



Tilting Towards The Past: The Dilemma of Sindi Oberoi in Arun Joshi's 'The Foreigner'

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Abstract

This study intends to focus on the tilting of Arun Joshi's protagonists towards the past and his trying to explain the existential problems in the context of the Indian tradition of detachment and Karmayoga. Sindi Oberoi in The Foreigner, Billy Biswas in The Strange Case of Billy Biswas or Som Bhaskar in The Last Labyrinth, face an existentialist dilemma. According to R. S. Pathak, "Joshi's novels read like the spiritual odyssey of the twentieth century man who has lost his spiritual moorings" (109). His fiction reinforces an increasing awareness of man's rootlessness and the consequent feelings of anxiety and alienation that afflict him. A close look at his fiction, however, brings multidimensional perspectives of his characters who, on the surface level, remain entangled in the cobweb of being and meaning of life but seek in India's Hindu past and sensibility answers to these afflicting questions. In addition, they find answers to their unflinching queries in the teachings of Buddha that have been an integral part of Indian ethos. While going back to Indian culture, his characters become aware of their historical past and its advantages and find peace and meaning only after embracing it. This study aims at identifying the inner sources of Sindi's life which sustain him in his worst crises and how he leans against his past, the sensibility of being an Indian which delivers him from the curses of modern living.

Keywords: Arun Joshi; Foreigner; Sindi; Gita; Indian sensibility; past

Introduction

With the publication of *The Foreigner* (1968) Arun Joshi emerged as an important Indo-English novelist. In an enthusiastic review, Kale Morsch referred to *The Foreigner* as "one of the finest novels to come out of India" and went on to compliment the author for presenting from within, a view that is "tumultuously open and never boring." She recognized Joshi's competence in realizing a novel which is "ruthless, compassionate, shocking and sometimes downright brutal" (Asnani, 21). Murali Das Melwani believes that the novel represents the effects of alienation on sensitive Indians of mixed heritage, as the protagonist in *The Foreigner* is an alien everywhere because he "shares three cultures" (2). Some writers take time to evolve as a craftsman. Their early novels seem raw products of a writer unsure of themes and craftsmanship. Not so with Arun Joshi. His very first book put him in the first rank in the world of Indo Anglian writings. In an early commentary on the novel, Kabita Sarkar stressed that the novel was about the hero's "inability to love...[and the need] to be loved (21)." Hailed as "one of the most compelling existential works of Indian English fiction" (Madhusudan Prasad, 51) the novel has been described by Siddhartha Sharma as "irradiating Indian sensibility..." (27). To Hari Mohan Prasad the novel marks



Joshi's contemporary sensibility etching out the inner wasteland of the archetypal modern urban everyman" (28). This also is true that the novel can be fully seen as justifying the Karmic principle propounded by Lord Krishna in *Gita*, in Karamayoga, chapters II and III. Other critics also have commented upon the merits of *The Foreigner*. Shankar Kumar finds it "dealing with the themes of alienation, the absurd, the sordidness and seediness of the human existence" (61). To Vachaspati Dwivedi, the novel has "an unusual authenticity" (27).

Dealing with Loneliness

Joshi exhibits the agony of loneliness in uncovering the psychological conflict in the character of Sindi Oberoi in his quest for meaning through a series of relationships. Impressed by the authenticity and insightful peering into agonised psyche, Meenakshi Mukherjee comments "*The Foreigner* is the first Indo-Anglian novel to deal with a genuine Indian predicament without compromise and without clichés since Anita Desai's *Voices in the City*" (103).

In *The Foreigner*, the story is told in a series of flashbacks with a clever ordering of past events to maximize suspense. Though the narrative includes Babu, an Indian student in America, June, a simple and passionate American girl, and Mr. Khemka, a Delhi industrialist, the novel is in the main the story of Sindi Oberoi, a rootless young man. The story is narrated from Sindi's point of view. The division of the novel orders the events, as the first part lights up the beginning of relationships, the second growth, and the last, defeat and destruction, the emblem of modern Indian scenario.

Sindi's detached view of life and the world, his typical relationships with others, all put him on the same pedestal as Albert

Camus' Meursault. If Meursault "the stranger" is an Algerian Frenchman, Sindi Oberoi "the foreigner" is "a Kenya-born Indian Camus" (D.R. Sharma 42). At times there is a parallel reproduction of Camus' words in *The Foreigner*. C. N. Srinath points out that June, Babu, Sheila, Mr. Khemka – all these come alive in this small world of foreigners. For "each of them is a foreigner in a sense" (119).

