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Mythical Concept of Karmayoga in Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner*

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Abstract

The publication of *The Foreigner* in 1968 marked Arun Joshi's debut on the Indian English literary terrain. Joshi attempts to demonstrate that people are still willing to embrace the mythical concept of Karmayoga, which is depicted in the second and third chapters of the Gita, in the construction of the foreigner's primary subject, which is devotion to life and practice rather than passive detachment. In reality, he oscillates between detachment and attachment. Joshi is profoundly influenced by the *Bhagavad Gita* in the formulation and resolution of this problem, such that the novel is unjustifiably interpreted as an illustration of Lord Krishna's Karmik Principle in chapters II-III of the Gita. The expatriate is on the path from his estrangement from the world to his involvement with Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist. Sincerity and candour characterize Sindi's description of his pursuit of the meaning and purpose of existence. The protagonists attempt to surmount their inner turmoil with the assistance of mythology. The present paper examines how the Hindu philosophy associated with the *Bhagavad Gita* aids the characters in overcoming life's challenges. An effort has been made to investigate the theistic and atheistic perspectives of characters, as well as how beliefs aid in their survival.

Key Words: Myth, Mythology, Karma, Karmayoga, Alienation, Detachment

Introduction:

Arun Joshi is one of the modern Indian novelists who portrayed the dilemma of the contemporary man in literature. Arun Joshi has handled some weighty, thought-provoking topics with great dexterity, including detachment and attachment, the quest for survival, cultural confrontation, alienation and regeneration, mythologies, illusion, and reality, etc. Joshi attempts to investigate the enigmatic underworld of the human psyche. Man's greatest challenge today is loneliness, cultural confrontation, the search for yearning, identity crisis, self-realization, spiritualism, rebirth, and the search for life and death. His characters appear to have difficulty exploring the mysterious underworld of the human psyche. Under the influence of The Bhagavad Gita, the novels are replete with mythological references, and some of the characters have mythical names. Hinduism being his religion of choice, his novels feature a philosophy with a strong existentialist bent.



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When the modern man realizes that he is no longer in control of his destiny and that there are forces that imperil his existence, he becomes powerless. The work of Arun Joshi appears to be the spiritual odyssey of a man who lost his spiritual bearings in the 20th century. His characters discuss Karmayoga, and one can also observe Sankhya Philosophy in his writings. Some of his characters recognize the impermanence of existence, so they strive for survival. He has used mythic imagery to illustrate certain characteristics of the characters. Arun Joshi focuses on this aspect of existence, which is a characteristic of life itself. According to The Bhagavad Gita's teachings, Joshi also believes that individual actions have consequences for oneself and others.

Various Influences on Arun Joshi's Writings:

His education has been predominantly oriented towards the West, both American and European. In many ways, therefore, the influence of Western intellectuals, especially Existential philosophers, dominates his works. Modern man is confronted with numerous problems, stresses, and tensions in the 20th century. He comes to the realization that he is no longer the ruler of his destiny and that there are forces that threaten to destroy his life and all its joys and aspirations. He has a profound sense of helplessness. These mythical problems in the forms of alienation, solitude, rootlessness, withdrawal, and detachment are regarded as the predominant themes in European and Indian fiction. The Indo-English literature is heavily influenced by these primordial myths and thus undergoes a similar transformation. It has shifted its focus to the private domain. It is not limited to the exploration and interpretation of the social environment. The novelist's focus will henceforth be on depicting the individual's search for the self in all its variegated and intricate forms. The novels of Arun Joshi and Anita Desai marked the beginning of a new era in Indo-English fiction and a shift in the treatment of themes. Indian English fiction departs and shifts from the exterior world to the interior recesses of the mind and heart in its novels.

If an artist is said to have been directly or indirectly influenced by a writer or group of writers, it means he attempted to imitate them. Joshi has been influenced by Western existentialist authors, and his fiction contains existential insight. However, Joshi has not slavishly imitated these authors and produced an Indian version of Western existentialist fiction. His works reflect the influence of Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and other existentialist authors. However, Joshi has not slavishly imitated these authors and produced an Indian version of Western existentialist fiction. One can discover Hinduism's influence in Joshi's life and



works.

Relevance of Myth in Literature:

Myth, as Richard Chase, interprets, “is literature and, therefore, and matter of aesthetic experience and the imagination, and as such, it has fictional character which is imaginatively true” (1). Myth reflects Northrop Frye’s full view of the human condition, human destiny, human inspirations and terror.

