



Parental Influence And Existentialism In Arun Joshi's "The Foreigner": A Critical Analysis

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Abstract: This study critically examines the themes of parental influence and existentialism in Arun Joshi's novel "The Foreigner", focusing on the complex relationship between Mr. Khemka and his son Babu. This study explores how parental roles influence the lives of children, as depicted through the characters of Mr. Khemka and Babu. A deep study of The Foreigner deals with Sindi Oberoi's and Babu's journeys of detachment from the world. Through a comprehensive analysis of parental roles impacts their children's lives. This study examines parental aggression in the context of cultural shifts and societal expectations. This novel explores the complex relationship between Mr. Khemka and his son, Babu. This study clarifies the profound implications of parental influence on identity formation. Here, we discuss Sindi's character in detail along with Babu. This study examines parental influence, familial relationships, and the search for belonging in Joshi's novels.

Keywords: Parental roles, Critical study, Self-discovery, Alienation, Existentialism

INTRODUCTION

Existentialism studies human existence and explores the true meaning of human life. Existentialism includes the absurdity of life, freedom, choice, and one's responsibility for their existence. In the literature, writers explore existentialism philosophy through the characters in their works and explore the meaning of life and the characters' struggle between social norms, familial traditions, and one's choice of living life. The existential philosophers Soren Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Jasper, and Nietzsche, all German philosophers, discussed the philosophy of existentialism. French writers Jean Paul Satre, Albert Camus and Fraz Kafka. Indian existentialists Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Namita, and many modern writers have explored the theme of existentialism. Arun Joshi is a prominent writer

who explores existentialism. In his novel *The Foreigner*, the researcher studies how parental roles are performed in terms of existentialism.

Arun Joshi is an important Indo-English writer of fiction in India. His novels focus on characters who feel the rootlessness of life, and Joshi's own experience of living in different places seems to influence his writing. In his novels, he discusses existential clashes between different cultures and the complexities of love and hate. He also explored deep questions about the purpose of life. He was inspired by the French philosopher Albert Camus. Arun Joshi's novel *The Foreigner* and Camus's novel *The Stranger* have similar views on existentialism. We can also compare *The Stranger* character Meursault and *The Foreigner* character Sindi Oberoi, both of whom have similar qualities in their novels. People recognize Arun Joshi as creative and talk about the moral and spiritual problems that people have in India. He has written many novels and short stories, and some of his earliest works, such as *The Foreigner* and *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, show his talents, while *The Apprentice* and *The Last Labyrinth* add to his reputation. Arun Joshi won the Sahitya Academic Award in 1982 for his novel *The Last Labyrinth*. He passed away in 1993; however, his legacy lives on in his works. Arun Joshi wrote five novels and a collection of short stories, in which he discusses the feeling of being disconnected from society. *The Foreigner* offers parental influence on children's lives against the backdrop of cultural displacement and societal expectations. Central to this exploration are the characters of Mr. Khemka and Babu's son, which examine the complexities of familial traditions and identity formation. This study examines parental roles through the characters of Mr. Khemka and Babu, analyzing their motivational relationship with their children and identity formation in *The Foreigner*.

PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS:

In the novel, *The Foreigner* protagonist Sindi suffers a lot from diverse cultural parents, Sindi's parents died in a plane crash when Sindi was four years old, and this absence of parental love led him to rootlessness in life and struggles for an identity for belonging. Sindi always felt where his real house was and what the meaning of life was. Similarly, Babu feels alienated because of parental expectations and pressure. In the novel, the relationship between Mr. Khemka and his son Babu portrays an Indian parent- child relationship. Mr. Khemka's aspiration for Babu pressures Babu to succeed academically and professionally and personally ignores his son's desire and passion. Babu was not a brilliant student despite Mr. Khemka sending him to America to study; his academic performance was very bad, and he felt frustrated every day in America. Mr. Khemka pressured him to study abroad and achieve the best performance. When Babu fails an exam, he is afraid of his father's actions, we can see this when Babu said Sindi, "he was really worried about his father, if that time he could not pass the exam his father might never want to see him again." (Joshi 149). Sindi

advised Babu to decide on his own because he would marry June. Babu has to take responsibility for himself according to Sindi (Joshi 141).