The prime concern here is with the gradual evolution of Sindi Oberoi from a negative philosophy of detachment to its positive aspect. In the beginning he depends on his own philosophy of non-involvement for happiness, which results in the death of Babu and June. But he slowly learns that real detachment from men and matters comes when one performs one's duty sincerely without any desire for the result, as laid down in *Gita*. This is what the modern man must do to get real happiness in a world where everything is in doldrums. The message of *Bhagwadgita* is sound and clear. It is : "Fulfill all your duties; action is better than inaction. Even to maintain your body, Arjuna, you are obliged to act. But it is selfish action that imprisons the world. Act selflessly, without any thought of personal profit" (*Bhagwadgita* 3.8-9).

Born of mixed parentage, Sindi is without a sense of belonging to society no matter where he stays, whether in England, in America or in India. His search for self takes him across continents with no tangible results. He believes that possession generates pain because it entails involvement.

Arun Joshi takes us to both the East and the West and highlights their warring cultures. This may be deliberate since the novelist, being an Indian, focuses on the regenerating character of Indian ethos and sensibility. In the novel we have descriptions of warring cultures of East and



West. *The Foreigner* puts these two cultures side by side. Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist, is a product of cross roads of the West and the East. His dilemma is socio-psychological. Born of an English mother and an Indian father, he is brought up by his uncle in Kenya and gets his education in East Africa, London and America. Deprived of parental love familial bonds and cultural roots, he grows up as a rootless young man with a built-in fissure in his personality. In an indifferent tone he tells Mr. Khemka about them:

For the hundredth time I related the story of those strangers whose only reality was a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs (10).

He remembers the days when his parents were killed in an air crash and he needed them most for the growth of his personality. He does not believe the tragedy:

I said they had been killed in an air crash near Cairo and that I had been brought up by an uncle in Kenya. I wanted to add that I did not particularly miss them, that it was too long ago for me to remember but I thought that might be misconstrued. (11)

He feels some kind of security in his uncle but the uncle's death adds to his misery forcing him to lead the life of a foreigner. He thinks himself insecure and without an anchor:

I had not felt like that when my uncle was living. It was not that I loved him very much or anything—as a matter of fact we rarely exchanged letters—but the thought that he moved about in that small house on the outskirts of Nairobi gave

me a feeling of having an anchor. After his death the security was destroyed. (61-62)

Genesis of Alienation

Sindi Oberoi is denied parental love, family affection and cultural roots. He grows into a wayward man and finally becomes a wanderer alien to his own culture. He has no longer any sense of security because of his isolation from his own family and the society. His mental agonies and predicament can be seen in the following lines:

But you at least knew what made an ass of a man; we do not even know that 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 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 think of it I don't even have a reason to live (135-136).

Although he has some mission, some purpose, and some desire in life, he has withdrawn from action. He desires to be a saint, and wants to escape pain and harsh realities of life. He tries in many ways but fails miserably. He wants to do something to get out of attachment but finding no answers to these strange questions, he is internally hurt. He records the pain of these internal wounds, this state of self-pity:

There were things, I wanted, only I didn't know how to get them. I wanted the courage to



live as I wanted; the courage to live without desire and attachment, I wanted peace and perhaps capacity to love. I wanted all these. But above all, I wanted to conquer pain. What could I have done with the directorship of a Company if the ball of pain still hung around my neck like a dead albatross I wanted an answer to the questions that my suffering had left with me like swollen carcasses strewn on river banks after a flood. Only after I knew what my purpose was, could I begin to fulfil it. (138)

Sindi has been an alien throughout his life. Right since his days in Kenya, London and Boston, he had undergone various changes and varied experiences. Once, while in Kenya he thought of committing suicide and when he came to London his dull roots stirred to a little life in his relationship with Anna and Kathy. A girl like Anna sought to find out her lost youth and to live for him but in response he gave her a sense of illusion and shows his liking for Kathy. These experiences and the burden of broken relationship disturb him intensely.

From Alienation to Illusion

So his detachment has created an illusion in his life. He knows intimately the relationship with June and Babu in Boston. He takes a new lease of life when he opts for June, an American girl. His relationship goes deeper but his defences of detachment crumble down when he learns that she wants to love, marry and create a home for her. His sense of sacrifice and love for the mystical in her desire, is revealed hereunder:

I like meeting people from different countries, especially people from Asia. They are so

much gentler and deeper than others, don't you think? (32).

