

## EXISTENTIAL UNDERTONES AND INNER MONOLOGUES IN ARUN JOSHI'S THE FOREIGNER

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### **Abstract**

*A philosophical approach to an individual's existence, existentialism focuses on one's experience, freedom, struggle and association with the world. Jean Paul Sartre, a French philosopher, in his renowned book What is Existentialism? remarks, "existence precedes essence" (Sartre 18). The school of thought gained momentum in the 19th century in Europe and later flourished in the 20th century. Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher, is credited with being the father of Existentialism. He gave his core ideas on human existence, choices and selfhood significantly in Either/Or: A Fragment of Life (1843). His contemporary Fredrick Nietzsche, on the loss of religious faith, declares, "God is dead. God remains dead and we have killed him" (Nietzsche 125). In the 20th century, the movement was held in the hands of Martin Heidegger, Sartre, Albert Camus and Kafka. The writers secularized the idea of existentialism in the modern world. The sense of loss of identity, essence, individual freedom, alienation, isolation, absurdity, despair, anxiety and meaninglessness of life are the central facets of the literary movement. In India, its roots can be traced to 20th-century writers like Arun Joshi, Kamala Das etc. Arun Joshi's The Foreigner (1968), The Strange Case of Billy Biswas (1971), The Apprentice (1974) and The Last Labyrinth (1981) can be studied through the lens of existential philosophy. The focus on existential undertones and characters' inner monologues gives ample scope to dive deep into the works from various perspectives. The present paper is an attempt to investigate The Foreigner by Arun Joshi, tracing and highlighting the themes of existentialism.*

### **Keywords**

*Existentialism, essence, alienation, absurdity, meaninglessness of life.*

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

**Received: 24/08/25**

**Approved: 20/09/25**

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### **Article No.35**

*RJPSS Apr.25-Sept.25, 2025*

*Vol. L No. 2, Pg. 271-277*

Similarity Check - 04%

### **Online available at:**

<https://anubooks.com/journal-volume/rjps-2025-vol-l-no-2-sept>

<https://doi.org/10.31995/rjps.2025.v50i02.035>

“Existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy” (Kaufmann 11). The movement relies on an individual’s existence, experience and essence. Aruni Joshi’s contribution helped the philosophical approach rise in Indian English literature. His novel, *The Foreigner* advocates the themes of existentialism. The story revolves around Sindi Oberoi, whose suffering echoes a sense of detachment, alienation and inwards him a sense of insecurity. The early demise of his parents brings a sense of loss of belongingness. He is brought up by his uncle but soon they too left him alone in this world. The lack of parental love causes him to feel alienated. He was born in Kenya to an Indian Kenyan father and English mother. He is confused and his mixed personality brings a series of challenges in his life in making decisions, relationships and emotional regulation. He wants to escape from the material world and prefers detachment from several things. When his beloved, June asks him to marry, he shows his disinterest, “[m] Arrangements wouldn’t help, June. We are alone, both you and I. That is the problem. And our aloneness must be resolved from within. You can’t send two persons through a ceremony and expect that their aloneness will disappear” (Joshi 115).

The German philosopher Fredrick Nietzsche’s statement, “Whither is God... I shall tell you. We have killed him—you and I” (Nietzsche 126) shows how the loss of absolute values has taken place in modern society. When June asks him about his faith in God, he says, “I didn’t know. But I suppose I didn’t (Joshi 30). With time, June meets death and the change of thought in him takes place. His wish to detach from the world turns into selfless action and belief in God. He says,

Detachment at that time had 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...  
There was assurance that the universe would click on,  
even though Babu and June and their child were gone.  
I was the only one left who had the completed record. (177)

The story begins with an inciting incident, “[t]hey uncovered his face and I turned in spite of myself. Will you please look at the body, Mr. Oberoi?” (3). Sindi Oberoi’s life has various twists. The author uses a first-person narrative to progress the story. Sindi’s lack of confidence and doubtfulness about future endeavors brings several challenges in his life. He has an affection for June but he wants to be free from worldly responsibilities. However, he advises her to unite with Baburao

