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The Reflection of Karma Yoga in Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner*

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Abstract

Arun Joshi is an outstanding Indian novelist whose novels probe into dark and inner most issues of human mind in the present world. He has not only presented the predicament of a modern man but also sensitively touched the deep layers of human beings. He is amongst those Indian novelists whose works reflect strong influence of Indian mythological and spiritual ideology. Arun Joshi's first novel *The Foreigner* published in the year 1968, reflects the ideas of Indian Philosophies. The novel reveals the principles of Karma Yoga narrated by the supreme personality of god head Sri Krishna in the battle field Kurukshetra to Arjuna, to uncover the layer of "maya" (vanity) of the material world. *The Foreigner* stresses the importance of detachment with the self but a

commiserative involvement with the world as a step towards the achievement of “Karma Yoga” or non- attached actions are personified by the protagonist Sindhi in the novel.

Keywords

Detachment; Karma Yoga; Inner Conflict.

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The struggle of the protagonist Sindhi against social conventions and his inner conflicts, what he is really and what the society expects him to be is the central idea of the novel. Arun Joshi used the first person narrative technique where the protagonist of the novel Sindhi Oberoi, himself narrates the story. He has put his efforts to reveal unexplored and mysterious dark realm of soul with some confusing questions of human beings. Sindhi’s career illustrates the verse of Gita Chapter III verse 4. It says a man cannot attain freedom from action by abstention from work or by mere renunciation.

The Foreigner is a tale of self assessment and finding a meaning of his life. The protagonist of the novel Sindhi is a character which comes out of the law of karma (work) and the story always revolves around detachment from self and society. Sindhi goes on hopping from one country to another because he finds no real meaning leading a life like an outsider, which is baseless, rootless and dissatisfied. His mother is English and father, an Indian, who lives in Kenya. The question ‘where do I belong’ starts from there. Sindhi lost his parents in an air crash in his childhood that gave an opportunity to become social and have interpersonal relations with people in the society.

His uncle brought up Sindhi in Kenya when his parents died. He moved to London to study Engineering and soon becomes tired of routine classes and searches for something meaningful. This search for meaning, once led him to wash dishes in Soho. Through the books of Philosophy he tried to console his soul but he came to a final note of life that “considerable change of attitude

towards life and living superficial life make a man rootless thus he belongs nowhere". The feelings of rootlessness became strong when he meets the characters like June, Babu, Mr. Khemka which gives lot of fluctuations in the story. Yet Sindhi's confusion is clearly seen "To do or not to do". The situation is similar to the situation of Arjuna in the battle field of Kurukshetra and begs for a solution to Lord Sri Krishna in *Bhagavad Gita*, "Should I perform the Kriya or should I abide".

Sindhi realizes the vanity of human efforts and achievements at the age of twenty-five when a normal person seems to be filled with enthusiasm and fondness of life. He makes way for his feelings like this,

And yet all shores are alien when you don't belong anywhere.
Twenty fifth Christmas on the 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
achievement: a ten stone body that had to be fed four times a day,
twenty eight times a week, this was the sum of a life time of
striving? (98)

The influence of karma yoga was very strong on Sindhi as he unconsciously shows strong influence in his discussion with Mr. Khemka. Sindhi says, "I want to do something meaningful" (14).

This shows the preaching of Lord Krishna in *Bhagavad Gita* "actions which performed expecting a result leads to misery so be unattached, be pure". The phrase 'something meaningful' means action without bondage: action with inaction. Sindhi in Mr. Khemka's office finds Mr. Khemka a man running for money and to avoid loneliness they hold or go to big parties to meet and console their souls. He remarks, "They talked of money and how to more of it. They left the impression that they could buy up anybody they wanted. Perhaps they could, but it all sounded meaningless to me" (16).

Sindhi found no meaning in Khemka's life, who is running always for physical or material pleasures which are short lived in the world. He also says, Mr. Khemka and his daughter lived in a strange world through which I wondered occasionally like a sleepwalker without grasping what it was all about. The reason they attended so many gigantic parties and threw so many of their own, first I thought, was because they were occupied with making more money. Gradually, it dawned on me that they were also afraid of being alone. This was perhaps natural since they had always lived in a crowd and women especially had little or nothing to do. (42)

Sindhi's remarks correlates with *Gita* that "any deed performed to attain physical pleasure in life is called lust or desire. A real man must do actions without expecting a result or fruit thus he becomes unattached to the real world. The feeling of detachment and loneliness continues all his life no matter where he lives. To avoid pain, suffering he moves from one place to another in search of a solution to his questions which are unanswered. Here Sindhi appears as a saint who is in search of something divine.

Sindhi meets two important individuals like Babu Rao Khemka and June Blyth in America when he was doing a doctorate degree in Mechanical Engineering. June Blyth played an important role in Sindhi's life after they met first time at International Student Association. They came close but June is always confused about the strange behavior of Sindhi and says,

There is something strange about you, you know, something distant. I'd guess that when people are with you they don't feel like they are with a human being. May be it is an Indian characteristics, but I have a feeling you would be a foreigner anywhere. (29)

The remark itself says how detached Sindhi in his life and with people he lives around. Sindhi feels there is no substantial change in his attitude of life

that he is living at artificial level because he does not belong anywhere. He realizes the vanity in human achievements and purposelessness of life at the age of twenty-five.

Sindhi initially felt that there is no purpose leading an artificial life and achieving something to show the capability of being powerful is meaningless in this world. Sindhi considers himself a foreigner on any land and he remarks, "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" (55).

