



### **The Pursuit of Dealienation in Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner***

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**Abstract :** In Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner* the protagonist, Sindi Oberoi, is a wanderer who is born in Africa to an Indian father and an English mother. While living in England and America, Sindi experiences several tragedies which eventually turns him into an alienated individual. Sindi, who vehemently follows the ideology of detachment, undergoes a dramatic change as he comes and lives in India. There are three stages of conformative behaviour – compliance, internalization, identification – which Sindi goes through while living in India. After undergoing the three stages of conformative behaviour Sindi gradually becomes a dealienated person. In the first stage, Sindi gets influenced by other characters in the novel. In the second stage, Sindi repeats a set of behaviours after realizing that they are intrinsically rewarding. In the third and final stage, Sindi learns to establish and maintain a self-defining relationship with other characters in the novel. This research paper shows how the protagonist gets dealienated and becomes a part of the society by way of conformative behaviour.

Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist of *The Foreigner*, is a wanderer who keeps moving from country to country without realizing the toll it has on him. He is born in Africa to an Indian father and an English mother. After his parents die in a plane crash, he is brought up by his Indian uncle for some years. He comes to England to finish his schooling and decides to go to America for his college education. When the story begins, the narration switches between Sindi's past life and present life. In the present time, Sindi works at Mr. Khemka's company. In the past, Sindi is a researcher who is undergoing his doctorate in engineering. The result of Sindi's wandering lifestyle makes him feel alienated and strange from others. The aim of this paper is to show that the protagonist goes through the three stages of conformative behaviour and undergoes dealienation after being alienated from the society. The primary focus of this paper will be on Sindi's journey as he travels from one place to another searching for meaning, purpose and peace. The secondary focus will be on the characters who either make Sindi more alienated or help him find meaning and purpose in life. The characters who accompany Sindi in his journey are June, Babu, Sheila, Mr. Khemka and Muthu. The people who make him

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feel alienated are June, Babu and Mr. Khemka. There are people, such as Sheila and Muthu, who aid Sindi in his efforts to dealienate himself. Sindi becomes a wanderer not by choice but by necessity which forces him to live in three continents before he is thirty years old. His time in Europe and America teaches Sindi the social norms of the western culture which is the sole reason behind Sindi's alienation. He always feels like a foreigner wherever he goes but when he settles in India, he absorbs Indian culture and its values thereby letting go of his long misconstrued ideology of detachment through inaction.

Man has many problems in life mainly due to the advent of science, commerce and globalization. The mundane existence of man with his need for materialistic things and the greed to own more things has made his life as trivial as an insect which lacks the ability to differentiate between right and wrong. An insect has only enough time to worry about where it is going to get its next meal. Man's banal living has made this world a hostile and unhealthy place to live in. Man gropes in the dark trying to seek his identity and also to overcome his alienation. He is always in search of something or the other but now his quest has taken him on a path towards self-realization. Arun Joshi has excellently portrayed the very essence of human existence. His novels deal with the inner crisis that a modern man is subjected to in today's world. It is not only the outward forces that create problems for man even though there are natural calamities and man-made disasters that ruin the life of man externally. But there are also internal calamities and disasters that devour man from the inside and ruin his life by throwing isolation, randomness and meaningless existence in his journey called life.

*The Foreigner* (1968) is Arun Joshi's first novel and it is no doubt that the novel is a milestone in Indian English novels. The novelist has explored issues like detachment, rootlessness, quest for identity and self-realization in a skillful manner. He has also highlighted the illuminating India's cultural heritage and moral values. The novel projects the life of Sindi Oberoi for whom the vein of aimlessness seems to be running through his wanderings. The protagonist, Sindi, is born in Kenya to an Indian father and a British mother. His interracial upbringing makes Sindi a scape goat and collapses his life since he does not have a sense of belonging towards any place – neither India nor Kenya. He loses his parents at the tender age of four and grows up under the care of his uncle in Kenya. He always feels neglected as a child and one can trace the deep pathos when he speaks about his parents to Mr. Khemka: "For the hundredth time I related the story of those strangers whose only reality was a couple of wrinkled and cracked photographs" (Joshi 12).

Sindi Oberoi is exposed to the cultures of Africa, Europe, and America when he does his school and college education. He lives in many cities but nowhere does he experience a feeling of attachment. He feels alienated from the society as his alienation chases him throughout, haunting him, and driving him mad to the point of a mental breakdown culminating in the death of June Blyth. Sindi's false notion of detachment occurs when he comes to England. The harrowing experiences of life have made him seek something larger than mere academic pursuits. The twenty-five-year old Sindi has already experienced such sad struggles in life. But it is obvious that the adversities of life had indeed given him a steadiness and he is not in a hurry to patch up things. He was very much perturbed while living in Kenya but became a little enthusiastic about life after his arrival in England. He comes into contact with Anna and Kathy. Anna's relationship with Sindi ends when she decides to give her marriage another chance. But the effect of her choice deeply scars Sindi. After breaking up with Kathy, Sindi soon realizes that nothing remains the same forever, even love. At that point in his life, Sindi loses his faith in love and in marriage.