Khemka. The dilemma faced by June is tragic because when she comes to know about her pregnancy from Babu, she has to abort but this action costs her life. June also feels alienated because of the indifferent behaviour of Sindi towards her. Babu too has love for June. The death of June drags Sindi into deep regret. The plot takes a drastic turn when Babu and June pass away unexpectedly and tragically. It compels Sindi to acknowledge that he cannot protect himself from suffering by avoiding emotional attachments; on the contrary, it deepens his sense of emptiness. This event challenges his ideas about freedom, responsibility, and human connection, and pushes him to reconsider the way he has been living. Arun Joshi poses significant questions through Sindi's inner conflicts: Is emotional detachment a sensible way of living or merely a means of escaping fear? Can a person be truly free without caring for others? The novel does not provide simple answers, but it invites the reader to think carefully about these issues.

The presentation of a story in a different context, as a flashback, reflection, or recollection from the present, is known as a framing device. Arun Joshi applied the introspective narration of Sindi Oberoi as a framing device in *The Foreigner*. The novel begins with the tragic deaths of Babu and June, and from that point, Sindi starts to recount his past experiences, including how he arrived in America, his relationships, his thoughts on freedom and detachment, and how everything ended in that tragedy. For instance, Sindi tells the story after the major events have taken place. He reflects on the past and considers what went wrong, the reasons behind his decisions, and the consequences of his decisions. This narrative style, which begins in the present and then moves back in time, frames the main story, which consists of his recollections. The framing device helps show Sindi's emotional growth and self-awareness. It allows readers to see things not just from the perspective of action but also from that of thought. It provides a depth of philosophy that is characteristic of Arun Joshi's existential approach.

The author portrays geographical shift as a background in the story. The characters Sindi Oberoi, Babu, Karl etc. feel absurd while living far from their homelands. Sindi is so disinterested that he wants to get a job which "should be something that could make me forget myself" (11). He wants to escape from the struggle, pain and chaos of this world. He wants to get utter silence in his life so that nothing can be felt. He, in every sphere of life, steps for experiencing that can bring detachment but the course of the practice turns into the cause of his struggle. He says,

Somebody had begotten me without a purpose and so far  
I had lived

Perhaps I felt like that because I was a foreigner in America.  
But then, what difference would it have made  
if I had lived in Kenya or India or any other place for  
That matter! It seemed to me that I would still be a foreigner.  
My foreignness lay within me and I couldn't leave myself behind  
wherever I went. (57-58)

These lines reflect the mental and emotional exhaustion of Sindi Oberoi, which ties into the novel's existential themes of disillusionment, detachment, and meaninglessness. Furthermore, Sindi tells June about the death of Babu and breaks down in tears. She is pitiful and mourns the death of Babu. On this note, Sindi too expresses his views: "I wished I could have said the same thing for myself. I might not have willed it consciously, but in some foggy chamber of my being I must have waited for it to happen" (5-6).

Although the circumstance shows Sindi Oberoi's lack of concern, it also shows how honest he is with himself. He had been in love with June Blyth all his life, despite his cold demeanor. He did not publicly admit it, but he felt uneasy whenever he saw June and Babu together. Sindi reassured June that there was nothing she could do. Now it was all gone. This demonstrates once more that, unseen or subconsciously, Sindi always desired for Babu to experience something similar. The author repeatedly depicts the protagonist's loss of identity and employs inner monologue throughout the story. Sindi finds himself surrounded by a crowd. As he walks aimlessly, his mind feels blank. Then he catches sight of two girls chatting in front of him. They laugh about something, and Sindi assumes they are making fun of him, believing himself to be a stranger. He tends to follow his heart and acts accordingly. He interprets everything he encounters through his own assumptions.

