CHAPTER-II

THE FOREIGNER

The Inner Crisis and Alienation
Arun Joshi in his novels depicts the plight of the modern man and the helplessness of human relationships. The world of Arun Joshi’s novels orbits round the highly alienated characters. It can be noted that he is passionately concerned with the dilemma of human loneliness. His writings echo the influence of Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre and other existential writers. Albert Camus and Sartre emphasized that alienation was inherent in the evolving character of man’s existence as a “stranger” in the world. Like Albert Camus, Joshi’s writings are mainly addressed to the isolation of man in an alien world and the estrangement of an individual from himself, the society and the culture. He unravels the different phases of crisis in modern man’s life.

Arun Joshi tries hard to tackle the dilemma of the evolution of the human personality in an alien world. He finds that self-alienation can affect an individual worse than social alienation and this is a great obstacle in the path of an individual’s mental and psychic development. This chapter examines how these people face their inner crisis and become alienated as also the manner in which the novelist portrays these characters especially the protagonist.
Arun Joshi’s first novel, *The Foreigner* is one of the most compelling existentialist works of Indian - English fiction. It reminds us of Albert Camus’ well-known novel, *The Outsider*, though thematically both the novels have nothing in common. Since the novel is also based on East-West encounter, 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 loneliness and aloofness prevails throughout the entire narrative. Sindi’s case has obviously an existentialist orientation which can be looked upon as a study that shifts from innocence to experience back and forth.

Meenakshi Mukherjee describes the hero of *The Foreigner* as a “perennial outsider”. Sindi finds himself always lonely and is never at ease in the world in which he has to live. He belongs to no country, no people and regards himself as “an uprooted young man living aimlessly in the latter half of the twentieth century”. (p.195) He is a spiritual exile who feels lonely even in a crowded bar.

The novel centres round a young man, Sindi Oberoi whose parentage and 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”. (p. 159). Sindi Oberoi is a Kenya born Indian of an Indian father and an English mother. Orphaned at an early age, he has no recollection of his parents. He is brought up by his uncle and has his education in Africa, London and America. But within him he can not trace out his roots, whether it be an African, an English man or an Indian and feels himself incomplete and lost and his roots remain hidden. He lies in the darkness of alienation not knowing where to place himself as insecurity overwhelms 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”. (P.61)

He feels like an alien wherever he goes, even his words, behaviour betray the sense of alienation. June rightly remarks at the beginning of their acquaintance, "I have a feeling you’d be a foreigner anywhere”. (p.35) Later in India Sheila Khemka pointedly says that he does not belong anywhere, “You are still a foreigner, you don’t belong here”. (p. 144). B. 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, a self-created foreigner, a refugee from yourself. You can’t belong. You’ll live in two words and fall between two stools”

Joshi derives much of the ideas for his theme of alienation from Kafka who was by destiny and nature an alien. The protagonist of the novel *The Foreigner* faces the dilemma and problems similar to Kafka himself. The question of his identity or roots troubled 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”. (Letter to his father-in-law)⁴.

Similarly Sindi Oberoi feels “in what way, if any, did I belong to the world that roared beneath my apartment window” (p. 61). He is devoid of the sense of belonging and experiences a feeling of detachment everywhere
he goes. Similar is the case in Nayantara Sahagal’s novel *A Time To Be Happy*, where the protagonist Sanad Shivpal, the son of a rich man is faced with problems of regaining his roots and belonging, which is very vividly portrayed when he mourns his fate: “I don’t belong entirely to India. I can’t. My education, my upbringing and my sense of values have all combined to make me un-Indian. What do I have in common with most of my country-men?” (*A Time To Be Happy*, p. 147).

Sindi’s case is a typical projection of alienation, he is isolated from the very web of relationship that constitutes society. Sindi’s search for himself takes him to London, Boston and America. In Kenya he feels restless, even contemplates suicide. He shifts to London where he has an affair with a minor artist Anna, who 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 sacredness of marriage. These incidents leave a scar on Sindi’s mind and disturb him intensely. Thus he learns to practice detachment and non-involvement in human emotions. His open discussion with a Catholic Priest in Scotland makes him realise that one “can love without attachment, without desire”. (p.170).
Sindi's emotional and mental predicament does not permit any respect for the society or religion just like Meursault of Camus' *The Outsider*. He believes that “There is no end to suffering, no end to the struggle between good and evil” (p. 43).

He feels that his life is purposeless: “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” (p. 65).