EMOTIONAL DISTANCE:

Joshi's novels explore the theme of alienation through various characters, each grappling with their own forms of isolation and emotional disconnection. In "The Foreigner", the protagonist Sindi's alienation stems from his early childhood trauma of losing his parents at a young age. Other characters, such as Mr. Khemka, Babu, June, and Shelie, also experience alienation, struggling to express their emotions and connect with one another. Similarly, in "The Strange Case of Billy Biswas", titular character Billy finds himself alienated from society, ultimately finding solace and happiness in the forests of the Sapura Hills. The relationship between Mr. Khemka and his son Babu in "The Foreigner" exemplifies the profound impact of emotional alienation within familial relationships. Mr. Khemka's authoritarian attitude and emphasis on external achievements create an emotional chasm between father and son. This emotional distance leaves Babu feeling isolated and unable to communicate his true desires or struggles. The pressure to meet his father's expectations leads to repeated academic failures, deepening Babu's sense of shame and frustration. Unable to bridge the gap with his father and trapped in a cycle of disappointment, Babu's alienation ultimately peaks in his tragic decision to take his own life, highlighting the devastating consequences of emotional disconnection and unmet psychological needs.

PARENTAL ROLES IN LIFE AND CHOICE:

Throughout the novel, Mr. Khemka's domineering presence looms large over Babu's life, exerting a suffocating influence on his son's academic and personal choices. This overbearing control extends beyond mere guidance, as Mr. Khemka actively opposes Babu's romantic involvement with June, a woman from a lower social class. The father's unyielding stance stems from a deep-seated concern for the family's reputation, which he believes would be tarnished by such an alliance. This constant pressure creates a pervasive atmosphere of fear and hesitation for Babu, who finds himself unable to freely express his feelings or pursue his desires. The clash between Mr. Khemka's rigid expectations and Babu's yearning for autonomy forms the central conflict of the narrative. Babu's struggle for self-expression and personal freedom is consistently thwarted by his father's inflexible adherence to societal norms and familial prestige. This ongoing tension leads to a growing sense of frustration and alienation within Babu, ultimately culminating in his tragic decision to end his life. The novel thus presents a poignant critique of the destructive consequences that can arise when parental authority and societal expectations are prioritized over individual happiness and self-determination.

AUTHORITARIAN PARENTS:

The psychological motivations behind characters' actions in literature often mirror the complex interplay of thoughts, emotions, and societal expectations that shape real-world human behavior. In Arun Joshi's works, this dynamic is particularly evident in the portrayal of father-son relationships and the tension between individual aspirations and familial expectations. Khemka's ambition for his son Babu to study abroad reflects a common desire among Indian parents to secure their children's social status through education. Similarly, Billy Biswas's father, a Supreme Court judge, envisions a specific career path for his son, highlighting the pressure often placed on the children of high-achieving parents to maintain or elevate their family's social standing.

The contrasting responses of Billy and Babu to their fathers' expectations illustrate the varied ways in which individuals navigate familial pressures. Billy's decision to pursue anthropology rather than engineering demonstrates a willingness to assert his own interests, even at the risk of disappointing his father. However, Babu appears more constrained by his father's wishes, possibly due to fear or financial considerations, as suggested by the observation that he might be "afraid of his father or of losing his stake in his father's properties" (Joshi 141). This exploration of familial dynamics within the context of Indian business families adds depth to Joshi's characters, making them relatable and complex figures that reflect the broader societal tensions between tradition and individual autonomy in contemporary India.

CONCLUSION:

In *The Foreigner*, Arun Joshi describes familial and parental influence through the characters of Mr. Khemka and Babu, exploring the complexities of traditions and the modernity of Indian society. Joshi portrays two generations of Indian society. He explored the patriarchal structure of post-colonial India. Mr. Khemka represents the repressive power of tradition, and Babu represents social change and adaptation in the face of societal norms. However, both characters are bound by the limitations of their worldviews. Through this novel, Joshi invites readers to consider the long-term impact of parental roles. Joshi highlighted the profound impact of parental influence on identity formation, familial relationships, and the search for self-realization in a world defined by societal expectations.

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