



Meaning and significance of action: A critical study of Arun Joshi's *The foreigner*

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Abstract

The present research paper explores the existential predicament of man who has a wrong conception of involvement and action in life. It analyses why man feels psychologically and emotionally fragmented. It discusses how withdrawal from action leads a man to catastrophe. In this paper an attempt has been made to bring out the importance of action for making the life meaningful. It points out how a life full of action becomes bliss, while disinterest in action disturbs the psyche and the person feels alienated wherever he goes.

Keywords: existential crisis, involvement, non-involvement, absurdity of life

Introduction

The central theme of Arun Joshi's works is the existential crisis in the life of an individual. Existential crisis indicates an inner conflict that lies in the deep psyche of individuals. A person who suffers from existential predicament sees no meaning in life. He runs from one place to another in search of happiness, but feels disturbed wherever he goes. The writer opines that man can get rid of this problem only if he involves himself in action because action makes his life purposeful as it is only the deeds through which he can fulfil his aspirations and dream truly, and the desired attainment brings gratification and satisfaction in life.

Through Sindi Oberoi, the central character of his first novel, *The Foreigner*, Arun Joshi explicitly emphasizes upon the importance of action. The author believes that man suffers from the pangs of alienation at every place if he doesn't indulge himself in action. Sindi Oberoi always feels lonely because of his philosophy of non-involvement in action, subsequently suffering from psychological conflict. Through a series of relationships he tries to have a quest for meaning in life but due to an escape from action he fails to find the essence of life.

In quest for self, Sindi goes across continent. As he doesn't believe in possession, he feels alienated whether it is England or America or India. This alienation makes him fragmented psychologically. For the character of Sindi, Reena aptly says in her article, "Conflict between Attachment and Detachment in Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner*, "He believes that possession generates pain as it implies involvement. Though he has some mission, some purpose, and some desire in life but he has drawn himself from action. And this makes him alienated wherever he goes (131)."

In his orphaned childhood Sindi is deprived of parental love and care that leads him to develop a state of identity crisis. In London, while studying Engineering, he feels the absurdity of life. In pursuit of a meaningful life he passes through a number of experiences, but doesn't get happiness due to his non-participation in action. While doing a job of a dishwasher in a night-club, he meets an artist named Anna who is a divorcee. Sindi discusses with her the issues of life and death. He enjoys love-making with her, but doesn't find meaning of life in this relationship. In a party he meets

another woman, Kathy, who hungers for adulterous love. After some time she also proves unfaithful to him. The disloyalty shown by Anna and Kathy leads Sindi to loose his faith in human relations, and now he adopts the path of detachment and non-involvement.

Having been betrayed by Anna and Kathy, Sindi thinks that human relationships are meaningless so he runs away from action. He embraces a wrong sense of disinterest in action because he cannot have a check on his senses. Now he desires only gain and pleasure in life, but afraid of involving in action that demands responsibility. He involves in action only for his selfish motives. He cultivates a sense of disinterest in action desired by the society. That is why he cannot have the belongingness and feels pangs of alienation wherever he goes. Kavita Yadav comments:

Sindi's philosophy of detachment is not the result of a pragmatic approach in life, but his search for wrong things at wrong places. His cynicism and detachment become a veneer of shying away from involvement and commitment, and send him from crisis to crisis. His false notion of living without desire is badly shattered when his ideal theory of non-involvement comes into clash with the reality of life (261).

The novelist brings into light the conflict that is developed in Sindi because of his decision of non-participation in action. As he has a sense of detachment to his duties and attachment to the self, in Boston he falls in love with June, a charming attractive girl. June loves him truly. She knows that Sindi suffers from an emotional void and is extremely lonely. She involves physically with him. June wants to marry and have children by him. Though he loves her, he doesn't want to marry because he doesn't want involvement in action that desires the fulfillment of duties. He opines that one should be able to love without wanting to possess. He asserts, "You can love without attachment, without desire. You can love without attachment to the objects of your love" (*Foreigner* 170). With a wrong sense of disinterest in action he cannot enjoy the bliss of life fully and remains shattered psychologically.

Sindi believes that possession requires action and he is of the opinion that he shouldn't involve in action as he adopts the philosophy of detachment, so he refuses June to marry her. Deepak Kamboj justly asserts, "He seeks refuge in non-

involvement and inaction which he misconstrues for freedom. But his detachment becomes a delusion as he cannot free himself from self-engrossment and selfish desire" (40). Sindi's withdrawal from responsibility further deepens his sense of aloofness, as he tells June, "Marriage wouldn't help, June. We are alone, both you and I, that is the problem and our aloneness must be resolved from within, you cannot send two persons through a ceremony and expect that their aloneness will disappear" (*Foreigner* 107).

After realizing Sindi's withdrawal from responsibility, June turns to Babu Rao Khemka. Still Sindi is in deep love with June, and one night he involves with him physically. When Khemka comes to know about it he feels aghast and drives off madly in his car. On the way, he meets an accident and gets killed. At the death of his friend Sindi gets shocked. This time also he suffers because of his philosophy of non-involvement and inaction. A. Mohamed Mohideen aptly remarks:

Sindi has some mission, some purpose, some desire in life but he has completely withdrawn himself from all such pursuits of life. He does not like to be an involved man with all sorts of natural activities....He has formed his own ideas regarding life. Sindi is more on the defensive and withdrawn self rather than on attacking the odds of life for which he had not been trained.

June also dies in an attempt of abortion. He has shattered completely. Now he realizes the fallacy of withdrawal and inaction. He is fragmented psychologically more and more. He cries, "Detachment at that time meant inaction. Now I had to see the fallacy in it. Detachment consisted of right action and not escape from it. God had set a heavy price to teach me just that" (*Foreigner* 188-89)".

As a tortured soul, Sindi comes back to India and accepts a job in the firm of Babu Rao Khemka's father. Here he realizes the reality of life that man can remain happy only if he involves in action selflessly. In this context Bala Shanmuga Devi aptly comments:

A man owes much to the society into which he is born for having accommodated him. Evasiveness and escapism, as of Sindi never suits an honest person. One should render services in all possible and practicable ways in order to repay the dues to the world. Abandonment of all desire prompted action is true renunciation (2).

Thus Arun Joshi explicitly explores the real meaning of involvement and action in life. To perform one's duties and responsibilities selflessly or without desiring for the results is true involvement and real action. It gives real satisfaction and makes the life purposeful and meaningful. The person who believes in non-involvement and withdraws himself from action cannot lead a happy life just like Sindi Oberoi.

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