In the split personality of Sindi Oberoi, thus, Arun Joshi surveys the prejudices and illusions of the East and the West. He investigates this point also through an American girl June and an Indian boy Babu. June likes to meet foreign students and the parties organized by the Foreign Student Office, while International Students' Association also helps her to know other cultures. In one such meeting she meets Sindi Oberoi and comes very close to him. But on his part Sindi maintains a kind of detachment towards her.

It is here that Babu enters. Fascinated by the fantasies and illusions of much publicized glamorous dreamland of America, he finds America a paradise for those seeking free sex. He is an Indian boy who does not know the intensity of attachment outside the country with foreign cultures quite unknown to him. June knows that she is in love with Sindi but cannot refuse to oblige Babu. She even does not want to make it known to Babu and in this way her dilemma intensifies and her sense of sexual gratification tears her from within. Finally, she comes to compromise with her tension and Sindi gives an account of her love with him:

We made love with a strange fierceness that was as excruciating in its pleasure as it was painful. And then just after the final moment her body was thrown into a paroxysm of spasms. She shuddered under me in a thousand convulsions gasping for breath. She bit into my shoulder until blood came out and then suddenly I discovered that she was crying. I put my arms around her and tried to calm her down. She bit



her lip and tried to hide her face in the pillow. Then something seemed to break within her and she burst into uncontrollable sobs (125).

A move towards Indian Ethos: from Attachment to Detachment:

Against this cultural background Sindi Oberoi cultivates a sense of detachment to overcome painful memories of the past. He wants to avert the tragedy of June and Babu when he feels his responsibilities and involvement in it. He soon realizes his sense of detachment and objectivity when he finds values in life. He starts speculating about these things objectively but not realizing that objectivity was just another form of vanity begins to see the fallacy in it. Detachment to him, then, consisted of right action and not escape from it.

Sindi's confused approach to detachment has cost him two lives, both dear to him. The "detachment" of *Gita* does not mean inaction, which Sindi had taken 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. It was not even detachment out of which Sindi had made love to June. It was from, he says, merely a desire to prove that he still held the key to June's happiness:

I had presumed that I could extricate her from the web of her own actions: that I could make her happy by simply standing still and letting her use me whichever way she wished. Nothing could have been farther from the idea of detachment. That was a fatal presumption. (208).

The suicide of Babu and the death of

June, both arising from Sindi's confusion of attachment and detachment, mark a turning point in his career and he decides to leave America—not yet decided where he will go – Nigeria or India? The spin of the coin in favour of India makes him happy at the prospect of his returning to the land of his ancestors. A thrill of joy spreads through his body and he celebrates the occasion.

'Foreigner' as Metaphor

This thinking of Sindi Oberoi reaches the depths of human problems of socio-cultural existence. The word 'foreigner' finds a symbolical value in the larger context of human existence. It provides ample opportunity for the study of cross cultures. We also come to know individual and human problems against the background of different cultures. It is not simply the question of cultures but because of his twice removal from his country of birth that he is alien everywhere. He wishes to achieve equipoise through non-attachment but in vain. It is his delusion that he can live uninvolved and unaffected. His advice to June breaks his emotional tie and proves to be a self-delusion when he says:

Marriage would not help, June. We are alone, both you and I that is the problem. And our aloneness must be resolved from within. You can't send two persons through a ceremony and expect that their aloneness will disappear (126).

Sindi's feeling of insecurity and meaninglessness of life compels him to defend the delusion; he is passing through a crisis as he has a different view. He finds it inevitable, sad and painful and also a deliberate act of madness:

It is different with me. I have no delusions to bank upon. I can't marry you because I am incapable of doing so. It would be like going deliberately mad. It is inevitable that our delusions will break us up sooner or later (120).

Here Sindi assumes a false image and make believes to be a self-deceiver with the ideas that he has developed about detachment and delusion. He advises Babu when the latter is in a delicate position:

Women are desirable creatures but they can also hurt you. We all make use of each other even though we do not want to. In your part of the world you marry only once in a lifetime. It is quite a serious matter. Don't just rush into a wrong thing for a temporary need (117).