Sindi always feels he “existed only for dying and so far as he knew everybody else did the same thing. It was sad, nonetheless”. (p. 62). Once talking to Khemka he emphasizes:

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 (p. 136)

Sindi's prodigal way of life takes a turn when he meets June Blyth in Boston. Their relationship gradually develops into intense love. His refusal to marry June can only be looked upon as a mere escapism from being
drawn into involvement. The novelist portrays the protagonist's limited understanding. Sindi clings to the false image and deludes 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 chord 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 comes to the conclusion;

"Marriage was more often a lust for possession than anything else, people get married just as they bought new cars. And then they gobbled each other up", (p.66)

He believes that in most marriages love ended and hatred took its place. "The hand that so lovingly held mine would perhaps some day ache to hit me" (p. 69). In short he does not "believe in marriage" (p. 105). 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, a friend of Sindi and an Indian who is dependence prone. 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”⁵. 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” (p. 32).

June and Babu come closer to each other with realization that their desire and attraction for each other is mutual. Unlike Sindi, Babu has his roots in India and represents the typical Indian fantasies. Babu sees America as a paradise for indulgence in free-sex and where many a dream finds expression. He argues with Sindi, “what is the good of coming to America if one is not to play around with girls?” (p. 23) Joshi portrays Babu as a dreamer who “lived in a world of dreams” (p. 59) Babu loves June and decides to marry her but is frequently haunted by jealousy and suspicion. Ultimately he kills himself in frenzy when he comes to know of June’s infidelity. We notice that though Babu pretends to have embraced the American mode of life and values, yet he cannot leave behind his ingrained Indian value vis-a-vis virtue of chastity and fidelity in an American girl.
Arun Joshi depicts Babu’s sense of Indianness through his love for his elder sister and fear for his father who is the tyrant 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” (p. 111). The novelist 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 place 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 obvious that the lure of the West makes him abnormal and ‘maya’ (illusion) in the form of June destroys him. Thus the novelist depicts the fickleness and ambivalence in the temperament of both Sindi and Babu. We notice that both fear to make a resolution of their own as they oscillate 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”.

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”.
Sindi's obsession with the idea of detachment makes him shrink from his responsibility. Like Meursault of Camus's *The Outsider* he always feels bored with the world and like Neil of Philip Roth's *Goodbye Columbus*, does not want to shoulder even ordinary responsibilities. That why Sindi shies away from marriage in order to be free from responsibilities that it would bring in its wake. Here the novelist brings to our notice the protagonist's lack of confidence and faith in himself. After Babu's death June accuses Sindi and says, "Look, what your detachment has done" (p. 174).

June who is pregnant with Babu's child also dies during the 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". (p. 6).

And he starts feeling "more alone and naked in the world than I had ever felt before" (p.175). Thus we find that the armor 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." (p. 193) Joshi gives us the first clue of Sindi’s self-knowledge through the realization of his past mistakes.

A brief sojourn in America makes Sindi realise that he has become statusless, 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 had. 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 possesses 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 question my existence had posed for me; but many more remained to be solved . . . I only wanted a place where I could experiment with myself. (p. 185).
He leaves America and decides to come to India in search of a new life. He hopes that India will provide him, "a place to anchor on this lonely planet". (p. 176), But his hopes are shattered. He finds India no better than America. In India he comes across different types of people with various vanities and "different ways of squeezing out happiness out of a mad world". (p. 208). Thus we find Sindi Oberoi a perfect foreigner even in the country of his origin.

Sindi accepts a job as Personal Assistant to Mr. Khemba and helps him in all his activities. Sindi is disgusted 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 (p. 15).

Though labelled as an Indian, he feels like an outsider, a stranger, a foreigner 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 buy up anybody they wanted. The fat men left me with a district feeling of being out of the place (p. 16)

He feels himself a stranger in India to both the corrupt rich and the half-naked struggling labourer. Thus the novelist depicts the sense of loneliness, rootlessness, boredom in Sindi’s character.

Khemka’s tyranny and the way he exploits the needy people like Jain and Muthu, fills Sindi’s heart with disgust. 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 why 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". (p. 56)

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 deserved the worst punishment. He determines to leave his job and never to come back but 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. It is from Muthu that he learns the non-attached
action of *The Bhagavad Gita*, “Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved” (p. 225). Sindi takes over the office and with the cooperation of the workers, business shows signs of great success. 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 processes of self-affirmation and self-realization.

