

## Chapter - II

### The theory of Angst and Self-alienation Reflected in

#### Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner* and Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*

##### II.0 Introduction

Existentialism is a broad term and at the same time it is hard to define. It primarily studies and explains the human existence, individual emotions, thoughts, and significance of life, and even man's free will to take a decision and act on it. It also implies that man is responsible for his own actions and reactions. He is condemned to be free. In short we can rightly say that the basic characteristics of the style of philosophizing are, firstly, it is involved more with human being than with the nature and the second characteristic is its key term, Existence. As the human being is responsible for his own existence, his past, present and future, and he has the power to develop his own personality, character and individuality, he is responsible for the outcome of his own decisions and in this process he does not have to impugn on the circumstances, situations or any other individual.

The philosophy has various aspects which explain the details of the derivation of existence of human being and the tribulations he has to face in this world. Modern English Literature has been influenced by the Existentialist thinking. The present research has a hunch that the fiction of two renowned post-Independent Indian English writers Anita Desai and Arun Joshi reveal aspects of Existentialism in their fiction. Anita Desai had experienced Second World War, the atrocious partition of India and Pakistan, the riots between the Hindus and the Muslims, and the mass deterioration of the values of mankind. The riots and the wear and tear of the entire society and the world are somehow considered to be the influential factors in Desai's life and writing. Her literary writing tries to show the realities of life, and how human nature is affected by them. It examines the emotional world of Indian women trapped in the society and culture, the innermost depth of the human psyche, individual quest for meaning in life, psychological issues, assaults on existence, existential problems in human life, and it also

indirectly expresses feminist point of view. The subjects in her vast oeuvre vary from the dreadful, isolated, humiliated, and psychic world of Indian woman to the secluded world of immigrant Indians. It touches on the values of the individual, problem of existence, marital disharmony, racial discrimination, demise of tradition, German anti-semiticism, western stereotypical views of India, and her recent novel illustrates Indian culture affected by decay and disappointment, solipsistic existence, isolation, and expectations and realities. Desai herself says that, her writing is realistic and believes in discovering the truth and revealing the psychic life of her characters.

The Indian English writer Arun Joshi's demise in his fifties cut short his promising literary career. It is believed that his own experiences in life have had some influence on his works. It is even believed that his experiences in the United States of America and the experiences he had about the human behavior at the mental hospital are reflected in his early novel, *The Foreigner*. Later he shifted to the history of India and demonstrated Indian themes as in the tribal life in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. His novel, *The Apprentice*, encompasses the theme of national history of Gandhian moral teachings, and *The Last Labyrinth* exemplifies another shift, illustrating mystery, a love tale, and the power of oracle. His last novel *The City and the River* too deals with the mystery, the mythology and tradition of religion and its devotees. He won Sahitya Akademi Award for his fourth novel *The Last Labyrinth* in 1981.

## **II.1 Angst and Self-alienation Aspects of Existentialism**

Angst and Self-alienation are major aspects which characterize existential philosophy. The present chapter explains how the Angst and self-alienation aspects are reflected in the novels *The Foreigner* of Arun Joshi and *Fire on the Mountain* of Anita Desai. The protagonists in these novels, Sindi Oberoi and Nanda Kaul, appear to be affected by these existential aspects, but quite differently. Arun Joshi's writing is considered to be quite intense as compared to Anita Desai's fiction, in screening the problems an individual faces in his/her life and the outcome is even more devastating. The present research work focuses on the comparison of the works of both the authors reflecting the Existential aspects, stated above.

The protagonists of both the novels are unhappy with their current life and are discontented with their family and friends. They wish to live alone due to the dissatisfaction, displeasure and annoyance they experienced in their life. They become anxious and fearful of everything. This anxiety leads them to be so ignorant of the surrounding world and their family that it leads to fatal outcomes.

The Angst or anxiousness is the phenomenon in the life of the human being. Man is the only living being who has freedom to choose and is solely responsible for his/her actions and who always lives in the shadow of anxiety. Self-alienation is to become withdrawn or impassive or emotionally isolated from others. There is a feeling of separation from the society, moral breakdown that characters experience. Human beings can be alienated from the society or social system, and consider their society as meaningless and vacant. But the most profound alienation is from one's own consciousness.