Money ruins life but without money a man cannot have a station in life. Sindi has also observed these facts of life. It is man's weakness to have greed for money without the checks and balances of sound culture and tradition. He examines two facts of life—poverty and riches – and easily differentiates between the two. His long travel from one country to another and his wide experience with the cultures of different countries has given him internal satisfaction to think about the life of the poor and the rich alike. So he says:

I had read much of inequality in India; now I could see it masquerade as company law and the amendments of parliament. I had no morals to apply one way or the other, but that fat man left me with a distinct feeling of being out of place. We were looking for

two different worlds. (16)

At times he passes through psycho-analysis. He blames American culture for causing disturbances in his life, for the disorder he undergoes, and the obsession he faces. His faith in God dispels the money-worship which the American culture had put as a priority. He realises his position as an outsider in America. In a disgusted tone he minimizes the burden of culture in the following lines:

I was full of love and sadness at the same time. Even if I loved her and she loved me it would mean nothing, nothing that one could depend upon. I was not the kind of man one could love; I had learnt that long ago (38).

Sindi is a foreigner but he knows the reality of life in America. He suffers a lot but he never takes it otherwise. He maintains: There is no end to suffering, no end to the struggle between good and evil” (41).

Sindhi falls in love with June in spite of his vigorous attempts to avoid the temptation. He feels all the time that “there was only a temporary bond of love between us” (75) but even that temporary bond cannot be resisted because it makes Sindi forget this strangeness, loneliness and even his search for detachment for those few moments. But what constantly keeps on nagging him is his knowledge that “I was not the kind or man one could love; I had learnt that long ago” (38). Even the lady owner of the café near university where June and Sindi often meet, describes Sindi as “Slippery as an eel” and “a shadow” (82). And the point soon comes when Sindi feels he had gone bankrupt of love as he later explains to Sheila: “Life is not a business account losses of which can be written against the gains. Once your soul goes bankrupt, no amount of plundering can



enrich it again” (138). The problem with Sindi is that although he loves June as much as he loves himself but he does not love himself much either. He desires and loves June but only as an object from which he attempts to be detached. Kabita Sarkar very aptly sums up his dilemma when she says that despite his “inability to love, what he obviously wants is to be loved (10).” But his almost pathological fear of involvement and the intrinsic pain in the process saps “the vitality of his existence and turn[s] him into a foreigner who is obsessed with the desire to preserve his individuality by jealously guarding his freedom of choice and action (5).” He fails to see love as a fulfilling and creative force and his fear of love as a destroying force is obsessive. June, who regards the purpose and fulfillment of her life in being of use to someone, turns to the young Indian student in America, Babu Rao Khemka, after getting disappointed from Sindi. Both are engaged to be married but just before marriage, the relationship breaks down. Sindi makes love to her when she is terribly depressed because of the failure of adjustment with Babu in a belief that he is helping her find herself. But he forgets that “she belonged to Babu and there were three and not two persons involved (172).” Babu, being frustrated emotionally, due to his academic failure, the fear of his father’s roaring image before him and the suspicion that June is carrying on with Sindi, quarrels with her and in a fit of desperation commits suicide. This tragic and unexpected episode of Babu’s death sends Sindi’s mind with its theory of detachment reeling. When June accusingly talks of his theory of detachment, he does realize the futility of his theory which had done no good but had driven a person to his death:

What I had considered beyond good and evil had produced evil on a gigantic scale; and

what I had thought to be the remedy for pain had at one stroke created pain that was like a bomb shell exploding under my nose. . . . Baby had kicked out all my beliefs and disproved all my theories (175).

It is only after June’s death immediately after Babu’s that, sitting on a rock near the river, Sindi experiences a new insight into the mystery of existence which carries him a stage further from the incomplete lesson of his London experiences. The tragic knowledge dawns upon him :

Detachment at that time had meant inaction. Now I had begun to see the fallacy in it. Detachment consisted of right action and not escape from it. The gods had set a heavy price to teach me just that (193).

From Detachment to Insight

The realization comes to him, in a tragic manner, that if one had to practice detachment, it is not merely to be detached from the world but also from one’s own self. His inability to perceive this exacts the toll of June’s and Babu’s lives. Whereas Sindi has learnt detachment from others, through Kathy and Anna, June’s death finally breaks his attachment to his own self too. And it is only towards the end that his realization is consummated through Muthu. He requests him to overtake the management of the company. Sindi tries to convince him that there was no fun in his getting himself involved but Muthu’s comment that “Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved (225)” pushes through the mists of Sindi’s theory of non-involvement the wisdom that “detachment consisted in getting involved with the world (226).” In the end, he does realize that detachment

does not consist in non-involvement but in right action.