Sindi Oberoi’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 obsessed by the desire to find “the meaning of life” and “to do something meaningful” (p. 14). He fulfills 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.

Arun 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 give 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 myself". (p. 195).

Therefore Sindi is compared to 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 the spider from the ceiling which aimlessly walks upside down “exploring his inverted universe” and the playing of cards are the symbols 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 “Kama”, the God of love in Hindu Mythology. June is the temptress who captures Sindi in her web with her beauty and youth. The title The Foreigner is itself symbolic as it portrays the protagonist’s sense of metaphysical anguish at the meaningless human condition.
The Foreigner is indeed a serious novel. 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 in cross 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”\(^1\). 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”\(^2\), 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 - “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”. Arun Joshi manages to deal with the theme of East-West encounter with admirable dexterity. “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, surpleness, but it also marks a definite improvement over all other novels in English on East-West middle

Arun Joshi, through The Foreigner, has the vantage-ground of surveying both the East and the West in an objective manner. He chooses Sindi Oberoi, a Kenya-born Indian, as the protagonist. He is a “foreigner” both for the East and for the West. His mother is a British lady and his father is a Kenyan - Indian. Everywhere and for every one he is a “foreigner”. In America, June rightly remarks: “I have a feeling you’d be a foreigner anywhere. (35). Back in India, Sheila points out, “You are still a foreigner. You don’t belong here”. (!49).

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. He believes: “Marriage was more often a lust for possession than anything else. People got married just as they bought new cars” (71). Babu projects a “secret image of an Indian Casanova” (23) 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?” (23). Like a typical Indian
snob, he declares: “I would never go back to India if I had the choice”. (95). But Sindi and even June know that Americans are not “very congenial towards foreigners”. 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 mocks at Gandhian non-violence and non-cooperation.

Sindi finds America “a place for well-fed automatons 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”? (60).

Human beings with their vanities and illusions are the same everywhere. Sindi is as much a foreigner in India as he has been in America. Even in India he finds the same American mechanisation “in the stagnant deadness or Mr. Khemka’s world”.

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Arun Joshi, it so appears, 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 June and the ignorant and orthodox Indian 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: “Aa no bhadra kratavo yantu vishwatah”, that is, “Let all the noble thoughts come to us from all sides”.

At this stage, Sindi’s search for authentic existence ends. He eventually achieves the state of a happy co-existence and harmony. He not only settles in his business but also with Sheila and, above all, with himself. This is “a pursuit after awareness - the Advaitic method of searching for one’s identity which is typically Indian”. 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. It is certainly, a step towards right direction, towards the supremely blessed state of human existence as
exemplified in the last verse of the *Rigveda*, the English rendering of which is the following:

"Let your aims be one and the same:
Let your heart to joined together
May your minds be in accord, and
At peace with all, so may you be"\(^\text{16}\)

Sindi, at the end of the novel, turns out to be a pure human being, who is ready to sacrifice, to share with Muthu, Sheila and other factory men, with 'hearts' “joined together”, so his mind rests “in accord, and at peace with all”. For him, there is peace within and peace around. “Having become a ‘Karmayogi’ he finds his equanimity and salvation”\(^\text{17}\) in the land of his ancestors. Ultimately, he comes to terms with his “foreignness” and concentrates “on decisive action” (242) of taking over the business of Khemka’s concern as “there would perhaps be useful tasks to be done” (234) in the future, and, thus, he would be lucky to have “a chance to redeem the past”. (234). We see how there is altogether a change, an upward movement, in the character of the protagonist. He comes to realize the change in the concept of “detachment”. Previously, it was a mere illusion. Now, he is led to “the inevitable conclusion that, for me, detachment consisted in getting involved with the world”. (239).
“Fiction is movement”¹⁸ says Robert Scholes. The story admits of a process of change. “A man’s situation changes or he himself is changed, or our understanding of him changes. These are the essential movements of fiction”¹⁹. 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 (234), 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 Khemaka, 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”.

We notice the moral upliftment in Sindi. The lusty beast 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, breach 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, of red over black with white sidewalls". (57). The image seems to be muddled when he says: "I stood in the graveyard of cars".

Throughout the novel, the idea of "foreignness" is kept before the reader. The insecurity, remoteness, alienation, and transitoriness associated with the word "foreigner" form the entire edifice of the novel that portrays the protagonist’s sense of metaphysical anguish at the meaninglessness and purposelessness of the human condition. These existentialist notions have
been so cleverly handled by Arun Joshi that the novel is never allowed to have an overdose of philosophy 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."21.