According to the existentialists, human being lives in the alienation of his entire institution, he is neither a part of it nor will he ever understand the nature of his existence. The mankind is not aware of the history of its existence. Everything is dependent on faith, rather than on any rational belief. There is no meaningful root of our past and even of the future. In other words, we do not belong to the past, nor to the present or to the future. Meenakshi Mukherjee has written about the alienation aspect, saying that "alienation is a very common theme in our Indo-English novels." (Shankar, 2003, 2) The alienation is not related to our institution or economy only, human beings are saddled with the feeling of alienation as distinct from any other being. It arises within the family, between the parents and their children, between relationships such as husband and wife, between the siblings; it has even dominated the relationship of love. It has affected the social, personal and work relations in the history of mankind.

Anguish is the dread of the nothingness of human existence. Danish existentialist, Soren Kierkegaard has clearly defined the term angst as intense feeling, nervousness, apprehension and severe inner emotional tumult. His findings explain that anxiety precedes sin, which leads to the suffering in the world. He even

describes a deep and subconscious condition of insecurity and fear in the free human being. It is generally held to be the experience of human freedom and responsibility. According to him, freedom leaves the human being in constant fear and dread about its consequences or the outcome, and failing his responsibilities in his/her life, and more specifically fear of the concrete responsibilities towards the Almighty or God. According to the existentialist philosophers, anxiety is in a special way revelatory of the human condition, and gives interpretation of the feelings in general. In view of Kierkegaard, anxiety is a prior condition towards the wrongdoing, and the fall of man. He describes anxiety in three ways:

- 1) It is inherent in the state of innocence.
- 2) Anxiety is linked to freedom.
- 3) With man's peculiar constitution as body and soul, established in spirit, human being is subject to take tensions, and by all means tension leads to anxiety.

Angst is sometimes called dread, fear, anxiety, anxious, stress or even anguish which is common to many Existentialist thinkers. Anxious has a sense of anguish, a generalized uneasiness, a fear or dread, which is not directed to any specific object.

## **II.2            *The Foreigner and the Fire on the Mountain***

*The Foreigner* and the *Fire on the Mountain*, the novels by Arun Joshi and Anita Desai respectively, portray the life of major characters (Nanda Kaul and Sindi Oberoi), who are lost in their own lonely world, and are free to decide the course of their lives. It leads to anxiousness and fear about everything which ultimately leads to the death of their best friends.

The only difference between the two is that, after the demise of his friend, Sindi Oberoi moves forward in his life, he goes to New York, but when he finds that his past is following him there also, in the dilemma, he decides, very abruptly, in a bar with the toss of a coin, that he would live in New Delhi for the rest of his life. On the other hand, Nanda Kaul reacts exactly opposite. She curses herself for the

death of Ila Das and in the state of shock she becomes mum. She is very much disturbed and devastated, and she just lies down and turns mute. Raka her grand-daughter shouts that there is Fire on the Mountain, and the novel ends there. Anita Desai ends the novel leaving Nanda Kaul in the state of shock, cursing herself about the tragic end of Ila Das.

Both the authors highlight the angst aspect in their respective novels, the protagonists' lives, their decisions throughout the novel, their family and friends ultimately result into anxiousness. The existential philosophers say that the human being is solely responsible for his/her actions and therefore lives in the shadows of anxiety, which ultimately leads to deterioration of the individual being. There are numerous incidents in the novels that explain how an individual lacks any objective and desire to live. Their complex past and the present is the major cause of their loneliness leading to their embittered souls and perplexed nature. All this leads to devastating results in their life. This chapter focuses on the self-alienation and angst existential aspects that appear to be at the root of the tragedy of both the protagonists. Nanda Kaul suffers deep dissatisfaction in her whole life marked by rejection and sacrifice, and her grand-daughter, Raka, suffers abject degradation of her mother and feels like an animal chased. Sindi Oberoi likewise is chronically sad being an orphan and suffers anguished consciousness of being isolated from society.

In both the novels the characters experience loneliness and fear throughout their life. They suffer because of their past, and their past affects their present as well as the future life. Nanda Kaul is dissatisfied with her married life especially with her husband, who has extra-marital affair with Miss David, the Mathematics teacher at the University. Enlarged family and friends and her husband's social life make her suffer, which results into her living in isolation and distress forcing her to decide to live alone in Carignano, a small house on the hills of Kasauli. After the death of her husband, she decides to shift to Kasauli house as she wants to run away from all the responsibilities and her fake life, her fake existence.

