THEMES OF ALIENATION AND ROOTLESSNESS IN THE FOREIGNER BY ARUN JOSHI

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Abstract— The present study aims at exploring the sense of alienation and rootlessness from materialistic society prevailed in twentieth century Indian sophisticated society through The Foreigner by Arun Joshi. The present study is an attempt to analyze Arun Joshi's ideas, his experience-based vision of life. He minutely observes the conflict between the traditional values and the modern materialistic approach to life. He notices the chaos and hollowness in the mind of the contemporary younger generation, which fill them with the sense of alienation and detachment. With his deep knowledge of Indian philosophy, Joshi suggests in his novels an entirely Indian solution to the spiritual crisis of the youth. The present study comprehensively examines Arun Joshi's delineation of the commitment to life and action as against passive detachment. The novels chosen for the study is The Foreigner by Arun Joshi..

Keywords—Alienation, Rootlessness, Predicament, Salvation, Solution.

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature is a mirror and interpretation of life. Indo-English literature has dealt with various themes like freedom struggle, Gandhism, partition, East-West encounter and alienation by various writers. The introduction of the theme of alienation in the modern Indo-English literature opens a new realm of understanding of human nature and behavior. It helps us to observe an individual in terms of his responses and reaction to other human beings, the environment and with his ownself. According to the Christian doctrine, man's fall through original sin is also a forerunner of the concept of alienation. Sin can be viewed as man's voluntary alienation from God. It can be said to have existed ever since men came face to face with his own frailty and the meaninglessness of his existence. It is said that materialism leads towards alienated world. One may trace its origin in Greek philosophy, and even in the Bible. Professor S. Radhakrishnan holds that existentialism is a new name for an ancient method of the *Upanishads* and Buddhism insisting on a knowledge of the self.

II. INHERITENCE OF THE THEMES OF ALIENATION AND ROOTLESSNESS IN MODERN WRITINGS

Alienation is one of the greatest problems confronting modern man. Its corrosive impact can be seen in the form of generation gap, the anti-war movement, the hippie phenomenon, the credibility gap, the compartmentalization of our life, the stunting of personal development, the conspicuous absence of a sense of meaningfulness of life, and so on.

The crisis of character, identity or consciousness or authenticity has grown out of man's looking before and after and pining for what he is not. In his work entitled *Man's Search for Meaning,* Victor E. Frankl rightly remarks "once an individual's search for a meaning is successful, it not only renders him happy but also gives him the capability to cope with suffering. And what happens if one's groping for a meaning has been in vain? This may well result in a fatal condition"

The idea of alienation is also found in the works of Albert Camus, Franz Kafka, Jean Paul Sartre and many other existential writers. Camus's novels *The Stranger* and *The Fall* are mainly based on the isolation of man in an alien universe, the estrangement of the individual from himself, the problem of evil and the pressing finality of death.

In the 20th century, modern man is confronted with various problems, stress and strains. He reaches a point where he is shocked to find that he is no longer the master of his destiny and realizes that there are forces which threaten to wither his life and all its joys and hopes. He suffers from a deep sense of powerlessness and meaninglessness. These psychological problems in the form of alienation, loneliness, rootlessness, withdrawal and detachment are seen as the dominating themes in modern European and American fiction. The depiction of the protagonist's psyche or inner development is seen at its best in the novels of D.H.Lawrence, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Graham Greene, Kafka, Sartre etc. They have portrayed beautifully and artistically the inner flow of sentiments of the protagonists in their novels.

III. QUEST FOR SELF-REALIZATION IN THE FOREIGNER

An outstanding novelist of human predicament, Arun Joshi has chartered in all his four novels the inner crisis of the modern man. His novels

deal more with human problems than issues arising out of regional loyalties. His condemnation of the industrial, the civilized and the materialistic world is not guided by his love of Indian philosophy or the values of life but by a genuine faith in the integrity of the primitive values of sensuousness, passion and action. His technique of self-introspection intensified by self-mockery opens a new dimension in the art of Indo-English Fiction.