Sindi, June and Babu have different roots and all of them are trying for existence in other's culture. Babu is quite a different sort of boy. He has his roots in Indian soil, but wings in America. He loves June, decides to marry her but his conventional morality comes in the way when he discovers that she is in love with others also. He is haunted by jealousy and suspicion but he can't resist his desire for June. He tries to forget his roots and wants to destroy the process of changes that may occur here. He gives June all she needs but she is also in a reckless condition. She dangles between Sindi and Babu. The philosophy of detachment and temporariness of love does not suit her. She pleads her case with Sindi:

I had wanted to belong to you, but you did not want it. You are so self-sufficient, there is hardly any place for me in your life — except perhaps as a mistress. Babu, on the other hand, was on the edge of a breakdown—and still is for that matter. He loves me more than he loves himself—that's more than what can be said for you. In return I am prepared to give him all that I have (158).

When Babu comes to know that Sindi is in love with her without lust or passion but simply to help her find herself, he decides to kill himself. In his innocence he is destroyed in the strange ways of the Western culture. June also dies after his death. Her death symbolizes cultural lag. The two cultures of East and West hardly meet. While June is a complex character, Babu is a simple character having Indian roots and middle class values. Sindi Oberoi is responsible for the death of both, though he feels a sense of guilt and self-

contradiction. He feels like an insecure man and harbours a deep rooted feeling of unreality. He wants to justify his identity through his contacts with others but ends up losing both individuality and identity. He suffers from the psychosis of engulfment. His relationship with Anna, Kathy and June fails as he cannot make out a complete union in any case. His conversation with June gives an account of his fear psychosis which he tries to hide:

I said I didn't quite know except that whatever I had seen so far in life seemed to indicate that 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. I said I imagined it was since everybody said so, but as far as I was concerned, love that wanted to possess was more painful than no love at all. One should be able to love without wanting a lot more harm than good. One should be able to detach oneself from the object of one's love (67).

Sindi is preoccupied with the sense of possession of a girl like June. While he tries to preserve his identity he is terrified with the fear of being possessed. He fears to be united in marriage because he sees his existence doomed. He works on the theory that "one should be able to love without wanting to possess." He has no courage to draw a meaningful lesson:

All love—whether of things, or persons, or one self—was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion. Love begot greed and attachment, and it led to possession. Absence of



love does not mean hatred. Hatred is just another form of love. There is another way of loving. 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 (170).

His initial feeling after arrival in India and after seeing his employer Khemka get into serious trouble with Income Tax people, was that it had only been a change of theatre from America and the show had remained unchanged. He still wanted to remain uninvolved. He had confided to Sheila earlier:

I withdraw from action for another reason, I first want to know the purpose of action. There is no purpose in life. There is perhaps a little purpose in right action. In action without desire (220).

But, step by step, his much-vaunted detachment crumbles down. Two of the strongest passions known to man are aroused in him—anger at Khemka's dishonest practices and love for the suffering poor like Muthu who had been cheated by Khemka:

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. These are my people, I thought, And yet I moved among them as if I were a stranger (207).

Insight into the Reality of Things: from 'Surinder to Surrender'

Now at long last he reaches the conclusion that for detachment consists in getting involved with the world. He decides to accept the employees' unanimous demand that he should take over the management of the imprisoned Khemka's firm. Like Arjuna, he gets aware to the right kind of involvement and the right kind of action with which his selfish desires have nothing to do.

Realizing the true nature of his situation, he gives a twist to his name, "Surinder" and calls himself "Surrender". This message of self-surrender is embodied in Chapter VIII, verse 7 of *Gita*, which Radhakrishnan analyzes so:

All actions of our lives are to be surrendered to God who encloses, penetrates and gives meanings to our lives (224).

Sindi thinks that in many ways his past had been a waste, but it had not been without its lessons. He had started adult life as a confused adolescent, awesomely engrossed with himself, searching for wisdom and the peace that comes with it. The journey, he thinks, had been long and tedious and still is not over:

And the future? In an ultimate sense, I knew, it would be as meaningless as the past. But, in a narrower sense, there would perhaps be useful tasks to be done; perhaps, if I were lucky, even a chance to



redeem the past (234).