Only the postman and her great granddaughter Raka happen to disturb her

lonely world. And when her childhood friend, Ila, comes to meet her, through her indifference she ignores her friend's problems, which finally takes her friend's life. She is horrified and flabbergasted and she cannot speak a single word at the tragic end of her friend, Ila Das. She is choked with the horror and the dreadful event that happens with Ila Das, and somewhere deep down her she knows that she is one of the reasons for this, as she could have helped Ila Das and asked her to stay with her at Carignano. Her ignorance, and her alienation and her unpleasant memories lead to devastation, which ultimately destroys herself, Raka and Ila Das. Nanda Kaul tries to withdraw to her lonely world, her children being all alien to her. And she too alienates herself finally. Her granddaughter's intrusion in her life is 'hard and unfair' to her.

The past of both the protagonists, Nanda Kaul and Sindi Oberoi, is somewhat similar, and their unconscious mind is tangled only with that past. This thing disturbs both of them very badly throughout their lives, which ultimately results in the demise of their loved ones. Because of their anxiousness and fear about everything in their life they lose their loved ones forever.

Sindi Oberoi, disgruntled with his past life, being an India born and brought up in Kenya, educated himself in New York, at the end shifted to his native country India. But wherever he lives, his life is never poised and this results into his being cold and indifferent towards others' feelings. This chapter compares his world with Nanda Kaul's secluded in *Fire on the Mountain*. He loved his crowded world, but kept himself uninvolved. In spite of being a scholar and hard-working employee throughout his life, he remains detached and uninvolved. The writer demonstrates how his protagonist tries to live uninvolved and alienated almost to the end. Sindi always has a feeling that he is a foreigner wherever he lives, whether in Kenya, or New York or his native country, India. Joshi too ends his novel with the death of Sindi's friends, June Blyth and Babu just because of his indifferent behaviour towards life. When he completes his Ph.D. and he leaves the university, all his memories of the past years return, and he gets lost in them. While leaving for his new job, while packing his stuff, he usually gets lost in the memories of his past life; recalling his college days with Karl (his roommate) and others, specifically June and

Babu, and this disturbs him very badly. Sindi used to tell June everything about his past and he used to feel free. Sindi talked to her about everything that happened in his life and used to feel that some burden had been lifted from his shoulders, as he felt relieved and free of his past for the moment.

Similarly, Nanda Kaul talked about her past to Raka, her great granddaughter, about her childhood days, about her father and his foreign trips and the gifts her father used to get from there. But later on it was discovered that some parts of the stories were not true. Still, after long, Nanda Kaul used to feel relaxed and content while chatting with Raka. Nanda Kaul share her feelings with Raka as she was entirely different from all other children and great grandchildren and the most significant point is that she found herself in that little girl. She used to feel relieved after talking to Raka just as Sindi felt relaxed after talking to June.

The stories of both the protagonists end with the death of their dear ones entirely because of their anxiety and ego which prevented them to connect with others. Sindi believes that June Blyth was guilty or responsible for Babu's death, but she was not aware of the accident until Sindi himself acquainted her with this horrible news. But his unconscious mind is very much aware of the fact that he is equally responsible for Babu's death, which led to the demise of June. He was quite aware that June was in love with him, but he spurned her because he did not want involvement. Similarly, Nanda Kaul being shaken by Ila Das's death, also thinks that Ila's family and her nature (that led her to become the social worker) are responsible for her tragic death. However, Nanda Kaul herself was responsible for it because she ignored Ila's need for companionship and protection.

She feels guilty that she might be the major factor in the tragedy. Nanda Kaul thought that her detachment from the world and her isolation led to Ila Das's death, and in her heart she felt herself responsible for her friend's death. Nanda Kaul broke down after learning about her friend's death; she started thinking about her past, about Raka, and the reality, her forceful decision to live alone at Carignano. Her alienation from her family was also partly responsible for the tragedy in her daughter's life. She wanted to weep, but could not, and suddenly Raka shouted

“Nani, I put forest on fire.” (Desai, 1978, 159) Nanda Kaul was horrified and flabbergasted and she couldn't speak a single word. She was chocked with the horror and the dreadful event that happened with Ila Das and somewhere deep down her she knew that she was one of the reasons for this, as she could have helped Ila Das and asked her to stay with her at Carignano. Her ignorance, her feeling of angst, her unpleasant memories led her to all this devastation, which ultimately destroyed her, Raka and Ila Das.