Arun Joshi emerged on the Indian English literary scene with the publication of his very first novel *The Foreigner* in 1968. It deals with the journey of the protagonist, Sindi Oberoi, from his detachment from the world to his involvement in it. The novelist depicts Sindi's anguish following his loneliness and his so-called rootlessness. The novel shows the sufferings of Sindi who finds himself lost in the maze of worldly existence and is deprived of any familial, social and cultural ties, and whose soul cries for a way out of these confused ways of life. Joshi draws an x-ray of the mind of the protagonist. He gives an account of the conflict between involvement in and detachment from the world going on in the mind of Sindi. To find out the solution to the problem of his restlessness and foreignness Sindi tries to be detached from the world. He pretends to follow the 'Karmic' Principle, propounded by Lord Krishna in *Shrimad Bhagvad Gita*. For him life becomes a receptacle of confusions. Aimlessly he roams through the labyrinthine ways of his existence in search of peace, identity and purpose of his life. Disappointingly, he tries to escape from the world as a solution to his problem. But Arun Joshi has his roots deep in the ancient Indian philosophy; that is why he never accepts detachment as the final solution to the problems of life. He has faith in the notion that estrangement is something to be overcome, and not to be nourished. Through Sindi, Joshi presents before us tremendous capacity for transcendence. The novel shows the protagonist's journey from inaction to action, from detachment to involvement and from illusion to reality.

The novel begins in Boston, where in a morgue Sindi identifies the dead body of Babu Rao Khemka, an engineering student, who has died in a car accident, and informs June about this unexpected shock. At this time June is carrying Babu's child. Then, the focus turns to Delhi, where Sindi, at present, is an employee of Babu's father, Mr. Khemka. The narrative has a constant movement between the recent past in Boston and the present in Delhi. During his stay in Delhi, Sindi has to face the teasing question by Sheila, Babu's elder sister, about the circumstances that caused Babu's death. He makes his best efforts to avoid her question because he doesn't want to recall his ugly past, but all his efforts end in vain:

Helplessly, I watched my past overtake me. I had traveled the world to escape Babu's ghost and still it stalked me from behind those bronze statues. (p. 17)

While replying to Sheila's question Sindi tries to conceal the fact about Babu's death intending not to expose the darkest part of his life. But, on the contrary, in the process of narrating the past, the reality is revealed and everybody is allowed to know of Sindi's confused innerself.

Sindi is a self seeker and absurd man and an existential character. Though his experiences tell him not to be involved but he gets involved through love and goodness. It is simply chance that Sindi gets involved this way or that way but he wants to live the life of an Indian saint. The terrible consequences of his practice of detachment in America compel him to leave the country and to go to India. He decides within himself. He hopes to live in India, the life different from New York and Boston.

Sindi's life is an account of his search for his roots in a parentless world and realizing his commitment to life and action as opposed to passive detachment. He is a born foreigner belonging to no nation, for he is born in Kenya of an Indian sceptic father and an English mother. When he is a mere child of four he is deprived of his parents, who are killed in an air crash near Cairo. After the death of his parents he becomes all alone in this wide world of never ending dilemmas. At this critical hour an uncle of his provides parentless Sindi with a feeling of having an anchor. But alas! Soon his uncle also dies and once again Sindi finds himself alone, rootless and unprotected in this world. This parentless childhood of Sindi develops in him a deep sense of emotional insecurity and forms his vision of life. Everywhere Sindi finds himself a foreigner and in solitude. The feeling of having no family ties and being rootless everywhere teases his soul. Sindi's soul cries occasionally, " I had never had a home"(p. 20). There is hardly any time when he is not conscious of his lack of any home ties, and his foreignness. When Professor White says, "Every foreign student is an ambassador of his country", Sindi asks himself, "And what country had I represented? Kenya or England or India?"(p. 43) He thinks himself to be "An uprooted young man living in the latter half of the twentieth century, who had become detached from everything except himself" (p. 195). He further exclaims his sorrow of being a foreigner everywhere, "And yet all shores are alien when you do not belong anywhere" (p. 92). But he never feels thus when he is under the protection of his uncle in Nairobi. He himself says:

I hadn't felt like that when my uncle was living. It wasn't 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. (p. 55-56)

In search of his roots Sindi keeps on changing places. He moves from Nairobi to London to Boston and then

finally to Delhi. He joins London University with an intention of studying engineering. But he is soon fed up with class-room lectures finding them unable to satisfy his constant queries about life. He says, " I wanted to know the meaning of my life. And all my class-rooms didn't tell me a thing about it" (p. 142). He joins a night club in Soho as a dish washer, not with the purpose to earn money but desiring to have a different kind of experience of life to sort out his ideas. It is here that he comes in contact with Anna, a minor artist, who has divorced her husband. She is about thirty five but looks much younger and attractive. With the passage of time their relationship grows to intimacy. Anna loves Sindi from the core of her heart and he is attracted by her sadness. But this affair does not last long. It happens to be merely an affair of sexual involvement. Anna tries to get her lost youth again in relationship with Sindi, a boy much younger than she is. Of her Sindi says, "Anna was not yearning for me or anybody, but for her lost youth" (p. 143). Sindi leaves Anna the moment he comes across Kathy, a married woman. This affair too going on for a few weeks only happens to be an experience of intense sexual activity. Here, it is Kathy who leaves Sindi for "She had to go back to her husband" (p. 144) and "She thought marriage was sacred and had to be maintained at all costs" (p. 144).