The New Karmayogi:

What Sindi had once said to June has now become the guiding principle of his life. His belief that one can love without attachment, without desire to the objects of one's love finds meaning in his life. Arun Joshi seems to reject both existential detachment and involvement with the self which Sindi had embodied in the earlier part of his life. He underlines the importance of non-involvement with the self but a sympathetic involvement with the world as a step towards the achievement of 'Karmayoga' or non-attached action.

The concluding part of the novel seems to illustrate how attachment can be easily attained by the common man through the intermediary stage of involvement with the world and not with self, the gradual reaching out into light of a confused and benighted soul. Through the protagonist, the novelist seems to demonstrate the core of the Indian sensibility:

One has to understand what action is, and likewise one has to understand what is wrong action and one has to understand about inaction. Hard to understand is the way of work (Radhakrishnan 230).

Caught between the contrary pulls of attachment and detachment he finally understands that detachment does not mean escape or alienation; it means involvement, devotion and sacrifice. He surrenders to himself as an existential hero and settles with business, with Sheila and with herself. Dr. Hari Mohan Prasad rightly remarks that Sindi's Journey from

... Boston to Delhi has been a journey from alienation to arrival, from selfishness to

sacrifice, from an anomic responsibility to himself to a member of mankind, from being to becoming (43).

The Foreigner strikes us with remarkable degree of maturity and technical competence. It is marked by "originality of the treatment of a theme which has almost become stereotyped in Indian fiction, namely, the East-West encounter" (Srinath 192). The novel deals with congruent configuration of contemporary human crisis and an incessant quest for a meaningful stance of life. The novel takes us, Hari Mohan Prasad writes, to the "lower depths of human suffering and the inferno of existential agony" which is also visible in his subsequent works (28). The critic further adds:

Joshi's is a contemporary sensibility etching out the inner wasteland of the archetypal modern urban everyman. The novel enacts what Spengler defines as "the crisis of the present" in the story of Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist, who is a product of the crossroads of the West and the East. The formative part of the novel develops in the back-drop of the West and the second phase in India makes an acculturation, a homing pilgrimage (28).

There is a strange, almost non-human detachment in Sindi which makes June accept her defeat and find solace and comfort in Babu's callow, but open arms. Sadly for Babu, his very first affair with June means the end of his life as he dies in an accident at the time of a major love crisis in his life. But Sindi is blessed with experience; for there was Karl before June and some one else before Karl and also a

native maturity and sensitivity that leaves him sad, cynical and detached by turns.

Sindi has a sense of melancholy that is also shared by those who come in contact with him—June in America and Sheila, Babu's sister, in India. The foreignness of Sindi gets an edge and almost a metaphysical dimension because of his sad outlook. He is the kind of foreigner who feels the pangs of his foreignness in every circumstance and every country. In the very beginning of their encounter June had told Sindi:

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. Maybe it's an Indian characteristic, but I have a feeling you'd be a foreigner anywhere (30).

In Sindi, the sense of foreignness loses its depth and expansiveness because of the fact that he has no roots anywhere in the world. Lying in bed one day and waiting for June he himself says:

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 My foreignness lay within me and I couldn't leave myself behind wherever I went. (61).

Expansion of the Idea of the Foreigner:

The tension which evolves out of a sense of deep-rootedness and a sense of foreignness has a complexity which is, by and large, akin to other protagonists of Joshi's novels. The transient sense of attachment and security that Sindi feels in the company of his uncle is a particular Indian sensibility that gives strength to

anyone feeling alienated and melancholic. The family system and the sensibility attached to it has a depth and meaning which a person of Indian sensibility can understand and which, Sindi is trying to trace though he is unmindful of it. The Indian sensibility that has become a part of his collective unconsciousness keeps on reverberating in his mind and keeps on pricking his soul till he realizes the truth toward the end of the novel.

Sindi's sense of alienation, moral and spiritual bankruptcy, purposelessness, and rootlessness, nonetheless, remind the readers of T.S. Eliot and his *'Waste Land'* where the contemporary man is attempting to breed lilacs out of the dead land. S. Rangachari aptly remarks in this connection:

The themes of alienation, of rootlessness of individuals, of inanity and purposelessness of human existence, of moral vacuity, spiritual bankruptcy and apathy—the themes which are associated with Eliot's early poetry figure prominent in *The Foreigner* (2).