When Nanda Kaul thinks about her past, she usually gets lost in her life with her husband. Her memories make her anxious, and the anxiety level increases when she recalls her past, specifically the relationship with her husband. She tells Raka about her father and his Tibet expedition in detail. She recounts what he used to bring from these trips for them, and tells her about the bronze Buddha, scrolls, carpets, jewellery. Her father met Lamas and sorcerers. Even Raka was quite excited to hear about her great-great grand father's expedition, and even wondered why her parents hadn't told her about these stories.

Nanda Kaul's angst is revealed when she says that she remembers her father, and pities herself about the fact that there is nothing left with her, except the Buddha idol. Thinking about her past life she thinks about herself and about the disciple or student of the Greek philosopher Epicurus. She even re-thinks about her life in Punjab that never ever pleased her. Her loneliness and the feeling of angst generated by it, is the result of Nanda Kaul's self imposed withdrawal from her past and from the social life around her. She appears to be incapable of love. Her children were alien to her, she herself felt alienated from her family. The barrenness of Carignano signifies the barrenness of her life and her heart devoid of feeling. She has lost her sense of belonging.

Sindi Oberoi also thinks at the end that, he was blaming others at first but in his heart of heart he knows that he was very much responsible for his life. After Babu's death, Sindi thought that his own detachment had led to this devastation, and he starts blaming himself for Babu's death, and he even curses himself for it. He thinks about Babu, and at one point he feels that he has lost a friend. These

emotions make him feel more and more lonely and uncomfortable. Sindi feels that June Blyth was equally guilty or responsible for Babu's death, though she was not aware of the accident until Sindi himself acquainted her with this horrible news. He realizes finally that he was blaming others at first but in his heart he is aware that he was very much responsible for what happened. Similarly, Nanda Kaul, in spite of being shaken by Ila Das's death, also thought that Ila's family and her nature (that led her to become the social worker) were responsible for her demise. At the same time she feels guilty that she might have been the major factor in Ila's horrible death.

Sindi and Nanda Kaul have similar feeling of guilt after they lose June, Babu and Ila Das respectively, they even curse themselves for the same. Nanda Kaul's alienation had made her impervious to Ila Das's problems. Only after Ila's death she feels that she has lost a childhood friend and a companion, and she even questions herself what her isolation and angst have resulted into. Sindi leaves America and goes back to New Delhi to his ancestors' land, because he wants to run away from his life, from his existence, June, Babu and the time he had spent with them in New York. New Delhi is the only place where nobody recognizes him and he can start his life newly.

Anita Desai and Arun Joshi have shown a great difference between the reactions of their protagonists' after the demise of their loved ones. Sindi Oberoi leaves for New York and later permanently to New Delhi, India and he starts his life again.

My parents, my uncle, my lovers, Babu and June, their parents, and finally myself, one by one all were called by the invisible judges and asked to give their evidence. Under normal conditions this would have been painful but after the shock of June's death it came as a great therapeutic process. I felt as if some indefatigable surgeon was cleaning up my soul with the sharp edge of his scalpel. (Joshi, 1993, 146)

But, Nanda Kaul is shocked and becomes mum after hearing the news on

phone about Ila's death, she is so disturbed that she just lies down and curses herself for what happened. The last scene of the novel is very significant when Raka shouts that there is Fire on the Mountain, it signifies the end of happiness as everything is destroyed and devastated.

But Nanda Kaul had ceased to listen, She had dropped the telephone. With her head still thrown back, far back, she gasped: No, no, it is a lie! No, it cannot be. It was a lie — Ila was not raped, not dead. It was all a lie, all. She had lied to Raka, lied about everything. (Desai, 1978, 158)

In the novel *The Foreigner*, Arun Joshi illustrates Sindi's fear and anxiety when he reaches Delhi to meet Babu's father Mr. Khemkha, Sindi has sent a message informing about their son's demise. The writer describes Sindi's anxiousness in facing Babu's family. At the same time Sindi is worried about the fact that, if Babu's family got to know the reason behind Babu's death, and specially that he is partly responsible for the same, how he will react and explain it to his father and sister.

