemka and helps him in all his activities. Sindi is surprised by the life style of Mr. Khemka and his friends. He feels it as a more sickening version of the way of life which he had experienced in America. He admits,

I took a long time figuring out how I was expected to behave. I had no desire to cause a disturbance. Ultimately I decided to forget about the figuring. It would have been impossible for me to behave as the others. (TF 15)

Sindi feels like an outsider, a stranger, a foreigner even in India too. He feels like a fish out of water even at the social parties held at Khemka’s place. He recollects the occasion only as,

Old men fat with success came with their plump wives. They drank and then they had gorgeous dinner. They talk of money and how to make more of it. They left the impressions that they could but up anybody they wanted. The fat men left me with a district feeling of being out of the place. (TF 16)
He feels himself a stranger in India to both the corrupt rich and the half-naked struggling labour. Thus the novelist depicts the sense of loneliness, rootlessness, boredom in Sindi’s character.

Khemka’s dictatorship and the way he exploits the needy people like Muthu and Jain fills Sindi’s heart with aversion. His observation about Mr.Khemka sums up his character. He tells Sheila,

Your father loved him like a factory. Babu was a pawn in your father’s hand with no will or life of his own. That’s way he couldn’t bear the thought of Babu marrying June. He wanted to marry Babu to a fat Marwari girl whose dowry might bring him half a dozen new factories. (TF 51)

When the income-tax people raid Khemka’s office and take away all the important documents, Sindi openly says to Khemka that he is a crook and deserves the worst punishment. He determines to leave his job and he gets another job in Bombay. Mr.Khemka is arrested and the office gets disturbed. At this moment Muthu, a low paid employee of Khemka’s office requests him to take over Khemka’s business and save Muthu and other workers from starvation. Muthu gives Sindi the divine message that he learns the non-attached action of *The Bhagavad Gita*, “Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved.”(TF 188) His vision of life is changed. Sindi takes over the office and with the co-operation of the workers; business shows signs
of great success. He accepts the demand of the employees to take over the management of the firm:

As I entered the room I had a strange sensation, something I had never before felt in life. I felt as if I had been dropped on a sinking ship and charged with the impossible task of taking it ashore. The men looked up at me unblinking, their expressionless faces reflecting neither love nor scepticism but only accumulated despair of their weary lives. Until the moment I had not realized how considerably my visit to Muthu’s home had affected me. If that was the sum total of Muthu’s life, God alone knew what massive suffering lay behind those vacant eyes. It almost overwhelmed me. (TF 189)

Thus we see that Sindi a man of non-involvement gets gradually involved in big business and starts having a sense of belonging. It is strengthened more with the increasing relationship between Babu’s sister Sheila and Sindi. Arun Joshi gives us ground to hope that Sindi will soon find a loving wife in Sheila; thus breaking the sense of non-involvement and detachment. June had been Sindi’s main temptation and the lure of the West, but Sheila becomes by and large his liberation who leads him to self awareness and self knowledge. Arun Joshi depicts the evolution of Sindi’s character through the process of self – affirmation and self – realization.
Sindi’s alienation is spiritual and not geographical. He himself confesses that “foreignness” lies within himself which leads him to many a crisis. From the beginning he is infatuated by the desire to find “the meaning of life” and “to do something meaningful.” (p.14) He fulfils his desire by taking up the responsibilities of Khemka’s business upon his shoulders. It can be noted that Sindi who thinks himself to be alienated arrives at a sense of belongingness. Meursault in Albert Camus’s *The Outsider* remains an outsider, detached and indifferent to whatever happens to him. Sindi’s detachment and cynicism was only a thin veil which breaks away with the onslaught of belongingness. Though the novelist portrays the protagonist as homeless and alien everywhere, but by the end of the novel he successfully makes an effort to conquer the self and reconcile with fate.