Further, he develops friendship with a Catholic priest in Scotland where he is employed in a village library. He discusses with the priest several matters related to religion, God and mysticism, and gradually his ignorance disappears and his vision becomes clear. He gets to spiritual heights, as he tells June later:

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

Sindi leaves for Boston with the purpose of getting Ph.D. degree in mechanical engineering. Here he meets June Blyth "at one of those balls the International Students Association laid out every year" (p. 21). Sindi gets attracted towards June because of her beauty and resemblance with Kathy. There develops an intimate relationship between them. It is for the first time that Sindi is "afraid of getting involved with June" (p. 53). He feels pain for her. But when June expresses her desire to him that they should get married, he refuses saying, "I am not the right kind of man for you. Some people are not really cut for marriage" (p. 91). On the other hand Babu Rao Khemka, Sindi's best friend, is also impressed by June's beauty and wants to marry her. June, realizing negative approach of Sindi, decides to prefer Babu who needs her. June is a humane, sympathetic and sacrificial girl. She cares for others and her single object in life seems to provide help to her fellow beings, to share their grief and to console them in their distress.

But Babu, who belongs to an orthodox Indian family, measures a woman's morality on the basis of her virginity. When, during some argument with June, Babu comes to know that she has been sleeping with Sindi, he is terribly shocked and rushes into his car violently never to return again. He is killed in a car accident. About Babu, a critic rightly remarks, "even since his childhood, he has been fed up on the hygienic diet of morals, even so he does not apply himself to his pursuit with the seriousness that is expected of him" (Jha, p.173). Sindi accepts a job in New York. One day he comes to know through a letter from June that she is carrying Babu's child. At this hour, Sindi thinks a lot and decides to marry June but when he reaches there he finds June dead during an attempted abortion. Sindi thinks himself responsible for both the deaths of Babu and June.

Lord Krishna preaches the philosophy of detachment in this way – "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" (*The Bhagwadgita, II: 48)*. The lord says that one has to work in detachment but Sindi misconstrues the whole philosophy of the *Gita* and says time and again that since he wants to remain detached he will not get involved. "I don't want to get involved"(p. 74), he says repeatedly, meaning thereby that he will not act. To justify his stand, he ruminates like a philosopher: "nothing even seems real to me, leave alnoe permanent. Nothing seems to be very important" (p.113). But the root cause of such rumination is *avidya* (ignorance). In the introductory essay of *The Bhagwad Gita,* S. Radhakrishnan says –

The world is not an illusion, though by regarding it as a mere mechanical determination of nature unrelated to God, we fail to perceive its divine essence. It then becomes a source of delusion … it breeds ignorance. (Radhakrishnan, 42)

As a result of Sindi's obsession with his solitariness, foreignness and rootlessness he becomes indifferent to the world and the worldly activities around him. He becomes so indifferent that he seems not to be moved by anything. To Mr. Khemka he says, "Nothing is bothering me" (p. 117). It doesn't matter for him whether he is called a moral or immoral man. He reacts against Mr. Khemka's comments, "What does it mean to me if you call me an immoral man. I have no reason to be one thing or another" (p. 118). So indifferent he has become that his parents are, for him, "those strangers whose only reality was a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs" (p. 22), and not only this he even says that he does not "particularly miss them" (p. 22). He does not want even to talk about his parents and whenever somebody asks him about them, he gets upset.

CONCLUSION

Thus, *The Foreigner* deals with the spiritually adventurous journey of a puzzled man, who is confused in the maze of life, from his escaping the world to his engagement with it. To find out the solution Joshi goes to the *Upanishads*, the *Gita* and the Gandhian philosophy. The Gandhian philosophy says that our existence is the outcome of suffering, which is unavoidable. Joshi, too, makes Sindi experience soul-searing pain throughout his quest for self-realization. Finally, his soul comes out renewed, purified and revitalized like the proverbial phoenix from the ashes of its past. At last, in the wake of his past experiences Sindi reaches his destination, he comes to know the purpose of his existence on this planet, in search of which he has been restlessly wandering from place to place. And forgetting his own interest, and caring not for fruit, whatever it may be, he accepts the responsibility of becoming the savior of the factory workers, thus, coming very close to the concept of *Karmayoga* enunciated in the *Bhagvad Gita:*

Karmannyaivadhikaraste ma phalishu kadachana, Ma karmaphal heturbhurma te sangostva karmani.(II, 47)

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

Hopefully, this paper will provide true position of an individual striving hard to establish his identity in the twentieth century materialistic Indian society. Furthermore it will also help us to establish an individual's strength on discovering his roots and identity.

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