Back in India, Sindi Oberoi who is alienated and rootless and detached, becomes emotionally involved. In his life in New York, Sindi had given an impression of being cynical, misogynistic and detached. June's mother had once told him "You are just a cynic, my boy" (Joshi, 1993, 88), and his flat mate Karl once said, "I didn't know you could laugh..." (Joshi, 1993, 65) and Sindi had replied, "I can if I am drunk." (Joshi, 1993, 65) Even Sheila, Babu's sister, had remarked, "You are the saddest man I have ever known." (Joshi, 1993, 122) Sindi's cynicism and sense of alienation is expressed in what he says to Khemkha:

Look at me, I have no roots. I have no system of morality. What does it mean if you call me an immoral man. I have no reason to be one thing rather than another. (Joshi, 1993, 118)

Sindi's angst and distress is noticed in the conversation with Mr. Khemkha when they meet for the first time in latter's house in Delhi. When Sindi is asked about the whereabouts of his family, he is uncomfortable in answering this question.

His parents died in a road accident, he was brought up by some relative, and he does not have any good memory of his past. His Angst results from his rootlessness, of having no history or no one to belong to.

On the other hand Nanda Kaul was shocked to hear the news of Ila's death, she got numb and was not able to speak at all, she got worried how she would convey this message to Ila's sister Rima. Nanda Kaul's Angst results from her own sense of guilt, from which she cannot escape.

Though Nanda Kaul had a family, she hardly felt like belonging to it. All her life she maintained a kind of emptiness. Her husband was unfaithful to her, and even her children hardly noticed her. The writer notes how she felt estranged from her family.

Nor had her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like a queen – he had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David, the mistress, whom he had not married because Christian but whom he had loved, all his life loved. Her children – the children were all alien to her nature – She neither understood nor loved them. She did not live here alone by choice – she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing. (Desai, 1978, 158)

At the end of the novel when Ila Das comes to visit Nanda in Carignano, her isolated world is shaken to the core, and she is so disturbed to see her that instead of helping her, she leaves her to her fate. After mentioning Miss David's name both were silent as the past had encroached upon them, the past which destroyed Nanda Kaul's married life, on account of Miss David. Nanda Kaul felt alienated from not only her husband but even from her children. It is her angst in facing the emptiness of her life that makes her live all alone on the hill station of Kasauli. Her lonely life at Carignano is the result of her feeling of alienation and the bitterness she nursed and shared with Ila Das.

Sindi Oberoi felt alienated wherever he went. He could not feel a sense of

belonging anywhere. But, we see his defenses crumbling when he meets Shiela. When Sindi decided to run away from his fake existence from the foreign land, for the first time he thought that he would move on from his past and he could start his life all over again. But instead of this, his anxiety and aloofness followed him wherever he went. He was not contented even after returning to his native land. Joshi illustrates Sindi's fear and anxiety when Sindi reaches Delhi to meet Babu's father, Mr. Khemka, Sindi had sent a message informing about their son's demise. The writer has described Sindi's anxiety in facing Babu's family. He is also uneasy due to his sense of guilt that in a way he was responsible for Babu's death. His anxiety and dread result from the consciousness of this sense of guilt. He is worried about his meeting with Mr. Khemka, what he would say if Babu's father asked him about the whereabouts of his family. He would feel uncomfortable in answering this question, so he feels anxiety.

And what mask was I to put on if they knew? The thought made me uncomfortable and I wished again I hadn't come.

(Joshi, 1993, 10)

On the other hand Nanda Kaul's anxiety results from the threat to her self-imposed alienation, when her granddaughter arrives to stay with her. The gruesome murder of Ila Das shocks her beyond speech, because she feels she is indirectly responsible for it, which threatens her self-imposed alienation.

Sindi and Nanda Kaul, both are alienated from their family, Sindi, on account of the death of his parents in a road accident when he was just a child, and Nanda Kaul was alienated in her married life on account of the infidelity of her husband, and apathy towards her of her grown-up children. Ila Das and Nanda Kaul both are dissatisfied with their past and nurse a feeling of estrangement. Nanda Kaul exiles herself to Kasauli. And Sindi is always a foreigner, having no place to call his own.

