



**Arun Joshi's Use of Symbolism in "The Foreigner"**

**Yashodhara Y. Thaker**

MA English, GSET

Email: [thakeryashodhara@gmail.com](mailto:thakeryashodhara@gmail.com)

**Abstract:**

Arun Joshi's use of symbolism as a literary device to convey the human condition will be the topic of investigation in this paper for the study. Arun Joshi illustrates the incredible nature of human existence via symbols. An in-depth analysis of the body of work indicates that the search and the crises are the primary experiences he draws upon while writing. The author underlines Sindi Oberoi's suffering due to his adrift ness and loneliness during the novel, concentrating on Sindi's path from disengagement from the world to involvement in it. The book is about Sindi's journey from disengaging from the world to being involved. The author, Joshi, uses effective symbolism to convey the protagonist's position as someone attempting to find truth despite the chaos and meaninglessness brought on by the mind.

**Keywords:** Symbolism, Alienation, outsider, rootlessness

Most people concur that Arun Joshi is one of the best works to have had an Indian background. His essays frequently touch on the challenges that the modern world presents. Everything about it is unique, from the many sides of the subject to the many creative or literary approaches, even the symbolism. The use of imagery and symbolism exposes itself to be a big load on the shoulders of any writer when it comes to keeping the story moving ahead in any piece of writing. Arun Joshi is one of several writers who tackle various topics on Indian literary canvases. Using this instrument as effectively as possible, he communicated his ideas to the audience. Arun Joshi is one of the numerous authors who cover a wide range of topics. He works as a management consultant and has a degree in business management, but



he also likes to write in his own time. He is the author of five books, and the recurring themes in all of them revolve around man's alienation, his knowledge of his rootlessness, and the loneliness and anxiety that follow in a society that is too materialistic, self-centred, and corrupt.

Additionally, he is the author of two volumes of short stories, both of which have as their central topics man's alienation from nature and awareness of his rootlessness. In addition, he has written a collection of short stories. He goes deeply into the conflicted human soul and articulates the goals and motives of the human spirit with an exceptionally high level of psychological insight.

**The Foreigner** The story in 1968 is well written and tells a good story. The author has provided a thought-provoking interpretation of the central issue of isolation. Joshi has brought to everyone's notice the conflict that occurs "between detachment and involvement, indifference and communion." The essay was written in a reflective tone and style, maintaining a wistful tone throughout. As he grows from a youngster into an adult, the main character Sindi realizes that it is better to be committed to anything, no matter what it may be, than to be apathetic about anything. In his book, Arun Joshi effectively uses symbolism to communicate all of this information; however, before we examine his one-of-a-kind technique for doing so, let's look at some examples from the book. This will give us a better idea of what we're trying to achieve. **The Foreigner** In the following, we will attempt to understand the significance behind the concept of symbolism.

The word "symbol" is derived from the Greek "symbol on" and the Latin "symbolism," both of which denote "token" or "sign. " The term "symbol" in English is derived from the Greek verb "symboling," which means "to throw together." (Webster, 2003, p. 1190). **The New Oxford Encyclopedic Dictionary**, a "thing standing for or representing something else, especially a material thing taken to represent an idea or quality, or an immaterial or abstract thing; a written character typically denoting something, a method, etc." is what one use of the word "symbol" reads.<sup>1</sup> In the **Readers Digest Great Illustrated Dictionary** The word "symbol" refers to "something that represents or stands for, or is thought to be typified, by association, resemblance, or convention, something else; especially, a material object used to represent



something invisible such as an idea: the dove is a symbol of peace."

"M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham are two of the stars of "The Invisible Man." A

**Glossary of Literary Terms** The definition of a symbol is "anything that signifies something else."<sup>3</sup> Although symbolism was not introduced to England until 1899, humans have always used symbols to express their feelings and viewpoints on events, life, and death. The first-time symbolism was used in England was in the year 1899. Symbolism is a literary technique that may be used in all sorts of writing; it is not exclusive to any form of written expression. Similar to symbolism in poetry and theatre, it can also be found in novels. However, symbolism in poetry and theatre is considerably more common than in novels. In the same way as character development, dialogue, and narrative advance the plot on the surface, symbolism links the story's extraneous events to the subject matter. The external events of the tale are connected to the subject matter via symbolism. Establishing a link between the story's actions and the meaning underlying them is made easier by using symbolism. The use of allegory was frequently responsible for the early development of symbols in creating the fictional story. One of the main objectives throughout these first stages was this. As a result, the relationship between the real event and its metaphorical equivalent was exact in all respects.