The frequent changes in setting, time, and the different moods of the characters show how Sindi Oberoi himself is emotionally confused and unsettled throughout the novel. The title *The Foreigner* is symbolic—not only is Sindi a foreigner in terms of nationality, but he also feels emotionally and spiritually distant from other people and even from himself. As a timeless reflection on identity, belonging, and the value of human connection, this novel ultimately conveys a powerful message: even in a world full of confusion and uncertainty, real meaning comes from being involved, caring for others, and taking responsibility. Arun Joshi reminds us that even though life is complicated, we must still try to live it with honesty, courage, and emotional depth.

The purposelessness of life is one of the themes of the novel. Sindi Oberoi's wish to escape from the course of life without any valid purpose, perhaps in a state of confusion, shows his wonder. He though, chooses to leave the situation numerous times, and is dragged in by fate. Like Camus' Sisyphus, a symbol of the absurd hero, Sindi's decision to follow his wish purposelessly gives a different angle to the story. One can see the turning of the character's persona with the due course of time. He learns through bitter experience that true detachment is a product of right action.

Muthu is the leader of the workers at Khemka's factory. He shows abundant trust in Sindi Oberoi when Sindi decides to leave for Mumbai after Mr. Khemka is arrested in an income tax raid. Muthu requests him to stay and not go anywhere, as there is no one else to take care of the factory. He believes that Sindi Oberoi is the right person to manage everything and handle the situation responsibly. At that time, Sindi was ready to leave — his backpack and other belongings were already outside the room. But after Muthu's request, he changes his decision. Instead of going to Mumbai, he chooses to stay in Delhi and take responsibility for looking after Khemka's factory. The author skillfully depicts significant incidents that allow readers to understand the characters' personalities and existential struggles. The well-structured plot adds a unique touch to the story. The work is notable for the way it depicts the sense of alienation and the quest for identity. His ability to weave the story across different time periods is remarkable and gives the narrative depth.

By the end of the novel, Sindi Oberoi has faced years of struggle—losing his parents early, drifting between jobs, failing in relationships, and feeling out of place wherever he goes. His fear of commitment keeps him distant from people and from life itself. Meeting Muthu becomes a turning point, as Muthu's selfless way of living forces Sindi to see that his real alienation is from himself, not the world. Inspired by the *Bhagavad Gita*, he learns that true detachment comes through *Karma Yoga*—acting selflessly without clinging to results. With this understanding, Sindi moves from isolation to involvement, ready to live with purpose, responsibility, and connection. Through Sindi's journey, Arun Joshi masterfully explores the existential dilemma of modern man, blending Indian philosophical wisdom with the alienation of contemporary urban life.

### **Conclusion**

*The Foreigner*, published in 1968, was his first novel and is seen as one of the earliest Indian English works to deal deeply with existentialist ideas. In this novel, Arun Joshi talks about themes like existentialism, rootlessness, alienation, the meeting of Eastern and Western cultures, and multiculturalism. This book gave Arun Joshi a distinctive place in Indian English literature as a pioneer in writing

about existentialism. His works, though set in an Indian context, can be compared to the writings of well-known Western existentialist authors like Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Franz Kafka, Martin Heidegger, and Søren Kierkegaard for their depth and philosophical insight. *The Foreigner* by Arun Joshi is an insightful and profoundly moving novel that explores the life of a young man who feels alienated not just from his country but also from his relationships and even from himself. At the heart of the story is Sindi Oberoi. Despite only being a twenty-five-year-old guy, he bears the psychological burden of a much older person, navigating a life divided between moral obligation and emotional detachment.

Coming from a mixed cultural background, Sindi Oberoi struggles with the feelings of alienation, disengagement and fear of getting too involved in life. The bewilderment and emptiness that many people feel in the present world are reflected in his voyage. The novel depicts the restless search for meaning through its portrayal of Sindi Oberoi's inner conflicts, constant self-questioning, and solitary struggles. Arun Joshi's use of inner monologues reveals the depth of human uncertainty and alienation in a rapidly changing world. By weaving existentialist thought into an Indian context, he forged a singular path in Indian English literature for exploring the individual's search for purpose. His work remains a significant bridge between Eastern sensibilities and Western philosophical traditions.

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