The myth explores the quest for the significance of nature and culture. As these primordial events are frequently associated with supernatural entities, the nature of action models and rituals tend to be accepted. The majority of falsehoods concern the commencement or origin of a particular event or action. Myths render the past comprehensible and significant, but it is the past's comprehensibility and significance that connect it to the present, as the continuity of myth is predominantly related to the present. Myths reveal what people wish to believe about the past, and even modern history is not always devoid of myth-making elements. In the early 20th century, the "return to tradition" is commonly considered a characteristic of the modernist movement. Modern novelists use content from ancient mythologies such as Ulysses, Prosperina, The Centaur, The Labors of Hercules, and Gilgame's throughout the year. The concept is utilized by writers to add vitality and vigour to their work.

The Plot of The Foreigner:

Sindi Oberoi, who does not adhere to any culture, is the primary character of the novel. His orphan upbringing imbues him with a profound sense of emotional insecurity that permeates his entire existence. Sindi is initially seduced by Anna, a minor artist and divorcee. As a result, he has his first sexual experience. Then he encounters Kathy, a returning English housewife to her spouse. He is assisted by a Catholic Priest in Scotland, but he is not satisfied. In Boston, he encounters June at a gathering for international students; she loves him deeply, but he fails to marry her after a carnal relationship. His Indian acquaintance Baburao Khemka dies upon learning Sindi's relationship with June. Sindi encounters Muthu, a modest factory worker at Babu's father, Mr. Khemka, who transformed his life; he becomes Krishna to Sindi, the Arjuna. Sheila, Babu's sibling, finally joins his existence. Sometimes, the characters in the novel appear as contradictory as Sindi.



Artistic Representation of Karmayoga in *The Foreigner*:

Religion and spirituality are integral components of Indian culture. As Arun Joshi is an Indian author, these characteristics can also be found in his works. When one examines his biography, it is evident that the Bhagavad Gita has had a significant impact on him. In his novels, there are references to the *Bhagavad Gita*; *The Foreigner* also contains such references. His Karmayoga theory is explicitly stated at the conclusion of the novel. Sindi Oberoi, the protagonist of the story, recognizes his spiritual endeavor.

The Bhagwat Gita is a dialogue between Arjuna, prince of the Pandavas, and Krishna, his guru. The Bhagavad Gita teaches the four yogas, which are the paths for humanity in general and Hindus in particular. The four yogas are Jnana, Bhakti, Karma and Raja Yoga. Karmayoga implies that one must perform his Karma (action/work) without desiring fruit or personal rewards. One must determine the correct action in order to receive the correct recompense. The deed of altruism is described in Karmayoga. The theory of detachment is related to the theory of Karmayoga. *The Foreigner* teaches us the identical theory. At the conclusion of the novel, the protagonist acknowledges, “Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved.” (188)

The Bhagavad Gita has had a significant impact on Arun Joshi's life. He is certain that every person's activities have an impact on both himself and other people. We can observe in everyone's lives that man must endure suffering in accordance with his Karma. Joshi makes an effort to explain this in *The Foreigner* as well. Sindi has the chance to prove himself when Mr. Khemka is detained in the Income-Tax department's raid for defrauding the government, but he thinks that one must take ownership of one's actions: “Mr. Khemka had to suffer for his own actions. In the past I had tried to put the consequences of my action on others, or presumed to take over their actions as my own. Both had boomeranged. In the end both had done more harm than good.” (123) Sindi tells Sheila: “Who are you and I to stand in the way? He must suffer if he wants to stop being jackal and become humane.” (182) These lines highlight the significance of the Karmic Principle of the Bhagavad Gita. Thus, impelled by his intrinsic nature, Sindi's higher and enlightened self-accepts involvement. In his last hysterical condemnation of corrupt Kemka, who attempts to place the blame for the demise of his empire on Sindi's impoliteness and kicks him out of his home, he claims,



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But why? It was not my fault. I am not afraid of going to prison but this time it is your turn. I have sinned, and God knows, I have paid heavily for them. This time it is your name that is being called. It is you who must answer. That is the only hope of salvation you have left. (181)

In the Bhagvad Gita, it is said that we have to suffer for our wrong deeds. Sindi tells Mr. Khemka what he has suffered in his life, “We think we leave our actions behind, but the past is never dead. Time has a way exacting its toll and the more you try to hold out, the heavier the toll is.” (181) The candid self-revelation and this demonstration of his similarities and contrasts with Khemka are important as they highlight the significance of the Karmic Principle of the Bhagvad Gita. (No action of ours goes unrewarded or unpunished): “We reap what we sow.” (S. Radhakrishnan, 244-45) in this novel. They suggest the necessity of penance and suffering as the only means of coming out of life’s intricate labyrinth where men are led by their foolishness, selfishness, ignorance and delusions.