One of the most famous Indian authors of all time is Arun Joshi, and one of the factors in his success is the use of symbolism in his writing as a literary element. His talent as a storyteller is another factor in his appeal. One of the most famous writers who emerged from India is Arun Joshi, highly recognized in the literary world. For him, symbolism is a powerful weapon to give aesthetic colouring and vesture to his characters' activities and subsequent functioning in continual co-relation with events, circumstances, visuals, and the like rather than just a theoretical appendage. In other words, he employs symbolism as a powerful tool to give his characters' actions and ensuing behaviour an appealing visual colouring and garb. He does this by giving his characters' actions and subsequent functioning aesthetically pleasing colouration and garb. He also uses clothing to do this. He accomplishes this by giving his characters' behaviour an artistic colouring and garb so that they can continue to live in a perpetual co-relationship with occasions, circumstances, images, and other things. The human condition is portrayed in Arun Joshi's works as being bogged down in the intricate labyrinths of isolation



and despair. It is inconceivable that this could have been done so effectively and efficiently by relying only on the story, and it is also inconceivable that this could have been done in the books without a system of symbols. Arun Joshi concluded that symbols were the only strategy he could successfully use to create an appropriate medium for the representation of the predicament and the loneliness. He realized this was the only tactic he could use to his advantage. He gave it a lot of thought before concluding that the only tactic he could utilize successfully was the usage of symbols.

In **The Foreigner** (1968), Everywhere he goes, the narrator-hero Sindi Oberoi is treated like a stranger. This occurs repeatedly in the book. Arun Joshi wants to look into the tortured feeling of being cut off from the social mores and cultural practices of his society. This is Sindi Oberoi's story. She was born in Kenya to an Indian father and an English mother. Her mother's point of view is used to tell her narrative. Despite coming from India, he didn't exactly match the stereotype of a Hindu. He expressed his ambiguity in the following words: "Anyway, I can't be termed a Hindu. My father is considered a sceptic, while my mother is of English ancestry. That doesn't make a nice introduction for a Hindu."<sup>4</sup> The only thing Sindi remembers about his parents is that they died in an aeroplane crash when he was a little boy. At the time, he was just four years old. They are only represented by "a few wrinkled and cracked photographs," in his opinion.<sup>5</sup> He has been moving aimlessly from place to place ever since, like a man who can't hang onto anything. Sindi is still regarded as a foreigner no matter where he goes, whether in Delhi, Boston, or London. He questions whether he can be a citizen of the globe rather than thinking of himself as a citizen of any one country: "Did I belong to the world?"<sup>6</sup> But contrary to what would initially appear, his sense of otherness—which makes him feel far from other people—is not geographical; rather, it is a soul-related experience.<sup>7</sup>

The existential problem of our day and the numerous issues related to and linked to it are handled in the novel "The Foreigner" in a way that exhibits extraordinary creative talent. Arun Joshi has also used symbols to depict this existential dilemma. Both the title of the novel, "Surrender," which is a contraction of the name Surinder, and the name of the protagonist, Indi, make allusions to this existential quandary. One who does not fit into a certain social group or community is called an "outsider" or "foreigner." This is



unquestionably the case with Sindi Oberoi. In this strange world, Sindi lacks a place to call home, a sense of security, an anchor, and good fortune. He claims that he has lived his entire life "alone in the darkness."<sup>8</sup>

Since Sindi first learnt of his identity and traits, he has epitomized what is meant by the phrase "existential everyman." He is always plagued with what has been called "a strange feeling of aloneness and aloofness."<sup>9</sup> He seems to us as an outsider who will never be able to find rest from their perpetual state of mobility. The continual mobility of a leaf during a storm serves as a metaphor for this phenomenon, comprised of Sindi's endless journeys. He left India to further his studies in the United States, but even in India, where he chose to return, he is still seen as a foreigner or a stranger. He had travelled to the United States to further his education.