The remark sensibly touches the preaching of Lord Krishna to Arjuna that "human beings are destined to live their lives with no control over their actions". Sindhi as a wanderer has no perfect reason to live his life in one way or another. He follows the actions which are destined to take him to a place where he is alone, sad and search for meaning though he had a lively picture of artificial life around but seems to miss the meaning of happiness and pleasure. Sindhi's actions make us decisively believe the words of Krishna that "birth and death are recurrent, human existence is not permanent and the world exists on the illusion".

Sindhi says "I don't want to get involved" (74) repeatedly to show his intension of not to act and to justify his point of detachment from his duties. He muses as a philosopher and says, "Nothing ever seems real to me, leave alone permanent. Nothing seems to be important" (113) but the main cause of rumination is ignorance.

The law of karma is beautifully elucidated in the case of Sindhi. It says no one can avoid Karma and the action that we are intended to do is decided by the supreme personality of God. Though Sindhi wants to remain unattached without involving himself in any action, he develops relationships with Anna, Kathy, Judy, Christine and June. It is impossible to avoid karma and Sindhi also did the same but whenever there is proposal of marriage he pretends to

himself on the pretext of being detached. In his daily life too he wants to be free from involvement. “To Love ... is to invite others to break your heart” (82).

Sindhi considers marriage is a painful act and to marry is to live in bondage because he finds no real meaning in spending his life with a woman in a relationship which demands more concern towards each other. For Sindhi, marriage is an illusion accepted by the society to have mutual concern over many complicated issues of life. Sindhi says, “Marriage was more often a lust for possession than anything else. People got married just as they bought new cars and then gobbled each other up”.

For Sindhi marriage is just a social responsibility that one has to accept to be in the society and it doesn't lead to detachment because nothing stays real in marriage. In his arguments, June asks Sindhi whether he really loves her. June thinks it is meaningful to love and make them happy, bring up children who contribute to society and in Sindhi's view it is unreal and momentary and their ideology parted them from each other.

On the other side we witness a character Babu who dwells completely in physical desires with low spirits and unable to understand his existential purpose he ends his life. Babu faces many difficulties in studies and was asked to leave university due to his failure. At this juncture Sindhi and June put all their efforts to bring Babu out from the gloom and motivate him. June is one such character in the novel who forgets herself in other's troubles. June remarks

I have been seeing Babu frequently since you left. He seems to be in such a low spirits most of the time that my heart aches for him. He is usually depressed because he is not doing well in his studies. I go with him every night because I think he needs me. I want to be use to him. (101)

While Sindhi goes away to complete his project, June becomes physically close to Babu in order to remove his fear. June and Babu both fell in love and

June cannot deny Babu as he is a sensitive person and denial can lead to depression in his life. They both get married without informing their parents in India.

In *Gita* Lord Krishna beautifully expostulates that involvement with materialistic things leads to more attachment. Rajoguna kindles desire and anger, which are the reasons to commit sins in the world. Babu, who is fond of sensual desires and pleasure, represents Rajoguna. Rajoguna makes humans to act worldly and allow humans to experience passion, lust, joy and sorrow.

Due to Rajoguna, Babu was suspicious over June going out with others. Owing to suspicious mind and lustful mind he was unable to control his emotions which made him to commit suicide. Sindhi was much affected by Babu's death and lost his confidence in the world as he was his belief in the world. Babu's death caused much disturbance in the world of Sindhi as he was the only belief to him to see the world with attachment.

When Babu died June was carrying his baby in the womb and in the confused state she met with death in an attempted abortion. Sindhi blames himself for the deaths and remarks he learns being detached from the world but not from his own self. The confused approach caused two deaths in Sindhi's life. In *Gita* it is clearly given that detachment does not mean inaction and Sindhi's behavior has cost the lives of two innocents. "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" (162).

Sindhi finds himself in a tangle where he was stained by the blood of two. His perceptions on the death of June and Babu made him to leave America as Arjuna wants to leave the battle field after he had to fight his own people in Kuruksetra. Sindhi left America and landed his ancestors' land, India. He was caught in a confused situation when he met Babu's father Mr. Khemkha. "I had no idea what they were going to say. And what mask was I

put on if they knew? The thought made me uncomfortable and I wished again I hadn't come" (10).

Sindhi was offered a job in the Khemkha's office and there he met Muthu one of the clerks of the office. After being alarmed by fraud in income tax dealings, he wants to leave the office and find a job in Mumbai. His detachment world still follows after witnessing the tragedy in America. Though he was left with many options he decided to meet Muthu before leaving to Mumbai.

Sindhi, being a confused soul meets Muthu as Arjuna goes to Lord Krishna for the right way. Muthu requests him to take over the responsibility of the office. Having lost his faith in himself he says he was afraid of attachment and denies his proposal. As Lord Krishna shows the right way to Arjuna in the battle field Muthu guides Sindhi to the right way saying, "But it is not involvement, Sir, he said. Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved" (188).

Muthu removes the darkness of detachment from the mind of Sindhi leading to the path of karma yoga which is doing actions without expecting anything. "As I entered the room I had a strange sensation, something I had never before felt in life. I felt as if I had been dropped on a sinking ship and charged with the impossible task of taking it ashore" (189).

Finally, Sindhi accepts to take over the responsibly after the request of all the workers in the office. This gives him finally a reason to lead life not for himself but to live and do actions for the well-being of others.

Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner* befits a good medium which mirrors karma yoga of Indian Philosophy by using Sindhi's confused behavior of "To do or not to do". It reflects human being's conflict in the world where no ray of hope is seen to take life in meaningful way. The protagonist of the novel experiences the dark realm in life through many characters that he come across in life and finally set himself on the note that "detachment lies actually getting attached through right actions and not expecting any fruit of his deeds".

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