Sindi's entire life was geared around his quest for permanence in life which he, like Prufrock, seldom achieves. He had regarded life as absurd having no meaning, as one which is akin to Eliot's "panorama of futility". This is why he withdrew himself from life into its dark side. Siddhartha Sharma observes :

Sindi appears to be a typical Eliotean character. Like Prufrock, he is a coward and for him "detachment" becomes a euphemism for non-involvement which sparks off many tragedies—especially in the lives of Babu and June. Towards the end of

the novel he becomes involved (karmayogi) which is again a page from Eliot's *The Four Quartets* (250).

Sindi keeps covering his weaknesses under the blanket term 'detachment', which, however, is not what *Gita* says. This can either be his emotion or spiritual vacuity or his cowardice to face the life boldly.

When Sindi with an unusual eloquence explains to Mr. Khemka later in the novel the reasons for his inaction, one is struck by his poignant sincerity:

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 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. And I am not alone. There are hundreds like me wandering the streets of this city and your industries are disgorging more of them everyday. They are neither wise men nor fools. They are just foreigners to your world. You may not understand them, but you can't scoff at them (61).

Sindi, it is evident, is a foreigner to the conservative society also to which people like Khemka belong that gives a social dimension to Sindi's foreignness but we fail to see in him any zeal to fight society for its dead values. For a conspicuous

characteristic of Sindi is his aloofness. Perhaps it is this withdrawal from action and a span of contemplation backed by his earlier experiences that leads him to the realization (when he shares his feelings with Khemka's daughter, Sheila):

There is no purpose in life. There is perhaps a little purpose in right action, in action without desire (61).

Joshi, it appears, had not prepared Sindi as one endowed with a sense of detachment in responding to various situations he finds himself in. In fact, when he met June who had almost reached her breaking point with Babu, he narrates his 'revelation' so:

One morning I had gone for a walk. . . . Suddenly I felt a great lightening, as if someone had lifted a great burden from my chest and it all came through in a flash. All love—whether of things, or persons, or oneself—was illusion and all pain sprang from this illusion. Love begot greed and attachment, and it led to possession.

That is not right, June said. According to you, hatred would be much better than love.

No, birth and death are real. They are the constants. All else is variable. In the rest you see what you want to see. According to the Hindu Mystics there is a reality beyond all this. But I don't know. I would like to know some day (61).

However unusual this experience may be, Joshi's art lies in that he can make

the esoteric sound credible. It is also extraordinary that a character like Sindi can come out of his silent cocoon and give words to his philosophy of life. This philosophy, one can easily say, is from *Gita*, taken, either in parts or out of context which strangulates the life of the protagonist at present and creates vacuum in his already dwindling life.

Return to the Roots

It is interesting, to note however, that Sindi, rootless as he is, comes to India though he decides it by flipping a coin, and settles down in the country to fulfil his random destiny. His involvement with the Khemkas and their business, the discovery of Mr Khemka's unscrupulous business dealings, consequently which leads to a rift between himself and Mr Khemka and the final decision to hold the reins of business out of sheer sympathy for the poor employees who face dismissal from service—all these are there as if to highlight the 'message' of disinterested involvement. Sindi's own realization of it is unmistakable:

Detachment at that time 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 (192, emphasis added).

This wise and relevant observation of Sindi is witnessed so naturally towards the end of the novel without giving any flavour of lurking message. What the readers note, nevertheless, is the truth that it is the deft handling of the *Gita's* true message which transmutes a philosophical concept into fictional enactment. What he realizes towards the end, perhaps, is the true spirit of what Lord Krishna preaches to Arjuna:

Fixed in Yoga, do thy work O

winner of wealth (Arjuna), abandoning attachment with an even mind in success and failure for evenness of mind is called Yoga (*Bhagavadgita* 48).

Leaning on Indian Scriptures for seeking Meaning in Life

Joshi reasserts the message of *Gita* here which ironically the Indians have completely forgotten today. Either the modern Indian has got self centered or is entrenched in petty personal interests.