Sindi works at a small village library in Scotland. He finds enough time to read and ponder about his life's journey. After repeated musings, he comes to the conclusion that one can live without attachment and desire. He believes that only through inaction can he stay detached from others. He then goes to Boston to pursue his research. He meets June Blyth and develops a genuine romantic relationship with her. Even though he falls in love with her, he vehemently denies his true feelings for June which ends in two deaths. Babu gets into an accident after knowing the truth that Sindi and June are very much in love even after breaking up. After Babu's death, June finds out that she is pregnant with Babu's child. She vainly hopes that Sindi would reconcile with her, and that they might eventually get back together and start a family. But Sindi is unable to stay in contact with her owing to his busy work load. June mistakenly believes that Sindi has deserted her. When Sindi returns to Boston from New York, he goes to June's house and finds out that June had committed suicide. Sindi mentally breaks down and flees from America. He comes to India to start a new life and also to get away from the memories of June Blyth.

Conformity is a type of social influence involving a change in belief or behaviour in order to fit in with a group. Sindi's past experiences in America are examples of non-conformative behaviour and attitude. When he comes to India,

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Sindi's conformative behaviour and attitude begins. According to social psychology, conformative behaviour contains three different processes of influence such as compliance, identification, and internalization. Compliance occurs when an individual "accepts influence because he hopes to achieve a favorable reaction from another person or group" (Kelman 53). Internalization occurs when an individual "accepts influence because the content of the induced behavior is intrinsically rewarding" (Kelman 53). Identification occurs when an individual "accepts influence because he wants to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship to another person or a group" (Kelman 53).

Sindi goes through the compliance stage when he begins working at Mr. Oberoi's company with diligence because he wants to impress Mr. Oberoi and get on the good side of Sheila. He adopts the induced behaviour not because he believes in its content but because he expects to gain specific rewards or approval and avoid specific punishments or disapproval by conforming. Sindi goes through the first stage for months. He works at the office and earns a reputation for being adequate at his job as Mr. Khemka's personal assistant. During this stage, the satisfaction derived from compliance is due to the social effect of accepting influence.

Sindi goes through the conforming stage of internalization when the office gets raided by Mr. Ghosh. Sindi remains a distant observer as a crisis begins at the office. But as it culminates into a bigger problem for Mr. Khemka and his office staff, Sindi takes the crisis seriously. He realizes that his future in Mr. Khemka's company may be in jeopardy because of Mr. Ghosh's selfish actions. The person who induces a change in Sindi's attitude is Muthu who works at the lowest cadre in the same company. His role is limited and powerless but he convinces Sindi to get involved even without getting personally embedded with the crisis. Muthu calls it as detachment with right action which is also the principle of Karma Yoga. After getting to know the world in which Muthu lives in and breathes, Sindi's belief system changes and undergoes metamorphosis in the second conforming stage. He inculcates the beliefs of his co-worker and tries to act according to those acquired beliefs. He adopts the induced behaviour because it is congruent with his value system. The satisfaction derived from internalization is due to the content of the new behaviour. Sindi considers the new behaviour to be useful for the solution of a problem or he is finding it congenial to his needs. Behaviour adopted in this fashion tends to be integrated with the individual's existing values. In the last few chapters of the novel, Sindi puts all his efforts and energies into rescuing the company from bankruptcy.

The third stage, identification, occurs in the final chapter of the novel. Sindi and Sheila are having coffee at a coffee shop. Outside the shop, men are protesting on behalf of the workers' union. The union leader comes forward and starts chanting slogans to reclaim their rights as honest and hardworking men and women. Sindi and Sheila witness this incident and speak nothing of it. Instead, Sheila asks Sindi about the company and his personal life. Sindi has become a changed man both internally and externally. Sheila is able to see those changes and appreciates his role in saving the company and the lives of those who work in it. Sindi does not take much of the credit. He realizes that he is now a part of the workforce of the company. He also realizes that he has become closer to Sheila after spending time with her in such informal occasions. He takes over the role of the other and forms of a reciprocal role relationship. Sindi believes in the responses which he adopts through identification. He adopts the induced behaviour because it is associated with the desired relationship. The satisfaction derived from identification is due to the act of conforming as such. Sindi identifies himself as being part of the society by playing two roles. The first role is that of a manager in Mr. Khemka's company and the second role is that of a suitor for Sheila. He slowly appreciates Sheila's place in his life and understands that he may even grow to love her: "We both looked out of the window. I had a feeling we were just beginning to understand each other" (Joshi 192). The novel ends with Sindi having high hopes of playing the two roles—manager, suitor—with success in the future. Sindi undergoes the three conforming stages of behaviour and completes the process of dealienation.

This paper proves that Sindi, after being alienated from the society, goes through the three conforming stages of behaviour such as compliance, internalization, and identification. After doing so, Sindi is dealienated and becomes a part of the society. Happiness can never be achieved but can only be pursued. The same can be applied for dealienation. One can never fully achieve dealienation but can only pursue it. Life is a constant and ongoing cycle of alienation and dealienation.

### **Works Cited**

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