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The World of Business and Personal Relationships in *The Foreigner* and *The Last Labyrinth* by Arun Joshi

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Abstract

The Foreigner (1968) and *The Last Labyrinth* (1981) are respectively the first and fourth novel written by Arun Joshi. These two novels have been grouped together for the simple reason that they both deal with same theme the world of business relationships as well as the personal. Arun Joshi is a novelist of the younger generation to which, besides others, belong the two women novelists such as Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai. The heroes of these novels are trained in the U.S.A., and they come back to India to work in industrial concerns. While Sindi Oberoi in *The Foreigner* gets employment in the Khemka concern, Som Bhaskar in *The Last Labyrinth* runs his own plastics industry. Their day-to-day lives are guided both by their existence in the world of their business and also as individuals. *The Foreigner* is a novel deals with several themes love versus hate, action versus inaction; possessiveness versus renunciation. It also deals with the themes of alienation, the absurd, the sordidness and seediness of the human existence. All the fictional works of Arun Joshi delve deep into these problems.

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The heroes of both *The Foreigner* and *The Last Labyrinth* are engrossed in industrial relationships and especially, in *The Foreigner*, industrial problems have also been mentioned and solved. The plot of *The Foreigner* has been unfolded from the viewpoint of the omniscient Protagonist narrator. Though Sindi Oberoi States very humbly, "I am not very good at remembering events, but for some reason I always remember the beginning and end of an affair" *The Foreigner*.pg.no 33 he is above all narrator and succeeds in communicating the very minute details of his life both personal and business relationships.

Sindi Oberoi's life is a study in rootlessness. He is hardly Indian and this fact keeps on haunting him. His mother was an English woman and fathers a Kenyan-Indian. Thus he is a child of mixed parentage. Both his parents settled in Nairobi, died early in an air-crash near Cairo. Being orphaned he is brought up by his uncle, also settled in Kenya. He had lost childhood happiness because of the death of his parents in his infancy. He is a product of a hybrid culture and his education in Kenya, London, Boston, and New York. He always says that he belongs to no culture and cannot confidently call himself either a Kenyan or an Indian. He thinks himself as a lonely planet, and the sense of pity and frustration also engulfs him. The heart of the matter with him is that he feels a foreigner wherever he goes and this is more psychological than physical.

His American girl friend, June Blyth is the first one to point out to him of his being obsessed with the foreign complex: "There is something strange about you, you know something distant. I would guess that when people are with you, they don't feel like they're human beings. May be it's an Indian characteristic, but I have a feeling you'd

be foreigner anywhere" (33). He considers his life to be a wasted one. Sindi thinks:

My fifth Christmas on these alien shores.
And yet all shores are alien when you
don't belong anywhere. Twenty fifth
Christmas on this planet, twenty five years
largely wasted in search of wrong things
in wrong places. Twenty five years gone
in search of peace, and what did I have to
show for achievements; a ten stone body
that had to be fed four times of a day,
twenty eight times a week. This was the
sum of a lifetime of striving (96).

Also like Prufrock, he is unable to understand himself or his life. He too is lonely, all alone in the wild world. Although an Indian by birth, Sindi feels himself to be an outsider even in India. Sheila, Babu's sister, tries to understand him but she too remarks: "You are still a foreigner, you don't belong here" (122). There is intense sadness in Sindi which those who come into contact with him, June in America, Sheila, Mr. Khemka in India, can feel in the very presence of the man. This he tries to explain to Mr. Khemka in the following manner: You had a clear cut system of morality, a caste system that laid down all you had to do. You had a God; you had roots in the soil you lived upon. Look at me. I have no roots. I have no system of morality. What does it mean to me if you call me an immoral man? I have no reason to be one thing or another. You ask me why I am not ambitious; well, I have no reason to be. Come to think of it I don't even have a reason to live! (118).¹⁵ Thus, in *The Foreigner*, Joshi depicts the alienation of the protagonist Sindi Oberoi. It results into the identity conflict but the post spiritualism gives him the salvation, an identity, and a meaning to his life. Besides, Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist of his debut novel *The Foreigner*, brings back to life many of the experiences encountered in his author's youth.

The Foreigner the world of business relationships is marginal to the hero of the novel. Sindi Oberoi is an engineer by profession who has to manage business. Like *The Foreigner*, *The Last Labyrinth* is also concerned with both the business and personal relationships. Som Bhaskar in *The Last Labyrinth* is himself a business man. At the age of twenty-five he has amassed a huge fortune and everything that is needed for worldly success. He is highly educated in the world's most famous

Universities. His wife Gita, is well-bred, beautiful and trusting and remains loyal to husband despite his erratic love-affairs with Leila Sabnis in Bombay and Anuradha in Benares. In his personal life he is a seeker after pleasure and hungers for the joys of life. In both the worlds of business and love he explores possibilities of new experience. But his indulgences have also an inner contradiction in that the more he runs after the material needs and sensual pleasure, the more dissatisfied he becomes with his existence and cries, "It is the voids of the world, more than its objects that bother me" (47). Yet he is always haunted by an insatiable cry of "I Want, I want, I want" (11). and not knowing what it is he desires, in some ways a parallel figure to Saul Bellow's Henderson, the rain king. His search takes him, however, to infinitely old Benares, a city seen as altogether intangible, at once holy and repellent, and to an end lost in a miasma of non-understanding. But the way there is gripping. Joshi writes with a persuasive ease and illuminates the outward scene with telling phrase after telling phrase.

The idea that the post-colonialism involves collision of two sets of values or notions about what modes of living are and that they are not worth preserving and promoting implies that individuals and communities must resolve the conflicts inherent to this situation. These authors present a range of resolutions to these conflicts through characters that represent the prevailing attitudes of different groups within a community, those of unusual yet believable individuals, and their own attitudes as men who have dealt or continue to deal with such conflicts. Since conflict defines the post-colonialism, resolutions and reformulated conflicts dictate its future definition. Therefore, conflicts and their resolutions enable the author to create, and the reader to discover, the nature of the evolving post-colonialism. The analysis of the entire corpus of Arun Joshi's writings demonstrates that there is a pattern in his works. The innate urge to determine life's meaning in positive terms leads Joshi's protagonists to wage an incessant war against challenging situations. The author's capacity of critical judgment is himself revealed through an analysis of novels. The socio-economic and cultural background leading to the literary milieu of the period to which Joshi belongs is pushed to further establish the basis of conflict in his novels.²⁸ The socio-historical realities from two divergent cultures (West and East) are

embedded in the psychological niche up of Arun Joshi.

Arun Joshi, a writer in the pre-Rushdie era, deals with secrecy and shadows of human mind. In today's world of book-promos, Arun Joshi would be a oddball as he kept himself out of the attention. His novels searching into existentialism, along with the ethical choices a man has to make, won him huge decisive admiration in India. Psychiatry was the basic curiosity of Arun Joshi. Most of the writings by Arun Joshi are filled with his own experiences right from his youth. Arun Joshi is a novelist who, more muscularly than most, has brought to his work that aloofness from the everyday, while still allow its existence, which is perhaps India's meticulous gift to the literature of the world.

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