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ARUN JOSHI'S THEME OF ALIENATION: *THE FOREIGNER*

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ABSTRACT

In this scientific society man is threatened with the specter of becoming a purely mechanical being, with the loss of religious faith, he is spiritually displaced, culturally uprooted, self estranged and socially alienated. Arun Joshi admits that his novels deal with the sense of up rootedness of the contemporary Indian. One of his novels *The Foreigner* (1968) seems to be concerned about, questions of identity, ethics and running away from responsibilities. The title itself may be translated as the alien or the stranger or as the outsider, which means that it is synonymous to the well known novels of Camus. It is easy to discover the identity of the names of the novels not only in the titles, but also in the subject matter, in the image of the protagonist and in the common ideological trends of the works. Such a coincidence does not appear merely by chance. Experiencing the direct influence, Joshi has created works about an aimless existence of a man who is indifferent to everything and alien to everybody. They make more or less futile attempts to silence the insidious bug within and to make harmony with the world. The novel is almost a single work in progress, and while the outer semblances undergo chameleonic changes, the hapless creature remains basically the same for the protagonists suffer from the same disease 'discontent and discontent'. It is almost a paradigm of the contemporary diseased world where nameless discontents grow a self doomed humanity.

Key Notes: Semblances, The Foreigner, Sindi, alienation

Sindi, the hero of Joshi's maiden novel, *The Foreigner* is an Indian by origin and brought up in Kenya by his uncle. He receives his early education in London and he gets a doctoral degree in mechanical Engineering from American University, but his technical virtuosity recedes to the background when he gets knocked down in a mess of human relations. His parents die in an air – crash in his infancy in four and their only reality for him is "a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs" (p. 12). The background emphasizes his metaphysical alienation. He is a man drifting aimlessly on the surface of life without an anchor to cling to. It is said: "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 or another. You ask me why I am not ambitious; well, I have no reason to. Come to of it, I don't even have a reason to live" (p. 118).

Being without roots and remaining a foreigner whether in London, in Boston or in New Delhi, being parentless and consequently he could not consider himself belonging to any country in particular. This feeling was poignantly experienced by himself when he, like the other foreign students in the united

states, could not consider himself an ambassador of his country. The sense of foreignness that afflicts him and makes his alienated from others may appear geographical. But it is mainly that of his soul. This is what June means:

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. May be it's Indian characteristic, but I have felt you'd be a foreigner anywhere (p. 29).

Sindi too realizes that he foreignness lies within him as a force which would not let him integrate himself with others. To solve this problem of existence, he joins London University but its solution evades him. It is seen in this question that he puts to his profession on the eve of his departure for India, "how does one learn to lure a life" (p. 132) to have relationship with others.

"As a product of the crossroads of the west and East, his dilemma is also social psychological. His is a case of sociological anomic resulting in 'Ontological insecurity' or the psychosis of engulfment. Denied of love, familial nourishment and cultural roots, he grows with a built – in fissure in his personality and becomes a wandering alien". He has become spiritually sterile, responsive only to himself, responsible to no one. His predicament is spelt in clear terms in his dialogue with Mr. Khemaka. But "you yourself at least knew what made an ass of a man; we don't 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" (p. 118).

He considers himself a misfit in Mr.Khemaka office. His foreign background stands against his total integration with others. The crowd in the United States in one of the balls of the International students Association does not make him feel like a foreigner sitting in his tomb while the room is crowded. Considering America sterile and empty, he alienates himself from the western civilized society. In India "his initial feeling after seeing his employer Mr. Khemka, getting into serious trouble with income Tax people, is that it has only been a change of theatre from America and the show has remained unchanged" (p.174). Still ,he wants to remain uninvolved. He confides to Sheila about it: "I withdraw from action for another reason. I first want to know the purpose of action...there is no purpose in life. There's perhaps a little purpose in right action, in action without desire" (P.146). This causes his detachment. Two of the strongest passions known to man are aroused here with him. One is his anger at Khemka's dishonest practices. The other is his love for the suffering poor like Muthu who is cheated. Khemka and Muthu resemble Charlotte Bronte's Edward and William. Edward's riches have fattened his eyes; his economic affluence alienates him from his only younger brother, William, his employee. Instead of loving and helping him, he hates him and becomes brutal to him. As for William, like Muthu in *The Foreigner*, it is economic poverty which alienates him from his true self, his real otherness. In a limited sense they stand as two hostile, like Khemka and Muthu, opposed classes – the capitalist and workman.