Joshi makes use of existentialism in the philosophy of karma, *The Bhagavad Gita*’s concepts of “detachment” and “involvement” to bring out the inner feeling of protagonist Sindi Oberoi. Babu’s and June’s unnatural death in the novel gives us a clue to Joshi’s rejection of the American way of life and his inability to appreciate the traditional Indian approach represented by Babu. Sindi journeys through escapism to a sense of responsibility and arrives at self-realization. He takes up the responsibility not only of himself but also of the factory and labourers which makes him a more balanced and matured character. Sindi, the self-seeker now seeks liberation
through involvement in the affairs of fellow-human beings. The novelist at the end of the novel portrays Sindi as reborn with the dawning of self awareness and self-realization. We observe that selfless action, self-knowledge and self-surrender enable Sindi to kill his ego and selfishness. He resolves his dilemmas from within and attains a universal dimension.

Arun Joshi in his novels makes use of Indian mythology, metaphors and symbols; for varying moods and intensity of emotions. Joshi’s protagonist Sindi can be identified with Karna, the great character of *The Mahabharat* because Karna is faced with the problem of “belonging”. Just as Sindi, Karna too could not “belong” anywhere. Sindi in this novel finds himself placeless and rootless, “An uprooted young man living in the latter half of the twentieth century who had become detached to everything except himself.” (TF 164)

So Joshi compares Sindi with a tree without roots. He is orphan for whom the only reality of his parents is a “couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs.” The recurrent fall of “A spider aimlessly walked upside down from one corner to another, exploring his inverted universe.” (TF 90) The playing of cards is the symbol of man’s pitiable position in the universe. Arun Joshi again makes use of the spider image to symbolize the creation of temptation; Sindi too gets caught in the web of illusion. By using the symbol of bow and arrow, Arun Joshi portrays June as “Rati”, the paramour of “Manmadha”, the God of love in Hindu Mythology. June is the
A temptress who captures Sindi in her web with her beauty of youth. The title *The Foreigner* is itself symbolic as it portrays the protagonist’s sense of metaphysical anguish at the meaningless human condition.

Throughout the novel we move across a series of reflections on freedom, suicide, love, marriage, life, detachment etc. Sindi undergoes a journey throughout the novel, beginning from Boston to Delhi. It is a journey from alienation to arrival, from selfishness to sacrifice, the thought of self to the larger society, from being to enabling. The novel which begins as a crime story ends as a mystery. The central message of the novel is from *The Bhagavad Gita* but it bends and balances the Western beliefs with the tradition and wisdom of India without over playing either. The novel is a fine study across cultures. It deals with the theme of the meeting of the West and the East at the level of human emotions. K.R.S. Iyengar points out that “there is a colourless cosmopolitan quality about the novel.” Sindi is an embodiment of cosmopolitanism. His only identity is that he is a human being. One may not agree with Iyengar to whom “that cosmopolitanism is somewhat disconcerting,” but it is in the fitness of things and the need of the hour to be cosmopolitan. It is large-heatedness, sheer generosity that leads one to feel the entire earth or universe a family - “Vasudhaika Kutumbam”. Arun Joshi manages to deal with the theme of East-West encounter with admirable dexterity. O.P. Bhatnagar points out that,
The Foreigner is not only a novel with a fine aesthetic vision rendering the subtle complexities of attitudes and emotions, in a language which has verve, ease, suppleness, but it also marks a definite improvement over all other novels in English on East-West middle.\textsuperscript{41}

The East and the West have their own social and cultural milieu. Sindi makes love with several girls and gains “experience” of sex but does not get entangled with any one of them in marriage. Sindi considers that marriage is marriage is more often for lust than anything else. Babu projects a “secret image of an Indian Casanova” (TF 21) and considers America a dreamland of free sex as he emphatically questions: “What is the good of coming to America if one is not to play around with girls?” (TF 20) Like a typical Indian snob, he declares: “I think it is a wonderful country. I would never go back to India if I had the choice.”(TF 78) But Sindi and even June know that Americans are not “very congenial towards foreigners.” (TF 80) Arun Joshi reveals through Mrs. Blyth how Americans laugh at poverty in India. Their snobbish attitude is pronounced in their charities they give to India. Karl almost shouts: “You Indians and your mealy-mouthed philosophies!” and mock at Gandhian non-violence and non-cooperation.

