

# LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 11 : 3 March 2011

ISSN 1930-2940

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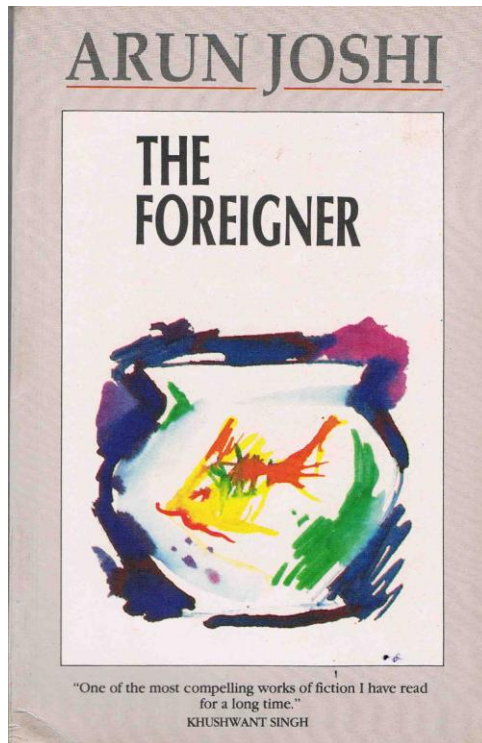
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## Joshi's *The Foreigner* - Within and Without

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Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

11 : 3 March 2011

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Joshi's *The Foreigner* - Within and Without

## **A Narrative of Sindi**

Sindi of *The Foreigner* is a product of multiple continents, born in Africa to an Indian father and an English mother, brought up by his Indian uncle, educated in England and America, feels always a 'nowhere man' who finally gets his anchorage in his ancestral home India, after a long struggle in loneliness and misconstrued detachment of inaction.

The typical confused state of a postmodern youth, who is always amidst crowds but always alone, is depicted. When June Blyth sees him for the first time in a party with all the dancing and drinking around, wherein, Sindi is the ex-officio host, she asks "Why do you look so sad?" (*Foreigner* 22).

The turbulent inner world of the protagonist is delineated in this interesting novel. Sindi is painfully aware of "twenty-five years largely wasted in search of peace, and what did I have to show for achievement: a ten-stone body that had to be fed four times a day, twenty-five times a week. This was a sum of a lifetime of striving." (*Foreigner* 92) "Death wipes out everything, for most of us anyway. All that is a big mocking zero" (92).

Even the institution of marriage is unreasonably scary to Sindi. When June asks for a reason, he avers, "I might have had reasons to begin with, but now I was only aware of a dull fear. I was afraid of possessing anybody and I was afraid of being possessed, and marriage meant both" (91).

### **Questions about Freedom: No Choice in Birth or Death?**

When Sindi keeps on voicing such philosophies Karl shouts at him thus: "You Indians and your mealy mouthed philosophies! The trouble with you is you have never known war. If you were bombed every night for a year, why, even a month, I would like to see how many of you would still go around preaching *The Bhagwad Gita*" (67). Karl also adds that whether we cooperate or not we are bound to lose our freedom wherein, Arun, an accomplice of Karl, replies after a long silence: "But you are never free, Karl. How can anybody take away your freedom when you never had it in the first place? All freedom is illusion. You had no choice in your birth nor do you even choose your death" (68).

June disagrees with him and says that we do have a choice in death and one can choose to end whenever he chooses to. She adds, "If everything is beyond control then how do you suppose we live from day to day?" for which Arun dreamily replies, "Random events happen around you forcing you to make decisions propelling you on through life. It is only our vanity that makes us imagine that we are leading our own destiny" (68).

This and many more philosophical responses voiced by Joshi are found in all his novels.

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## **Change of Theatre, But the Show Remains the Same**

Later when Sindi comes to India he only finds it to be a change of theatre. The show remains the same. He finds different people with different vanities and different ways of squeezing short-term happiness out of this mad world.