From this perspective, it is important to note that the two countries are better regarded as separate, living, and beating organisms. Regarding their symbolic meaning, the two nations stand for a trap that manifests as distractions in the shape of evil powers and indifference that result in catastrophic occurrences in people's lives. How Sindi Oberoi describes the United States of America as "a place for well-fed automations rushing about in automatic cars" perfectly captures her sense of alienation and absolute outsiderdom.<sup>10</sup> India's situation isn't much better, and Sindi Oberoi disapproves of the country's "stagnant deadness"<sup>11</sup>. Sindi's dejected attitude and feeling of isolation from the rest of the world are metaphorically represented by the fact that he is surrounded by ambiguity and uncertainty. "Darkness" represents India, whereas "automation" is the most appropriate term for the United States of America.

Sindi and the story are both always travelling and visiting new places. He feels he will stay in Delhi forever and that his travels may end when he first arrives. But as soon as he gets to Delhi, he begins to miss Nairobi, where he was born. In addition to these two locales, he has links to other places, including Boston, Scotland, and Soho in London. Each one is linked to a certain moment in his life and a unique experience he had while residing in those locations. During his varied and exciting career, he has worked in various professions, including dishwasher, bartender, employee at a small-town library, and student. Additionally, he was in contact with many people, including June Blyth and Babu Rao Khemka. It's vital to



remember that his visit to these places and contacts with the locals wasn't prearranged. The choices were, at best, accidental, "un-premeditated, and hardly ever consciously deliberated."<sup>12</sup> As a result, Sindi Oberoi is shown throughout the narrative to be plagued with the issue of being an outsider, alien, or Foreigner. Sindi Oberoi informed Babu Rao Khemka of this issue by saying, "You have roots in the land you lived upon. Observe me. I have been uprooted. I don't follow any one moral code."<sup>13</sup>

This proves that Sindi's "foreignness" has more to do with his personality than his place of residence. He tells June the following, which may be interpreted as a sign of his inability to come up with a way out of his predicament: "Our aloneness must be resolved from within."<sup>14</sup> It's probable that Sindi's lack of a secure family and her strong sense of otherness in the world contribute to her difficulty building meaningful relationships with others. A battlefield represents the internal turmoil Sindi is going through, more precisely, "a battlefield within the child and the adult warred unceasingly."<sup>15</sup> The failure of Sindi Oberoi's endeavour to join himself with other people and things is then demonstrated using an unconventional comparison. According to the author, Sindi's thoughts kept exploding "like an ill-packed cracker."<sup>16</sup>

The roots of the character Sindi Oberoi are obscure. His sense of confusion and disorientation best describe his personality. Arun Joshi uses Sindi's interaction with Anna, a less accomplished artist, as a metaphor to illustrate all of this. Because Anna lives separate from her marriage, she is just as adrift as Sindi is. Through a symbolic encounter with a Soho artist, Sindi's isolation from others and the emptiness of his existence are thrown into stark light. This artist's only concern is with her "lost youth," not with the finer things in life or with having good connections with other people.<sup>17</sup>

Sindi Oberoi is a rootless individual who cannot identify any certain place as his home. He is a nomadic wanderer who does not have a certain place he calls home and does not fit in. Roads that go nowhere are a metaphor for the life of a Sindi, which serves to emphasize the core of Sindi. Arun Joshi frequently mentions how the motorways in New York City are pointless and that no one can get anywhere by following them. Arun Joshi is keen to discuss the absence of a clear route, as he uses an old Indian song as an example in this passage: "Who knows where the road may lead? A fool wouldn't say something like that."<sup>18</sup> The songs



instantly cause Sindi Oberoi to reflect, and he declares that his life has reached its pinnacle of meaninglessness and is comparable to that of "an idiot."<sup>19</sup>

To express Sindi's desire to leave the United States, the narrative has been portrayed using a new symbolism: the dead leaves. Sindi wanted to escape himself since he appeared to be the most "decayed."<sup>20</sup> He envisioned the process of leaving as consisting of ascending a ramp and then, one day later, finding himself on a fantastical island where he would be completely unknown and could start his life over from scratch. Like many others of my kind, I falsely believed that moving from one land mass to another would allow me to liberate myself from a part of myself, Sindi muses. I was like a river that abruptly jumped over a cliff to leave its dead wood behind.