Through his experiences in Boston, Sindi learns to understand his misunderstanding of the Vairagya school of thought found in the Gita. Sindi's road to self-realization demonstrates Krishna's Gita teaching that when knowledge and inner purity increase, deeds become easy and unselfish. Selfless activities carried out in the world finally lead to emancipation. The ultimate self becomes the individual. He now seems to adhere to the Karmayoga doctrine, which is shown in the Gita's subsequent verses. Who is a true Karmayogi, according to Krishna, is:

“Yastivandriyani mansaniyamyarabhitarjuna,

Karmendyriyaih Karmayogamasaktohsa Vishishyato” (III-7)

Arjuna is told by Shri Krishna that he is superior if his mind has complete control over his senses and if he uses his action organs in any way. When he is thrust into the tumultuous Khemka industry, Sindi demonstrates exemplary fortitude in his ability to regenerate. He achieves success because for the first time in his life, he is working for others without regard for himself. He is working without considering the outcome or karma of his actions. What is referred to as ‘Nishkam Karma’ is this. O.P. Mathur says, “The novel portrays the progress of a Sartrean protagonist attached only to his own self towards a realization of humanity and responsibility which brings him very close to the concept of Karmayoga enunciated in The Bhagvad Gita” (57).



Sindi's Spiritual Journey:

The works of Arun Joshi are replete with Hindu life philosophy. The Hindu way of life. It is a spiritual way of living. It demonstrates the path to reaching death. The Bhagvad Gita has a significant effect on *The Foreigner* since Sindi Oberoi quotes portions of it and contrasts it with the idea of detachment it teaches. In actuality, Sindi's spiritual voyage is the subject of the book. The primary message of the book is found in the Bhagvad Gita. In his books of various moods and emotional heft, Arun Joshi employs tales, metaphors, and symbols from the Indian subcontinent. Due to the issue of "belonging," Karna, the famous figure from the Mahabharata, might be compared to Sindi's character. Karna could not "belong" anywhere, much like Sindi. Additionally, Sindi feels lost and rootless. In the Mahabharata, Karna is a mythological character. He is connected to Sindi.

The Foreigner explores a man's spiritually daring journey as he navigates the labyrinth of life, from his attempt to flee it to his eventual participation with it. Arun Joshi consults the Upanishads and the Gita to get the answer. Sindi's conversation on religion, God, and mysticism with a Catholic priest in Scotland, as well as his agonizing inquiry to a police officer in Delhi, "Have you seen God?" (175) serve as evidence of his spiritual search. One is continually reminded of the unreality of the artifacts of meaning and the eternal rule of death on all forms. It is really hesitant to take part. The book is written in the style of a spiritual autobiography and details the protagonist's arduous search for self-awareness. This book, which follows the self as it progresses through many phases toward self-perception, was appreciated by the inwardness.

When Sindi next runs across June, he exhibits what looks to be "Brahma Satyam Jagatmithya" (God alone is reality; all else is illusion) belief. Because Sindi Oberoi references the Bhagvad Gita's teachings on detachment, it is clear that the Bhagvad Gita had a significant effect on the writing of *The Foreigner*. In actuality, Sindi's spiritual journey ends up becoming the Bhagvad Gita's central lesson for the story.

Sindi's Detachment and Self-realization:

The novel discusses Sindi's separation since it is a quest story. Sindi is a man without any attachments to anybody or anything, nor does he have any roots. Sindi is shown to be deeply in love with many different women; he totally loved his intercourse with each woman, but he had no romantic tie to any of them. Sindi and Anna are in a relationship. It has a six-month lifespan. Though she is not in love with



him, Sindi believes that she is. Sindi's limits in terms of love are evident in his statement that "I enjoyed making love to her and her sadness attracted me, but engrossed as I was with my own self, I couldn't return her love." (143) Sindi meets Kathy, an English housewife who craves adulterous love after his encounter with Anna. For a few days, the affair continues. She feels marriage is holy and must be preserved at all costs, despite the fact that he becomes very physically connected with her. She then departs from him and returns to her spouse. He is deeply troubled by these encounters and the weight of his shattered connections. They weren't romantic matters. His separation has led to a current delusion in his life. He really misinterpreted what was meant by "dissolution." His utterly selfish idea of separation is just another word for not taking part. In June, he communicates with a young American woman in Boston. At the Party of Foreign Students, he meets her and finds her attractive. He also really cares about her. He adores her. But he refuses to take ownership of this connection under the guise that he doesn't engage. Through non-attachment, he attempts to foster collaboration but in vain. When June debates the value of love in marriage, Sindi responds that desiring is harder than not having a love. The story of his love relationship with June shows the gradual demise of his attachment-free spirit.