People like Mr. Khemka and his tribe exploit needy people like Jain and Muthu. A Ph.D. holder in mechanical engineering Arun learns the definition of non-attachment or non-involvement from a simpleton like Muthu. It goes in line with the following definition: "Duty should be done with indifference, renouncing all results. He who gives up the fruit of action is the true renouncer. And, finally, the supreme state (of non-involvement) which transcends all work is attained by him whose understanding is attached, who has subdued his self, and from whom all desire, has fled" (Zachner 219). Thus, the mutually contradictory tendencies for 'having and being' are found in all human beings:

The desire to have, to possess, owes its strength to the biological factor of the desire for survival: the desire to be, to share, to give, to sacrifice, owes its strength to the specific conditions of human existence and the psychic need to overcome one's isolation. In order not to feel utterly isolated which would condemn us to insanity, we need to find a new unity: with our fellow beings and with nature. (Pathania 141)

*The Foreigner* reveals Joshi's keen awareness of a deeper social reality of our times. Freedom in the sense of being unfettered, freedom from the craving for holding on to things and one's ego, is the condition for love and for productive being. Sindi later laments, "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" (188-189). He strives to walk out of his illusions. He takes refuge in Occidental and Oriental philosophies. It is apparent that Oriental philosophy has a strong hold on him when he states: "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."(180).

## **Seeking Pleasures While Mouthing Philosophies of Detachment**

In actual practice, we notice that all the while mouthing philosophies of detachment and non-involvement Sindi is a pleasure-seeker like the Epicureans as is evident from his reveling and developing illicit relations with Anna, Kathy, Judy, Christine and June. He says that he is against falling in love, but, towards the end of the novel, he is in the process of falling in love with the sixth girl. He keeps saying that he will remain detached when June chooses Babu over him but grows possessive, selfish, jealous and greedy instead of being what he says he is. He is rather convinced out of self-love that June

would not leave him for a person like Babu whom he thinks is, in no way special that his own self.

### **What Goes Around Comes Around**

No action goes unrewarded or unpunished. Sindi goes wrong when he states that Mr. Khemka and the entire civilization are behind Babu's death, but soon understands that no one can be the cause for another person's misery and thus repents. He understands that the individual is responsible for whatever befalls him. He states to Mr. Khemka thus: "I have sinned, and God knows, I have paid heavily for them. This time it is your name that is being called. It is you who must answer. That is the only hope of salvation you have left" (181).

### **Class Consciousness and Class Conflict**

Another trait found in the novel is traces of Marxism. Class-consciousness and class-conflict find immense say. Babu is scared of his father who is very much concerned about their upper class, attitude that a foreign educated son would add to his status and fetch a richer daughter-in-law. The living standards of the Khemkas differ dramatically with that of his employees. Sindi is amazed at the exquisite interior decoration of the palatial house of the Khemkas and shocked at the one room residence of Muthu, accommodating a dozen people. The difference between the haves and have-nots is too conspicuous. People like Muthu are only too ready and waiting to oblige to whatever the rich upper class demands.

### **Exploiting a Potpourri of Philosophical Views**

Thus, Joshi makes use of existentialism, the Vedas, the philosophy of karma, the concept of detachment from *The Bhagwad Gita*, the philosophy of Gautama Buddha about how our own aspirations lead to misery, and Marxism, to bring forth the learning process, moving from good to bad, from illusion to reality and detachment to attachment.

### **At Least a Zero, Not Below Zero!**

Life is sometimes a zero for some of Joshi's protagonists. Soon, however they begin to understand that life does not end as zero and sometimes satisfy themselves with what Ratan in Joshi's another novel *The Apprentice* states that it is at least a zero and not below zero.

If one adds his total surrender and secure humanity to life, it becomes ebullient and divine. It becomes troublesome and negative if one opts for shame, dishonesty and egotism.