Sindi's foreignness again makes him morosely passive. He gives in to the call from within. Throughout the novel, we find him passing through different moods and attitudes. It is true that Sindi cannot hold relationships with others. He loves Kathy and leaves her after sometime. The memory of her prevents him from developing a harmonious relationship with June who longs for him. What he gives her is but a part of her lovelorn self. Her presence increases his sense of guilt and aggravates his despair. He feels insanity creeping into his being: "what made matters worse was the fact that nearly every time we met, June told me that she loved me. This only aggravated the burden of my guilt" (p.75). Feeling of lost ness sags his life. "A ruffled and distraught sindi drags drowsily through the sapless ordeal of existence. Finding his life a burden, he contemplates suicide. His hopping from one land to another as an escape from the heavy taxation of life lands him nowhere". He is unable to carve out an identity for himself. He belongs to no land. He comments therefore: "I wondered in what way, if any, did I belong to the world that roared beneath my apartment window.... Perhaps I felt like that because I was a foreigner in America, but then what difference would it have made if I had lived in Kenya or India or any other place for that matter? It seemed to me that I would still be a foreigner. My foreignness lay within me and I could not leave myself behind wherever I went" (p.55).

Sindi's is personal problem of emotions seeking fulfillment in terms of human existence. In England he makes friends with several married and unmarried girls like Anna, Kathy, Judy and Christine and gets emotionally involved with them. Although they share the most intimate and intense moment of their passion, pleasure and emotional fulfillment with him, they fail to bind themselves in the permanent bond of marriage with him. This leaves a streak of pain in him. He argues with himself on the concept, meaning and necessity of marriage and comes to the conclusion that "marriage was more often a lust of possession than anything else. People got married just as they bought new cars. And they gobbled each other up" (p.60). In Anita Desai's *Cry, The peacock too* the alienation of Maya, is rooted in Gautama's philosophical detachment like Sindi's. His imperviousness to the "beautiful yet tremulous beauty of the natural world and his gross unconcern over the "Basics in life" are also the reasons for her alienation.

Joshi's exploration of the lone self of Sindi, is indeed a great therapeutic process. He lays bare the different planes of consciousness through which Sindi passes. He realizes the importance of June only when she leaves him for Babu. It is at this stage that the awareness comes to him that by not acting according to his true nature, but not integrating himself completely with her, and by acting with detachment, he had alienated himself from his own self. He fails to pay attention to Babu's problem. This causes Babu's death, making him feel "much more alone and naked in the world" than he has ever felt before. A sense of guilt overawes him. He has an unconscious and inscrutable fear that he has caused Babu's death. Thus he imagines that he is tried in the court. This awareness coming to his disconsolate self makes him disinfected. But the memory of Babu's death keeps on "growing and probing ... ripping dry scars open and dipping into old would" (p.44). Totally withdrawn he becomes an alien inside. He is in the society but not with the society. He has no ambition to move up. "Indecision rules his life/his aimless and wavery self wobbling between involvement and detachment makes him drift like a flotsam in the main of life. He does not love but toys with the charms of love just to have a smack of it. Though physically attached, emotionally and spiritually he remains alienated".

In religion too, Sindi faces the same music: "Anyway I can't really be called a Hindu. My mother was English and my father, I am told, a skeptic" (*The Foreigner* p.30). His responses to life are coloured by his childhood deprivation of love from his parents. Being brought up in a loveless world, he harbours in him deep sense of insecurity and unreality. Things seem to have an ephemeral existence for him as he tells June, "Nothing seems very important" (p.111).

As Joshi's *The Foreigner*, Camus' *Caligula* and Girish Karnad's *Tughluq* also may be seen as plays which deal with alienated outsiders, estranged at various levels, from society and individuals around them, from traditional religion, from existence and the human predicament in this world and from themselves.

Sindi's insecure and isolated life grudges him to love others as well as beloved by others. He acknowledges: "I was not the kind of man one could love. I had learnt that long ago." (p.34) His attitude to life urges him to deny the reality and permanence of existence. He is so much scared to attach himself in anything and with anyone. He is even frightened to make love. His uncle's words are ringing in his ears: "To love is to invite others to break your heart" (p.69).

He is also a stranger to the society. He becomes impatient and lets out his alienation as a defense mechanism. His detachment is ambivalent "his philosophical outbursts about renunciation are a masquerade, a veneer to hide his inner compulsions and motivations. His is an instance of fractional and fragmentary alienation since he is not completely cut off from his surroundings. "shuttling between attachment and detachment love and hate, participation and withdrawals, he drifts in the flux of Time. Throughout we find him indulging in an interminable and ransacking dialogue with his self to resolve the existential tangles and ties of life, which attain consummation in his final decision to take over the charge or Mr. Khemka's office and even in his tender love for Sheila Khemka. He is not a perennial outsider. He finally settles down in India for he truly belongs to it. From a life of alienation in America and England, he moves to a life of identification in India. So he longs to come back to India. The same length referred to an Adit's longing to go back to India in Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird*. Adit's attitude to England undergoes a profound change. His nostalgia for his country is intensified by his experience of a visit to his in-laws. He

frankly admits to being “a stranger, a non-be longer” in England. At last Sindi too moves from self alienation to self identify, from un-involvement to involvement.

The images in the novels show that the dominant mood of Arun Joshi must have been that of alienation. They help in creating an atmosphere of alienation, forming a backdrop as it were, and facilitating the work of the artist in depicting such alienated heroes.

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