Between disengagement and commitment, renunciation and possession, are Sindi's wings. Finally, his detachment's vulnerability is revealed. The passionate strokes of June's love's tidal waves are too much for Sindi's detachment's protective wall to handle. He is self-centred and torn between being involved and detached. June is aware of his cold affection for her as well: "I did at one time, and perhaps still do. But you are so tied up with your detachment it makes little difference whether you love or you don't" (136). A turning point on his path from passivity to commitment and action is his connection with June.

After Babu's Death, June says to him: "Look, what your detachment has done." (148) Sindi also feels about Babu's death to his heart: "When I had come close to gaining true detachment and acted out of goodness, I had driven a man to his death." (148) When June comes to know that she is pregnant by Babu and asks Sindi to marry her, he is in that mindset to accept Babu's child: "I have written this letter twice before but each time, at last moment, I lost courage. And what I am going to say calls for a measure of courage that I do not possess." (153) But under the garb of detachment he shirks his duty of extricating her from the situation. Finally, she has to undergo an operation in which she dies. Thus, Sindi's false and cold "detachment" leads to the tragic death of both-Babu and June. He confesses that his detachment has driven a man to his death. After the death the two close friends Sindi now knows the real meaning of detachment:



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“Unblocking meant inaction at that time. I had now started to see the mistake. Right action was a detachment, not an escape. The Gods had placed a heavy price for teaching me” (162). K. Radha comments on the detachment of Sindi:

Sindi’s relation to June is a story about the gradual breakdown of the obstacles to separation and non-involvement built up throughout his life. He was quite conscious of what was happening and he tried valiantly to resist it, but in vain. (9)

As evidence of the devastating consequences of alienation, Sindi wants to leave America and go to India. After moving to India, he receives a chance from God to turn his life around. If Mr. Khemka is imprisoned for the fraud in his income-tax account, his firm begins to collapse, and his employees start dying from famine when they are forced to run it. Although Sindi is still unsure, his visit to Muthu's home changed the way he saw the world and the people in it. When Sindi claims he won't get involved, Muthu responds: “But it is not involvement, sir. Detachment sometimes lies in being involved in fact.” (188) Sindi now adheres to Muthu’s words and confesses that “detachment” has been realized late. The “unloading resulted in engaging with the world.” (189) It is this low-paying employee who shows him the true meaning of life that unlocking consists of right action rather than running from it

He ignores his own needs in response to Muthu's frantic plea for help, and the fruit he embraces is ultimately responsible for saving the factory employees. whomever or whatever it is. He starts to consider the world from the perspectives of others rather than his own. His actions inspired all employees to work honestly and start improving the company's fortunes. He firmly adheres to the Karmayoga idea from The Bhagvad Gita by acting in this manner.

Karannyavadhikaraste ma phaleshukadachan,

Ma karmaphalhetur bhurmate sangostva karmani. (II:47)

Here, Shri Krishna asks Arjuna to do his work without concerning about the fruit at all and having no attachment to inaction. Usha Pathania writes, “The Buddha teaches that in order to arrive at the highest stage of human development, we must not carve possessions and selfish individualism.” (65) Therefore, we find that Sindi is not in despair as a search for identity, but also for meaning and purpose of life.



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Conclusion:

The Foreigner (1968), the most compelling of Arun Joshi's literary works, was his first novel and what initially established him as a renowned author. Since the theme goes from the East to the West, it demonstrates Joshi's strong understanding of his culture and of his period in cross-cultural circumstances. The narrative depicts a character who is cut off from his identity, society, and environment. Arun Joshi gives this book a personal feel by delving deeply into the dark corners of his psyche. This news broadcast relates the tale of Sindi orphan Surrinder Oberai, also known as Sindi, who feels "alone in the world" and wants to do something significant. He sees himself as a guest wherever he goes, including Kenya, Tanzania, London, America, and finally India. He recoils from affiliation, ownership, and involvement. Finally, he establishes his roots in India when he resolves to put others before his own limited ego. As a result, he receives the certainty of separation action, which Lord Krishna encouraged in the Gita in accordance with his idea of anasaktikarmyoga (unconnected action). The purpose of the book is to highlight Sindi, the narrator, who is deprived of love and cultural identity in the heat of worldly life.



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