Naipaul states: “I saw how close in the past year I had been to the total Indian negation ... I felt it as something true which I could never adequately express and never seize again” (266-267).

### **Existential Insights of Communion Mode**

There is no denying the fact that the root of existential thoughts is traced back to pre-philosophical era. Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament of *The Holy Bible*, Buddhism and Upanishads, mainly all oriental concepts, contain deep existential insights of communion mode, not of fragmentation and desolation. Solomon, the preacher-king says in Ecclesiastes: “Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever” (1:4), and that much wisdom “is a chasing after the wind” (1:16).

So, one has to bear in mind that Existentialism is an old wine in a new cup, a new name for an ancient method of Buddhism and Upanishads, which insist only on the knowledge of self. Man, being a victim of ignorance and selfishness, feels an inner void over the spirit, which makes the world a waste and a vain show.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan in his *Towards a New World* states that, “It is wrong for us to think that we are the victims of natural force, that there is a kind of inevitability, that inexorable laws prevail, that man cannot help; he has only to endure whatever happens. Man is intended for something greater than confinement in this world. He can rise above it. He can defy nature” (64-65).

### **Detachment Lies in Actually Getting Involved**

Muthu says to Sindi persuading the latter to take up the dwindling business of Khemka saying, “sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved” (*Foreigner* 225), in order to save the poor employees from damnation. J. Krishnamurthi states to people like Sindi that, “you are frightened to lose and you are frightened of something much greater which is to come ... you think about it and by thinking about it you are creating that interval between living and that which you call death” (98).

### **Self-Delusion**

The self-delusion of Sindi that perverts all Hindu ethical codes of Maya, Karma and detachment to suit his own pensive contemplation stating, “Nothing seems real to me, leave alone permanent. Nothing seems to be very important” (113), fades away leading Sindi to an affirmation that in many ways the past had been a waste, but it had not been without lessons as the ancient scripture espouses. Even, “The dead teach you how to overcome their death” (*Foreigner* 164).

### **An Autobiographical Creative Writing –The Craft**

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Joshi's *The Foreigner* - Within and Without

Joshi's maiden novel *The Foreigner* could be a narration of an individual person is highly autobiographical. A Japanese biochemist says that, when he smiles, it is, "a little cheerful, a little sad, and very sexy" (*Foreigner* 128) which has a lot to reveal.

*The Foreigner* is narrated in a series of flashbacks, with an intense ordering of past events being obviously spiritual and autobiographical. The narrator 'I' is both experiencing the foreignness and perceiving others' foreignness and hence results sometimes in a narrative distance.

The novel begins in the manner of a crime thriller, the climactic moment being introduced first. Sindi identifies in a morgue the dead body of Babu Khemka, who dies in a car-wreck and hence rips the veils of feigned detachment. Thereafter, the story swings back and forth between Boston and Delhi.

### **The Images, Metaphors, and the Style**

The simple style is enriched and made effective by means of dreams, sickness, wounds, pain and fear. Death in reality, or the very thought or reference to it, could be traced throughout the novel resulting in the dynamic turn of events. He avers that, "once you are born, you spend the rest of your life getting away from your birth" (*Foreigner* 124). Even the idea of love and hatred are blended with death and fear. "Love is real only when you know what you love must, one day die" (*Foreigner* 145). J. Krishnamurti, a great teacher of our time, says that, "As long as there is fear there is no love ... only when there is no pleasure, no desire or fear, then there is something called love" (77).

The images of wounds, scars and other physical sufferings like abortion, surgery and diseases serve to emphasize the mental agony of the protagonist. June's separation is like "an unforeseen abortion" (*Foreigner* 123) and her death, is "as if some indefatigable surgeon was cleaning up my soul with the sharp edge of his scalpel" (*Foreigner* 165). The tubercular wife of Muthu, living in a single room apartment with eleven others, leads to the desired metamorphosis of Sindi.