Sindi finds America “a place for well-fed automations rushing about in automatic cars”, and much “too clean and optimistic and empty”. June is not acceptable to Khemka and his daughter Sheila as
she (June) does not know the traditions, the language, the customs and the religion of India and she, therefore, cannot be married to Babu. Sheila further accuses June of not being “virtuous” as she is “not a virgin.” Sindi laughs at the sex-centred morality of India and tells Sheila. “So you think one of these Marwari girls is really superior merely because of a silly membrane between her legs?” (TF 52)

Arun Joshi rejects the American way of life. June is a representative American character. She is accustomed to free sex life of America. She finds no sense in Babu’s avoidance of physical contacts with her before wedding. She tells Babu of her pre-marital relations with Sindi. At this, Babu is surprised and shocked. He calls her “a whore”, hits her in the face, goes out and commits suicide in a car accident. Afterwards, she, too, meets a similar tragic death. Having come to know that she is pregnant by Babu who is no more alive, she feels utterly frustrated. She dies during the course of an operation for abortion. Thus, Arun Joshi disapproves the American way of life symbolized by Babu. He 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: “Aano bhadra krtavo 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.”42 O.P. Mathur
rightly views Sindi’s quest for identity as a ‘yatra’ a pilgrimage from “existentialism to Karmayoga.” It brings about a moral growth in Sindi.

At the end of the novel, Sindi 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 in the land of his ancestors.” Ultimately, he comes to terms with his “foreignness” and concentrates on decisive action of taking over the business of Khemka’s concern as “there would perhaps be useful tasks to be done” (TF 185) in the future, and, thus, he would be lucky to have “a chance to redeem the past.” (TF 185) We can 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.” (TF 189)

Robert Scholes says “Fiction is movement.” The story confesses of a process of change. As Joy Abraham remarks “A man’s situation changes or he himself is changed, or our understanding of him changes. These are the essential movements of fiction.” Various changes in the atmosphere have symbolical significance. The sudden dropping of the temperature during the night stands for the relief from
the mental tension received through wanderings and ruptures in love. "The dawn" (TF 185), after the night is over, indicates the state of “boodhi” or knowledge of the self by way of the emergence of light within him. Rains by the dawn bring in a welcome change in Sindi. The clear sky in the afternoon when Sindi goes to meet Muthu symbolises the light of knowledge and the clarity of vision that he is going to achieve. The bronze figure of dancing Shiva, which Sindi comes cross in the drawing room of Khemka, has a symbolic value. “Shiva” is both destructive (Rudra) and constructive (Shiva). The dance of Shiva releases Sindi from illusion. 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 “Karmayogi”.

The moral upliftment in Sindi can be observed here. The healthy creature in him ultimately changes into a humble man who is essentially human and is eager to learn lessons from the problems of life. He has the competence to modify himself and thus, he saves himself from the doom. All the incidents in the novel like academic success, break of trust in love and friendship, suicide, death and the downfall of Khemka’s business contribute to his wisdom. Joshi suggests that the sufferings in the world are caused by misconception of certain ideas, and that there is always a way out of sufferings if one is really ready to learn.
Most of the images are related to death and are from the field of technology. Arun Joshi himself admits: “The world which I know well is the industrial world which has not so far been handled in a novel.”

Sindi describes June to Sheila as he describes an automobile:

“Tall and slim, with blonde hair and large blue eyes.” I described her like an automobile: light grey with a radio and heater, or red over black with white sidewalls. (TF 49)

All the way through the novel, the idea of “foreignness” is kept before the reader. The insecurity, remoteness and alienation associated with the word “foreigner” from the entire construction of the novel shows the protagonist’s sense of metaphysical anguish at the meaninglessness and purposelessness of the human condition. These existentialist ideas have been so cleverly handled by Arun Joshi and that the novel is never allowed to have an overdose of philosophy like the novels of Raja Rao, and certainly, it is the flow of narrative that arrests our attention and makes it, as Khushwant Singh puts, a “compelling” work of fiction. C.N. Srinath rightly remarks: “It is the deft handling which transmutes a philosophical concept into fictional enactment.”

