



EXISTENTIALISM IN ARUN JOSHI'S NOVEL: *THE FOREIGNER*

DR. C. USHA NANDHINI

Assistant Professor of English
Sri Balamurugan Arts and Science College
Sathappadi – 636 451 (TN) INDIA

ABSTRACT

The paper deals with Existentialism. Existentialism is a philosophical outlook that stresses the importance of free will, freedom of choice, and personal responsibility. This perspective emphasizes the unique experiences of each individual and the responsibility of each person for their choices and what they make of themselves. Perhaps the most prominent theme in existentialist writing is that of choice. Because one is free to choose one's own path, existentialists have argued, that one must accept the risk and responsibility of following one's commitments.

The paper stresses the fact that Joshi visualizes the inner crisis of the modern man and finds and gets convinced that the most besetting problems that man faces today are the problems of the self, like alienation, identity crisis, sense of void and existential dilemma. The Foreigner relates how Sindi Oberoi, an immigrant Indian, suffers in the course of his search for meaning and purpose of his life.

The paper concludes by stating that Joshi's protagonists are absolutely puzzled fellows restlessly searching for their roots and trying to know the purpose of their existence on this world. Thus, one finds that Sindi's quest for meaning and purpose of life does not end in despair. He is lucky enough not to find absurdity and estrangement as the ultimate condition of life, and shows a tremendous capacity for transcendence.

INTRODUCTIUON

Existentialism is a philosophical outlook that stresses the importance of free will, freedom of choice, and personal responsibility. This perspective emphasizes the unique experiences of each individual and the responsibility of each person for their choices and what they make of themselves.

Existentialism in literature is a movement or tendency that emphasizes individual existence, freedom, and choice. The most prominent theme in existentialist writing is that of choice.

DR. C. USHA NANDHINI

1P a g e



Because one is free to choose one's own paths, existentialists have argued, that one must accept the risk and responsibility of following one's commitments.

Existentialism is not dark. It is not depressing. Existentialism is about life. Existentialists believe in living and in fighting for life. The politics of existential writers around the world varies widely, but each seeks the most individual freedom for people within a society.

Among the Indian English writers who qualify as existentialist, Joshi is the first and finest one. His novels are strongly influenced by the existential philosophy of Satre, Camus and Kierkegaard. His journey of fictional works from *The Stranger* to *The City and The River* have in them an undercurrent of existentialist philosophy. Joshi who is obsessively concerned with the human predicament explores the human psyche so as to unravel the mystery of the human existence. Joshi is primarily concerned with the action that is concrete and directed towards the individual who is free to choose for himself, a personal way of life out of nothingness and vacuity around.

In his fictional world, Joshi tries his level best to delineate the predicament of the modern man who is confronted by the self and the question of his existence. As a novelist exposing human predicament, Joshi visualizes the inner crisis of the modern man and finds and gets convinced that the most besetting problems that man faces today are the problems of the self, like alienation, identity crisis, sense of void and existential dilemma. These problems are so pervasive that they threaten every sphere of human activity. As a result, man fails to discern the very purpose behind life and the relevance of existence in a hostile world.

Joshi achieved literary fame with the publication of his first novel *The Stranger* in 1968. It portrays the traumas and tensions, probing and pinging of the protagonist through an exploration of the lacerated psyche of the protagonist. It registers the existential dilemmas and predicaments of the protagonist. The novel takes one to the lower depths of human suffering and the inferno of existential agony. *The Stranger*, probes the existential predicament of Sindi, the nowhere man.

The Stranger relates how Sindi Oberoi, an immigrant Indian, suffers in the course of his search for meaning and purpose of his life. Sindi's alienation from the world is similar to the one that many existentialist heroes in the West suffer from. The novel is an enactment of the crisis of the present in the story of Sindi Oberoi. He is an existentialist character-rootless, restless and luckless in a mad and absurd world. He is a perennial outsider, an uprooted young man living in the second half of the twentieth century who belongs to no country, no

DR. C. USHA NANDHINI

2P a g e



people and finds himself an outsider in Kenya, Uganda, England, America and India. His rootlessness is rooted within his soul like an ancient curse and drives him from crisis to crisis. Sindi is trapped in his loneliness, which is accelerated by his withdrawal from the society around him.

What oppresses him most is the realization that he is a “lonely man who has failed to see in what way, if any, did he belong to the outside world?” (61). He forgets about himself, about his knowledge, the position, the thoughts and the ideas he cherishes. His ego does not stand in his way and he can fully respond to the other person and that person’s ideas. Sindi has a purely detached, business like attitude towards life and people. Sitting expressionless, he watches the world go by. June tries to involve him in a conversation with a view to know more about him. But it makes him uneasy. He feels “embarrassed by her personal talk” (34) and changes the subject to save himself from the discomfort of talking about himself. He desires to physically possess her but wildly struggled to remain uninvolved.

Sindi wanders from place to place and person to person in search of peace and meaning of life. Without enjoying the sense of well-being and happiness provided by emotional bonds, he remains suspicious of all involvements and makes detachment as the creed of his life. His belief in detachment, is a mask to cover his inability to reach out of people, to love them, to belong to them and to understand them. June’s sincere efforts to involve him in a loving union fail because he stubbornly refuses to loosen his grip on his creed of detachment and non-involvement.

Thus, one finds that Sindi’s quest for meaning and purpose of life does not end in despair. He is lucky enough not to find absurdity and estrangement as the ultimate condition of life, and shows a tremendous capacity for transcendence. Sindi comes out of the impasse after intense suffering, as he himself confesses after June’s death: “The Gods had set a heavy price to teach me just that” (204). Sindi is demonical in nature. He is full of desire, does not believe in God or religion, lacks purity and good conduct and cannot make out the difference between the way of action or the way of renunciation.

Therefore Joshi, an author of rarer sensibility and style, attempts a serious probe into the existential problem and spiritual disturbances of mankind by fixing his focus on certain individual characters. His novels demonstrate the edifying lessons for one’s spiritual heritage that have not been totally irrelevant with the growth of materialism and the rapid westernization of life in India.



REFERENCES

- Dhawan, R.K. *The Fictional World of Arun Joshi*. New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company, 1986. Print.
- Iyengar, K.R.S. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publication, 1996. Print.
- Joshi, Arun. *The Foreigner*. New Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1968. Print.
- Prasad, Madhusudan. *Arun Joshi: Indian English Novelist*. New Delhi: Sterling, 1982. Print.
- Srinath, C.N. *The Fiction of Arun Joshi*. Delhi: Mital Publication, 1986. Print.