The novel **The Foreigner** begins with a foundation full of symbolism throughout. The initial scene is set in a morgue, sometimes associated with sorrow, death, and irrecoverable loss. Sindi Oberoi undertook the journey to ensure that the body of Babu Rao Khemka, a person he knew who died due to injuries sustained in a car accident, was positively identified. To positively identify the deceased, he has flown there for this reason. When he examined Babu Rao's corpse, he found what he described as "a dark bottomless hole" where the right eye should have been. The seductive curve of the top lip was gone, replaced with a dreadful smile that didn't appear to be going away anytime soon.<sup>21</sup> Shortly after that, Sindi's weariness reportedly affected her legs, "turning them into stone." My throat felt as though it were ready to close up, and my eyes were incredibly dry. Sindi signed the papers and walked away. He was contacted by a salesperson who inquired about whether or not she should call a cab to drive him to his destination. Sindi gave the following justification: "I did not know where I was going, so there was no point in calling a cab."<sup>22</sup> All of this should convince one beyond any reasonable doubt that existence has no purpose and is only a sophisticated ruse.

Sindi Oberoi has dealt with the repercussions of having her identity mistaken for someone else for a significant portion of her life. On the other side, he is armed with experience now that he has encountered various trying circumstances and new things. Additionally, one may get a symbolic representation of these tensions here. According to Sindi, his fights have been more internal than external, and the war itself has been between "the saint and the lusty beast."<sup>23</sup> As a result, he feels emotionally detached from the events occurring in his immediate



surroundings.

The way the book crescendos gives the impression that Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist, is finally starting to experience a sense of belonging and that his days of aimlessness are ending. The notion of putting things back where they came from and the term "putting things back where they came from" strongly suggest this. Sindi returns home after Muthu has convinced him not to travel to Bombay. I unpacked my belongings after supper, much to the amazement of my servant, and tried to put them back in a spot that was as close to where they had been before.<sup>24</sup> This is another metaphor from Gita's teachings that might be used: "Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved." Since this is the only way to prevail, the only way to achieve independence is to commit oneself to the struggle to save one's existence.

In Arun Joshi's writings, the main character is on a quest to learn what it means to be a human and what qualities of life make them important. In all four of his books, Joshi—who is widely regarded as one of the most talented authors writing on the human condition—has highlighted the existential crises that contemporary man experiences. One of the most talented novels exploring the human condition, Joshi is well known. As a result of being cut off from the dark and materialistic world, which is all around them, his heroes make it their goal to plan their lives in a unique way. Arun Joshi uses symbolism in his writing to draw readers' attention to the characters and the situations they find themselves in.



## References:

1. *The New Oxford Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 1962 (Reprint, Oxford, London, By Books, 1983), p.1696
2. *Readers Digest Great Illustrated Dictionary*, 1984, Vol. II, P.1682
3. Abrams, M.H., Marpham, G.G., *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 10<sup>th</sup> Ed. Cengage Learning India Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 2013, P. 393
4. Joshi, Arun, *The Foreigner*, Delhi, Hind Pocket Books, 1968, p.30
5. Ibid., P. 10
6. Ibid., P. 52
7. Srivastava, K. Ramesh, "The Themes of Alienation in Arun Joshi's Novels". *Journal of English Studies and Creative Writing* Vol. 1 (December 1982): p.13
8. Joshi, Arun, *The Foreigner*, Op. cit., P. 189
9. O. P. Bhatnagar, "Arun Joshi: The Foreigner, A Critique of East-West," *The Journal of Indian Writing in English*, Vol. 1, July 1973, P.13
10. Joshi, Arun, *The Foreigner*, Op. cit., P. 90
11. Ibid., P. 207
12. Auerbach, Erich, *The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, (Trans. Williard R. Trask), New York, Anchor books, 1957, P. 286
13. Joshi, Arun, *The Foreigner*, Op. cit., P. 143
14. Ibid., P. 126
15. Ibid., P. 130
16. Ibid., P. 139
17. Ibid., P. 167
18. Ibid., P. 196
19. Ibid., P. 163



Vidhyayana - ISSN 2454-8596

An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal

[www.vidhyayanaejournal.org](http://www.vidhyayanaejournal.org)

Indexed in: Crossref, ROAD & Google Scholar

20. Ibid., P.177

21. Ibid., P. 1

22. Ibid., P.2

23. Ibid., P. 195

24. Ibid., P. 226