The *Foreigner* delineates a Sartrean protagonist in the process of acquiring a love for life and the people and becoming a sort of Karmayogi, a believer in right and useful actin. Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist of the novel, has no domestic or cultural moorings. He is a "perfect example of an Indian who pretended to be a foreigner and behaved as one" (159). Sindi Oberoi, and Indian by origin, brought up to Kenya and who received his early education in Africa and London, has been studying engineering in America. He is a Kenya born Indian of an Indian father and an English mother. Orphaned at an early age he is brought up by his uncle. Within him he cannot trace out his roots, whether be it an African, an English or an Indian. He feels himself incomplete and lost and his roots remain hidden. He lies in the darkness of alienation not knowing where to place himself as insecurity overwhelms him:
I felt like that because I was a foreigner in America. But then, what difference would it have made if I had lived in Kenya or India or any other place for that matter? It seemed to me that I would still be a foreigner. My foreignness lay within me and I couldn’t leave myself behind wherever I went (65).

He feels like an alien wherever he goes, even his words and behaviour betray the sense of alienation. In India Sheila Khemka, sister of Babu Khemka, says to Sindi: “You are still a foreigner, You don’t belong here” (149). B. Rajan’s *Too Long in the West* also makes a similar statement through Kalyanasundaram about Nalini:

Your won’t fit in You’ve joined the lost generation, out of place everywhere and acceptance nowhere. You’ll always be an exile and an alien, a self-created foreigner, a refuge from yourself. You can’t belong You’ll live in two worlds and fall between two stools”23.

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
America. His affair with Anna and Kathy leaves a scar on his mind and disturbs him intensely. He learns to practise detachment and non-involvement in human emotions. His discussion with a Catholic priest in Scotland makes him realise that one "can love of June Blyth, but is haunted by the meaninglessness of everything including his love. 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" (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" (184). 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. The detachment of *The Gita* does not mean inaction as Sindi takes it to mean. Lord Krishna had warned Arjuna against inaction and the deaths of two persons closest to Sindi are a warning to him, which he fully 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 escape from it. The Gods had set a heavy price to teach me just that (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 the most decayed" (186). He decides to leave America - but for which country, Nigeria or India? The spin of the coin favour of India makes him happy at the prospect of his returning to the land of his ancestors, land of his future self-fulfilment and salvation.
Earlier Sindi believed that 'the past cannot be redeemed' (150). Despite his realisation of the meaninglessness of the past, he feels the 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' (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 realised 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 (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 has appeared important to him only the moment before, are now viewed by him as no more than a fleeting illusion. His mind is now hard set to re-orient itself. The barriers of detachment gradually melt away at the lukewarm touch of his subterranean 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. When he visits Muthu’s family, “the accumulated despair of their weary lives” (240) makes him accept the employees unanimous demand that he should take over the management of the imprisoned Kemka’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” (239-40). At long lost he arrives at the right conclusion that, for him, “detachment consisted in getting involved with the world” (239). It is from Muthu that he learns the non-attached action of *The Bhagvad Gita*. 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 adds a new orientation to his name “Surinder” by calling himself “Surrender” (242) and hopes that the future may provide him a “chance to redeem the past” (234). Sindi seems to have arrived at the truth that “action is better than inaction”24 and that one should learn to be non-attached:

Yajnarthat karmano’nyatra

loko’yam karma-bandhanah

tad-artham karma kaunteya

mukta-sangah samacara25

(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).

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. Selfless action, self-knowledge and self-surrender enable Sindi to kill his ego and selfishness. He resolves his dilemma from within and attains a universal dimension. Thus Sindi’s seems to illustrate:
karmano hy api boddhavyam
boddhavyam ca vikarmanah
akarmanas ca boddhavyam
gahana karmano gatiḥ
twenty-six

(One has to understand what action is, and like-wise one has to understand what is wrong action and about inaction. Hard to understand is the way of work).

_The Foreigner_ enshrines 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.

Before bringing this chapter on _The Foreigner_ to a close, it remains to compare briefly Sindi with two other fictional characters, Meursault in Camus _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 familiar 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 Sinid's response to the death of June. He is restored to 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.
REFERENCES


10. Arun Joshi, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (New Delhi: Orient paperback, 1987) P. 22. (All further references to the novel are from this edition).


12. Ibid. P.


