

## Conflict in the Novels of Arun Joshi

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### Abstract

Arun Joshi is an important signature in modern Indian English fiction. Though his literary output is not very voluminous, comprising five novels and a collection of short stories only, its quality is such that it has left an everlasting imprint on the history of Indian English novel. Today he stands as tall as any other novelist in Indian writing in English. His untimely death at the age of fifty three when he was in the full bloom of his creative genius deprived Indian English literature of many remarkable novels that were likely to follow. What makes Arun Joshi important as a writer is his understanding of the predicament of contemporary, educated middle class Indians born and brought up in free India and face to face with a fundamentally changing society. Joshi is different from most of his contemporary novelists like Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal and others in the sense that he is equally interested in the inner and outer world of his protagonists. If the turmoil in the minds of his characters interests him he is not unmindful of the socio-economic-political condition in which these characters live.

**Key words:** Alienation, social life, cultural life, psychology, humanity.

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The conflicts between alienated self and the socio-cultural forces are the postulates of Arun Joshi's fictional creations. In all his novels, the protagonists are subjected to the extreme social, cultural and psychological pressures. Sociologically speaking, the "Cultural lag", the inter-generational tensions and the changing ethos make increasing demand on the life of the individual. It results in emptiness, reflecting the chaotic conditions of "No Man's land," and rootlessness in life, pertinently haunts the psyche of men. The awareness of rootlessness and

consequent anxiety form the basis of identity-crisis, which has been described as the keynote of: "Joshi's existential vision of the plight and exploitation of the modern day man" (Bhatnagar 131). The protagonists discover the meaning and value of life by probing through the dark mossy labyrinths of the soul. This search of the identity is the central pillar of Arun Joshi's novels.

The protagonists of Arun Joshi's novels are perplexed and find themselves in the fast-moving world with no clear ambitions in mind.

The economic suffering, the social pressure, the dissolutions of the old beliefs and dogmas and uncertain loyalties mercilessly degrade their lives and injure their psyches, resulting in cynical attitudes towards life and established social norms and ethics.

The alienations in the novels of Arun Joshi's novel are because of the clash and conflict between the socio-cultural and psychological pressures. The alienation primarily arises because of social maladjustment and emotional insecurity. The alienated self, in search of identity, as the typical protagonist of Joshi's earlier novels.

The identity motif functions more on the socio-psychic two-dimensional materialistic plane rather than on the three dimensional metaphysical worlds. This quest attains the spiritual dimension only at certain levels. "My novels are essentially attempts towards a better understanding of the world and myself...." (32), asserts Joshi. No doubt, it points to the influence of Camus and Sartre on him. Arun Joshi himself reveals that he did read Camus and Sartre and liked their works.

Arun Joshi has, in *The Foreigner*, very dexterously handled some thought-provoking, grave issues like rootlessness, detachment, frustration, quest for a better alternative, identity-crisis and self-realization, highlighting our glorious cultural heritage and imperishable moral values. His reputation has been steadily rising since the publication of this very first novel.

"Humane technology" is a ray of hope in the darkness of modern world. While technological innovations have an important place in society, they also lead to a precarious life. There is a growing antagonism between man and technology. Arun Joshi illustrates that "total industrialization" and "total automation" (Ivasheva 32) result in the frustration that leads to various pathological

states. This notion brings him closer to the Marxist perspective of alienation. However, he departs from the Marxist perspective because he argues that the triumph of things over people leads to spiritual alienation which results in the wholesale destruction of the personality. The literary technology adopted by Arun Joshi, "humane technology" is a kind of acupuncture to smooth the pain and suffering, and is kind and friendly to the sufferer. The novels of Arun Joshi emphasize the urgent need of the "Humane Technology" to cure this sordid civilisation.

Arun Joshi's first novel *The Foreigner* was first published in 1968. Arun Joshi has mentioned that he started writing the book when he was a student but finished it, after his completion of academics, in 1966. The author also regards it as full of autobiographical sketches. Therefore, an analysis of the novel needs to be made in the context of the author's life. *The Foreigner* epitomises the main traits of his obsessive preoccupations as a creative artist. The protagonist shares the individualistic temperament of his creator. Joshi has addressed himself to the human dilemmas in all their complexities. Essentially, the protagonist has become the mouthpiece of the creator's perception of the realities and the vision. Arun Joshi has candidly accepted with reference to *The Foreigner*: "It is largely autographical. I am...a somewhat alienated man myself...Some parts of *The Foreigner*, my first book, were written when I was a student in America" (Purabi 4).