### **II.3 Dissatisfaction and Discontentment**

Dissatisfaction and discontentment is visible in both the protagonists throughout the two novels. Sindi always feels lonely and discontented. He is always ill at ease wherever he goes. He belongs to no country, no people and feels like "an

uprooted young man living aimlessly.” (Joshi, 1993, 195) His loneliness is quite obvious to people who come in his contact. June, for example, tells him, “but I have a feeling that you’d be a foreigner everywhere.” (Joshi, 1993, 33) Similarly Nanda Kaul was not happy in her mansion with her husband, her children, and grandchildren. And even at Kasauli where she decided to spend her remaining, life however, she was never satisfied with her life in the Vice-chancellor’s house, and even in Kasauli. Being isolated, and just being with herself, she was afraid and anxious about the phone ring, the postman, letters, her friend Ila Das and even her grand-daughter Raka, whose arrival disturbed her.

Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain* begins with the arrival of a postman with a letter that makes Nanda Kaul anxious. The message disturbs her more as it tells her that Raka, her great grand-daughter will arrive as she is not well. And it struck her very hard that with the arrival of Raka the stillness and silence of her house will be shattered again. And at the same time as she is informing her cook, Ram Lal, about her great grand-daughter’s arrival, suddenly the phone rings, which rang quite seldom in Carignano. With the telephone ring, Nanda Kaul’s anxiousness crops up, she never likes that shrieking bell and usually feels dread and anger about it. She would not allow it to ring as she doesn’t want the pleasant weather of Carignano to be spoiled. She is disturbed because telephone ring announces encroachment on her loneliness. She feels the same about the letter.

Here was a letter and she would have to open it. She resolved to say ‘No’ to whatever demand or request it contained. No, no, no. (Desai, 1978, 13-14)

Now, to bow again, to let that noose slip once more round her neck that she had thought was freed fully, finally. Now to have those wails and bawls shatter and rip her still house to pieces, to clutter the bare rooms and the cool tiles with the mountainous paraphernalia that each child seems to require or anyway demand. Now to converse again when it was silence she wished, to question and follow up and make sure

of another's life and comfort and order, to involve oneself, to involve another. (Desai, 1978, 20-21)

Sindi also feels lonely and withdrawn from the society. He is greatly disturbed when he learns about June's amorous feeling about him. He feels depressed. He says:

Lying there in the bed I wondered in what way, if any, did I belong to the world that roared beneath my apartment window. Somebody had begotten me without a purpose and so far I had lived without a purpose, unless you call the search for peace a purpose. (Joshi, 1993, 55)

Sindi's discontentment, his alienation is not about any place. He is lonely in his soul. He feels his 'foreignness' within himself. Even June notices it when she tells him that he is forever a foreigner. He rejects June's suggestion to get married because he is basically a lonely person. "We are alone, both you and I. That is the problem. And our aloneness must be resolved from within." (Joshi, 1993, 107)

This feeling, discontentedness and alienation does not allow Sindi to form any permanent relationship. He remains an outsider. Though he is attracted to June, he is quite certain in his mind that he would never get into any permanent relationship with her or anyone. On the beach, getting a lift from June, he feels:

Even if I loved her and she loved me, it would mean nothing, nothing that one could depend upon. I was not the kind of man one could love; I had learnt that long ago. (Joshi, 1993, 34)

On the beach Sindi compares his existence on the foreign land and questions about his own existence in this world.

So what about the world? I was born an Indian and had been spat upon; had I been a European, I would have done the spitting. What difference did it make? I should still die and be forgotten by the world. (Joshi, 1993, 26)

But, for Sindi every land is a foreign land, and he, perhaps, would feel this anywhere, because he remains an outsider to all relationships.

Nanda Kaul's discontent, her feeling of dissatisfaction, is slowly built up from her family life. Her routine as a Vice-Chancellor's wife, throwing parties, looking good as a hostess for the benefit of her unfaithful husband, slowly alienated her from her pretentious life. She is driven to loneliness, as her children grow up and live their own life. She is disillusioned finally of the fake life she was living.

The care of others was a habit Nanda Kaul had mislaid. It had been a religious calling she had believed in till she found it fake. It had been a vocation that one day went dull and drought struck as though its life spring had dried up. (Desai, 1978, 33)

Unlike Sindi, her feeling of alienation and loneliness arises after the death of her husband. Until then she had to remain a dutiful wife and the mother. She had not come to Carignano "to enslave herself again. She had come to Carignano to be alone." (Desai, 1978, 88)

Nanda Kaul at Carignano, guards her seclusion and privacy fiercely. But, her seclusion is invaded by the arrival of Raka, her grand-daughter. She is an introvert, eight-year old girl.