### **Seasons of Life and Emotions**

Joshi makes use of seasons and time to reflect human emotions. At times the seasons forebode certain things. The first time when Sindi meets Babu, it is an "unusually cold" September evening, which is how ultimately Babu's life ends, in a freezing manner. Fortunately, in spite of frequent tragedies, he is eased of the agony very surprisingly, in due course.

### **We All Have Our Masks: Wearing Masks and Ripping Them Off**

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11 : 3 March 2011

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Joshi's *The Foreigner* - Within and Without



Constant reference to masks can be detected in this novel. Sindi's concept of detachment is itself a mask. Sindi acknowledges that "we all have our masks" (30). When Mr. Ghose argues about handing over the office to the proletariat, Sindi says, "The charlatans you wish to destroy will just turn around and put on another mask" (*Foreigner* 38). The death of Babu and June succeed in puncturing his mask and Muthu rips it off. This mask is a metaphoric one as Fowler defines it as belonging "to the group of concepts which imply that artists discover a more fully integrated vision than that exists in 'reality'. It implies, too, a way out of the closed world of the ego into an objective vision, communicable to others" (177).

### **Similes and Animal Imagery**

The use of similes and animal imagery are also found which render a glow to what the author wants to convey. The fallen spider walking upside down exploring his inverted universe, and the beautiful imagery of the shuffling of cards are symbolic representation of man's pathetic non-grip over nature in the universe. Sindi finds June "graceful like a cat"(64) and Babu's affection for her is "dog-like"(86). When Sindi pays his first visit to Khemka's household, "A lone fly, quite unexpected in that air-conditioned room, buzzed across the room and settled on"(13) his cheek. He understands that Mr. Khemka is less humane and he should "stop being a jackal" (182) whereas the latter considered Sindi as "stubborn as a Mule" or even worse.

### **Flashbacks**

A series of flashbacks with mellifluous order of arrangement of past events capturing the past and the present, the imaginative world, and the factual happenings maximize the thrill of the novel. The death of Babu in a car accident, the reason that induced Babu's suicidal rash driving being eclipsed till the reader finishes two thirds of the novel, June's picture found in Babu's wallet, the identification of Babu's mortal remains at the morgue by Sindi Oberoi, letters of Babu written to his sister who well before the accident, has got an idea of Babu's discomfort at the foreign land, all brings aloft Arun Joshi on par with a thriller writer. The weight of the serious theme of *The Foreigner* is counteracted by the detective story mode of narration. The chronology of the incidents is not lost in spite of the riddlesome sway from past and the present.

### **Language and Style of Arun Joshi**

The 'I' character serves its purpose well, bringing out the protagonist's psychical contact with society and environment that induce a disturbed psychological development which finally enable him to solve his turmoil of alienation. The very confession of Sindi, that he is not good at remembering events pay testimony to his simplicity of character and confessional mode. As far as possible, the narration of Joshi is neutral, unprejudiced,

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matter of fact revealing the identities of all the characters true to their nature, rendering the story on aroma of a real happening experienced by every one of the readers in his vicinity.

The language employed by Joshi, is free flowing. Sprinkling the novel with similes, satire, metaphors, parallelism and oxymorons to indicate variation of mood and intensity of emotional outbursts, Joshi states that Sindi “feels like a river that hopes to leave its dead wood behind taking an unexpected plunge over a steep precipice” (*Foreigner* 176) since he felt like “sitting in your own tomb” (22). Also “Strangers parted on the doorstep promising to meet again, knowing full well they didn’t mean it. It was the American way” (23). When Sindi’s professor says that every foreign student is an ambassador of his country, he wonders “what country had I represented” (43).

Babu’s memory piercing through the statues and Jukebox song to stress Existential appeal are some of the motifs mentioned in the novel. The very title gains a symbolic value in the larger context of human existence and struggle. The metaphysical anguish of the protagonist at the meaninglessness of the human condition, the unreality, insecurity and transitoriness associated with the word ‘foreigner’, provides the texture and structure of the novel.

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