Sindi is spiritually detached from the world, which he seems to realise. He is isolated from the very web of relationship that constitutes society. Sindi’s search for himself takes him to London, Boston and India. His affair with Anna and Kathy leaves a scar on his
mind and disturbs him intensely. He learns to practice detachment and non-involvement in human emotions.

Later, Sindi expands friendship with a Catholic priest in Scotland where he is employed in a library. He talks with the priest about several matters related to religion, God and mysticism. Slowly his ignorance vanishes and his vision becomes obvious. He gets to spiritual heights, as he tells June:

Suddenly, I felt a great lightening, as if someone had lifted a burden from my chest and it all come through in a flash. All love – whether of things, of persons, of one self – was illusion. Love begot greed and attachment and it led to possession. (TF 145)

He refuses to marry June because he believes that in most marriages love ended and hatred took its place. He is afraid of possessing and being possessed by anybody and marriage means both. Sindi’s withdrawal from life, love, marriage leads June to Babu, an Indian friend of Sindi. Babu loves June and decides to marry her but is frequently haunted by jealousy and suspicion. Frustrated by Babu’s behaviour June wants to return to Sindi. He tries to comfort her and help her find herself by making love to her, again without any serious intent:

Months of struggle to satisfy Babu’s whims and innocence had left her depleted and now she wanted a gesture of Love from somebody she trusted. “Was I to say no? I had
come all the way to help her. That was perhaps all I could
do for her. (TF 182)

Babu cannot bear the infidelity of his beloved June and ends his
life in an accident. After Babu’s death June accuses Sindi and says,
“Look, what your detachment has done.” (TF 148) June who is
pregnant with Babu’s child also dies during the abortion. Thus the
confused and blundering approach of Sindi to the concept of
detachment has cost him two lives, both dear to him. Seized with the
sense of guilt or self-contradictions he progresses toward an insight
into the nature of life and action. This detachment of The Gita does
not mean inaction as Sindi takes it to mean. Lord Krishna had
warned Arjuna against inaction and in this novel the deaths of two
persons closest to Sindi are a warning to him, which he full
understands:

Detachment at that time had meant inaction. Now I had
begun to see the fallacy in it. Detachment consisted of
right action and not escapes from it. The Gods had set a

Heavy price to teach me just that. (TF 204)

Sindi wants to resolve his dilemma from within by knowing the
meaning of life. Like Conrad’s Jim, he decides to start life in another
place where he can experiment with himself afresh: escaping from an
aspect of his being that “appeared that most decayed.” (TF 186) He
decides to leave America – but for which country, Nigeria or India?
The spin of the coin favours to go to India and makes him happy at
the prospect of his returning to the land of his ancestors, land of his future self-fulfilment and salvation. Sindi believes that “there is no end to suffering, no end struggle between good and evil.” (TF 39) This is significant of what Lord Krishna tells Arjuna:

\[yada-yada hi dharmasya\]

\[glo\textit{nir bhavati bharata}\]

\[abhyutthanam adharmasya\]

\[tada\text{" }^\prime\text{ } tmanam srjamy aham. (IV, 7)\]

That is: “whenever there is a declaim of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, O Bharata (Arjuna), then I send forth (create incarnate) Myself.”

Despite his realization of the meaninglessness of the past, he feels that there is a need to redeem it by useful tasks. He is now a disillusioned; sad but wise man who is able to look at life objectively and dispassionately. With a view to doing ‘something meaningful’ (TF 14), something that can make him forget himself, he joins the business of the dead Babu Rao Khemka’s father. This in itself is a step in the right direction; his preoccupation with self seems to be crumbling. For the first time, he comes face to face with a reality that he, preoccupied as he was with his own suffering and blinded by his detachment, has hitherto ignored. He has realized that the life flows through despair, loneliness, selfishness and vanity as well as through
love, sympathy, hope and compassion. He is struck by the bronze figure of the dancing Shiva in Khemka’s drawing room:

For a moment, just one brief moment, I was struck by the intense beauty of the divine dancer. America, India, Egypt, all mingled behind him in aeons of increasing Rhythm. The dance went on unheeding, and yet comprehending all. What did it matter if Babu was dead, And I living merely to keep up appearances. (TF 14)