This makes the point more emphatic that in Joshi's creative universe the creator and his creations are intricately linked with each other and that provides authenticity to his novels.

In all his novels, Arun Joshi attempts to deal with different facets of alienation: in relation to self, the society around and humanity at large. Sindi Oberoi in *The Foreigner* (1968) is a born

Foreigner--a man alienated from the whole of humanity. The only son of an Indian father and an English mother, and born in Kenya, he is orphaned at an early age and grows into a youth without family ties and without a country. 'My Foreignness lay within me,' he confesses. Educated in England and the U.S.A., he sums up his life as: 'twenty-five years largely wasted in search of wrong things in wrong places.'

He develops a philosophy of detachment, which is really a mask for his fear of committing himself, of getting involved too deeply with others. His love for an American girl, June Blyth, ends tragically both for the girl and for his best friend, Babu, primarily because Sindi (a short form of Surrender which he, with unconscious irony, transliterates as "surrender") is afraid of marriage and its demands, "of possessing anybody and...of being possessed." He returns to India and joins an industrial concern but his rootlessness persists. Finally, when the numerous employees of his factory face ruin as a result of the exposure of the fraudulent boss, he discovers his latent humanitarianism, which compels him to save them by taking over the management.

This sudden transformation is unfortunately neither adequately motivated nor prepared for earlier. The ending thus appears to be botched up--a weakness not confined to this first novel alone, though Joshi's presentation of his hero's alienation in search of the identity is evocative enough. However, for a detailed and close analysis, the theoretical background of the concepts of "Self" and "Identity" is likely to be useful.

The issue of "Self" or "Identity" has long been a matter of intellectual discourse philosophical, psychological, sociological and literary levels. Philosophically, "Self" is Atma, intricately joined with Parmatma in Hinduism as well as in

Buddhist philosophy. In fact, the whole discourse of the Hindu and Buddhist philosophies is the discourse on the "self" passing through the various transitory phases of the human life cycle. It has to pass through suffering and redemption to attain "Moksha". The detailed account of the self and suffering enumerates several scientific causal factors in the Buddhist philosophy. In it, it is suggested that to be elevated and to have the "Madhayam Marga" should be adopted. Mahatma Buddha spent his life in search of the self and the identity of himself, leading to "Enlightenment" at 'Nirvana' (Death of the life).

Psychologically, Sigmund Freud has extensively analysed and written about the "Self". He relates the self from infancy till late age in personality development. The self consists of the Id, Ego and Superego, manifested in the form of Consciousness, Sub consciousness and the Unconsciousness. However, the most important part of his analysis lies in the understanding of the fact that Consciousness, Sub consciousness and the Unconsciousness are placed in the environment context internal and external. The self does not grow in the vacuum; rather it grows in the materialistic realities. The psychological state of mind is always in conflict with the environment in which one grows. It implies that the estrangement or alienation takes place because of the identity and self-crisis and for which environmental set up is prima-facie responsible. The self has been manifested in the form of the Personality, which is defined as the Constituent of all the behavioural traits of a man being.

The process of developing self-identity has three stages. First, we imagine how we appear to others to relatives, to friends or even the strangers on the street. Then we imagine how others perceive us; and finally, we develop some sort of feeling about ourselves. While doing so,

one passes through the preparatory stage, play stage, role taking, and game stage where the self occupies a privileged, central position in a person's world.

Thus it becomes amply clear that identity is very crucial to one's survival, and in literature it has been termed as the Existential theory. Camus, Kafka, Sartre and various other like-minded authors have dealt with the issue in detail. The issues of identity-crisis and self in the novels of Arun Joshi are looked at from philosophical, psychological and sociological points of view.

Arun Joshi is indisputably one of the few front-ranking fictionists of today. He made his debut in Indian-English literature with his novel The Foreigner (1968). It has been hailed as one of the most compelling existential works of Indian English Fiction. With it began Arun Joshi's journey into the dark, mysterious and uncharted hinterland of the soul to plumb some perennial problems of human existence.

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