At a number of places, the novel seems to be giving glosses to *Gita*. When we find Sindi not paying respect to the norms of social conduct, we remember the 7th verse of the sixteenth chapter of *Gita*, which says : "The demonic do not know about the ways of action or the way of renunciation." Sindi's belief that "there is no end to suffering, no end to struggle between good and evil" (43) recalls *Gita* : "whenever there is a decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, O Arjuna, then I send forth myself" (IV, 7). We also recall another verse from *Gita* :

*Paritranaya sadhunam
 vinasaya ca duskrtam*

*Dharmasamsthapanarthaya
 sambhavami yuge-yuge.* (IV, 8)

(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")

In Sindi's desire to seek refuge from the world on account of death of both Babu

and June, we again find how Gita resolves such a state of distress :

*Dukham ity eva yat karma
kayaklesabhayat tyajet*

*Sa krtva rajasa am tyagam nai
krtva tyagaphklam labhet
(XVII, 8)*

(He who gives up a duty because it is painful or from fear of physical suffering performs only the relinquishment of the 'passionate' kind and does not gain the reward of the relinquishment.)

Gradually he becomes another Arjuna, a modern day Arjuna, getting aware that detachment does not mean loss of action or non-involvement but means right commitment and right action :

*karmany eva' dhikaras te ma
phalesu kadacana*

*ma karmaphalahetur bhra ma
te saigo' stv akarmani (II, 47)*

(To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to the fruits; let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction.)

In short, then, passage upon passage from Gita can be cited to illustrate Sindi's state of mind, his irresolution and his coming back to the world.

Though Sindi had practised detachment in life, he had all along missed that positive content of detachment which leads to meaningful community. Now that

he has realised that detachment is not merely negative, he learns of its positive content in right action. Arun Joshi's concept of detachment as expounded through Sindi Oberoi appears also to be closer to the one explicated by Aldous Huxley. Huxley believes that the ideal man is the non-attached man and his non-attachment is negative only in name. The practice of non-attachment entails the practice of charity, courage, generosity and disinterestedness. Non-attachment imposes the adoption of an intensely positive attitude towards the world. The non-attached man puts an end to pain, not only in himself but also to such pain as he may inflict on others. He thus qualifies to be "blessed" and "good". Through such an approach man can sculpt a new future for himself and in turn for the humanity in the last.

Sindi Oberoi's transcendence is clear in his detached and yet compassionate commitment to work in order to involve himself meaningfully in the community. He has found a heaven after the vigorous quest of meaning that has shaped his life and tormented his psyche. Detached compassion to every kind of work is the need of the hour. He is now ready, Paul Morel like, to face the world in all its ironies.

Sindi's return to India is the return of an Indian who needs to attend to his native roots. His journey back symbolizes his journey to his spiritual self, the quest for meaning and significance of life. In Muthu, he finds the "guru" he needs to gain steady wisdom. Joshi finds his source of wisdom in the Indian sage Sankara who says that while jnana or knowledge can alone make a man realize the ultimate nature of his self, still it is by utter selfless devotion that man trains his mind to rise from the bog of selfishness and wanton desires. The Gita says:

*Tasmad asaktah satatam
 karyam karma samachara*

*Asakto hy acarana karma
 param apnoti purusah (VI, 2)*

(Therefore, without attachment, perform always the work that has to be done, for man attains to the highest by doing work without attachment).

Sindi has now arrived at the realization that one's non attachment with oneself does not break one's connection with the world; rather it—non attachment with oneself—leads to and is created by one's attachment with the world.

Conclusion

Although M.K. Naik believes that the ending of the novel is all “botched-up”, yet the wisdom that falls upon Sindi comes as a God's hand, as *deus ex machine*, but this, indeed, is how God operates, not “logically” the way the scientist, rationalist would do, but as a bolt from the sky, as a flash, as an epiphany. Sindhi is in full light now, in God's light.” The fruit of it [action] was really not my concern” (228). He turns to his duty not with a selfish desire but in self-knowledge. His illusions removed, his doubts resolved, he fixes himself to selfless cause. Totally reoriented, totally restructured, he surrenders his will to the will of God, knows that the world outside is the world he should live for. Giving up his own interests he attaches himself selflessly to the interests of others. In Sheila, he discovers his new real, pure partner. “I too smiled, amused by the random absurdity of it all” (230), he says, and like Paul Morel, in *Sons and Lovers*, fortified and renewed makes his way to people. He recognizes that even though the future may not be the “end”

and hopes for in life, it is all that man has all that one can have. Readiness is all Action is All. Hope is all. The novels ends at a affirmative note and Sindi is accepted back into the folds of Indian wisdom.

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