With the expansion of his vision, levels of his consciousness unfold. The sorrows and delights, the possessions and bereavements of the ego dissolve into unreality. All that appeared important to him only the moment before, are now viewed by him as no more than a brief illusion. His mind is now hard set to re-orient itself. The berries of detachment gradually melt away at the lukewarm touch of his bottomless humanism and compassion. Two of the strongest passions known to man are aroused in him – anger at Khemka’s dishonest practices and love for the suffering poor. As Lord Krishna tells Arjuna:

\[
\text{pavitrnaya sadhunam} \\
\text{vinasaya ca duskrtam} \\
\text{dharmasamsthapanarthaya} \\
\text{sambhavami yuge-yuge. (IV, 8)}
\]
That is: “For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age.”

When Sindi visits Muthu’s family, “the accumulated despair of their weary lives” (TF 189) makes him accept the employees’ unanimous demand that he should take over the management of the imprisoned Khemka’s firm. He persuaded himself for it with the most selfless of motives: “I felt as if I had been dropped on a sinking ship and charged with the impossible task of taking it ashore.” (TF 189) At long lost he arrives at the right conclusion that, for him, “detachment consisted in getting involved with the world.” (TF 189) It is from Muthu that he learns the non-attached action of the Bhagvad Gita. Coming very close to the concept of non attachment of result of doing any work articulated in the Bhagvad Gita:

\[ \text{karmannyavadhikarste ma phalishu kadachana} \]

\[ \text{ma karmaphal heturbhurma te sangostva karmani. (II, 47)} \]

Here Lord Sri Krishna asks Arjuna “to do his work without concerning about the fruit at all and having no attachment to inaction.”

Sindi takes over the office and with the cooperation of the workers; business shows signs of great success. Now Sindi a man of non-involvement gets gradually involved in business and starts having a sense of belonging. It is strengthened with the increasing relationship between Babu’s sister Sheila and sindi. June had been
Sindi’s main temptation, but Sheila becomes his liberation who leads him to self-awareness and self-knowledge.

Deeply aware of his new orientation in his way of life and thought, Sindi twists to his name “Surinder” by calling himself “Surrender Oberoi” (TF 191) and hopes that the future may provide him a “chance to redeem the past.” (TF 185) Sindi seems to have arrived at the truth that “action is better than inaction”25 and that one should learn to be non-attached:

\[
yajanarthathkarmano’nyatra loko’yam karma-bandhanah
\]

\[
tad-artham karma kaunteya mukta-sangah samacara. (III, 9)
\]

That is: “Save work done as and for a sacrifice this world is in bondage to work. Therefore, son of Kunti (Arjuna), do thy work as a sacrifice becoming free from all attachment.”52

Sindi, journeys through escapism to a sense of responsibility and arrives at self-realisation. He takes up the responsibility of the factory and labourers, which makes him a more balanced and matured character. Arun Joshi portrays Sindi as reborn with the dawning of self-awareness and self-realisation. Sindi’s ego and selfishness is killed by Selfless action, self-knowledge and self-surrender.

The Foreigner protects strong affirmations: right detachment and meaningful action, confrontation with evil and corruption, humanitarianism and love of the people, faith in the operation of
destiny and a quest for peace, fulfilment and salvation within one’s own cultural parameters. What Sindi learns from life and suffering is not much different from what Krishna had preached about the right type of action.

Arun Joshi’s inventions and discoveries make Sindi realise his mistakes. Sindi Oberoi seriously searches for meaning of life. From Boston to Delhi has been a journey from alienation to arrival, from selfishness to sacrifice. This is coming out of the “foreignness” and realising that there are other tasks to be done in future even if those are as meaninglessness as of the past. The custom of non-attachment involves the practice of charity, courage and generosity. Non-attachment imposes the adoption of an intensely positive attitude towards the world. The non-attached person puts an end to pain, not only in himself but also, to such pain as he may cause on others. Thus Sindi qualifies to be “blessed” and “good”.

Sindi Oberoi’s transcendence is very clear in his detached and yet compassionate commitment to work in order to involve himself meaningfully in the community. He has towards the end found a heaven after the vigorous quest of meaning that has shaped his life and tormented his mind.