If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great grand-daughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct. She had not arrived at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice – she was born to it, simply. (Desai, 1978, 52-53)

Between, Nanda Kaul and Raka, there was common life of suffering and rejection. Raka's father would come home drunk and beat Raka's mother.

\_\_\_\_\_ harsh, filthy abuse that made Raka cower under her bed clothes and wet the mattresses in fright, feeling the stream of urine warm and weakening between her legs like a

stream of blood, and her mother lay down on the floor and shut her eyes and wept. (Desai, 1978, 79)

Raka suffered and cried and hated the parents. Nanda Kaul also secretly suffered, feeling betrayed by her husband. She too, like Raka, loved mountains and wilderness. Like Raka, she too was attracted towards a burnt house, 'the nature's expanse and desolation.'

Nanda Kaul thinks about her days when she worked all day long to take care of her house, children and anxiously waited for her husband to return from work, as she knew about his extra-marital relationship with Miss David in the college. In spite of being a wonderful wife and mother she suffered a lot and this leads to the anxiety, and ultimately to her isolation in Carignano.

#### **II.4 Trauma and Meaninglessness**

Nanda Kaul, Ila Das, and Raka, all these three undergo traumatic experience in their life. Nanda Kaul's impression of her past life is "like the gorge, cluttered, choked and blackened with the heads of children and grand-children, servants and guests all restlessly surging, clamouring about her." (Desai, 1978, 19)

She felt stifled in her house as a Vice-Chancellor's wife, facing responsibility and liabilities, with 'the congealed smile on her face' and above all nursing 'soul-destroying enmity' for her unfaithful husband. She hankers after calm and quiet life of a widow without any children around her. "Her children were all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them." (Desai, 1978, 199)

She lives in Kasauli alone because she is forced to do so. She now distrusts the members of her family. Nanda Kaul's married life has been disappointment. She has injuries and scars of her past life, now driven to her loneliness and seclusion. The eagle flying in the sky, alone, represents her total detachment from the world of relations, which has disillusioned her.

Like her grand-grand-mother, Raka also wants to be left alone. At Kasauli, she wanders alone over bare hills and gorges. Like her great-great-granddaughter she also has gone through traumatic experience, and feels alienated from others.

Nanda Kaul and Raka, both are the recluse. Both have suffered rejection.

Ila Das is a handicapped woman, yet she is a self-respecting woman, who tries to assert herself. People treat her cruelly as she hops and hobbles through the streets of the bazaar; “\_\_\_\_\_ people knocked into her or shoved her aside, burst into guffaws or made jeering remarks, as though her feelings didn't matter to anyone. Did they think she didn't feel it?” (Desai, 1978, 148-149)

In spite of her 'child-sized and time-shrivelled' figure she tried to establish her identity, and directly fights malpractices in the rural society. Her death is tragic, yet she dared to show her spirit and the worth of her character. All the three of them are victims of callousness. Their kids have neglected them. All the three of them were forced to live the life of the recluse, alienated from the dear ones.

#### **II.4.1 Trauma**

Sindi Oberoi does not feel trauma like Nanda Kaul, but he describes his whole life as being 'alone in the darkness.' His temporary affair with Anna and Kathy in London, had taught him how it is necessary not to get involved emotionally. He, however, got involved with June, the American girl. He, of course, did not promise to marry her. But he was disturbed when June made an alliance with Babu.

He did not respond to June's request for marriage, and to maintain his detachment he left Boston and took a job in New York. He faces absurdity of life when he comes back to help June as she was pregnant by Babu (who died in a car accident), but he finds June dead. He feels that the terrible happenings in his life must be the result of his detachment, non-involvement.

Whether in America or Kenya or any other country Sindi felt an outsider, a foreigner. When he went to get his passport to go to India, there in a restaurant, he played a song on the Juke-box:

Who knows where?

The road will lead?

Only a fool can say. (Joshi, 1993, 152)

These lines really apply to his life, as they have an existentialist appeal. On reading *The Foreigner*, one gets an impression that Sindi Oberoi is a lonely, alienated and a rootless person. But, towards the end of the novel his stance of indifference and non-involvement appears to melt away. It did melt for a little while when he felt anguish at the time of love between June and Babu Khemka, but he gets over it. In India, when Khemka's business is in peril, he gives in to Muthu's impassioned plea to take over Khemka's business and save the employees. He appears to be convinced by Muthu's argument that "Sometimes detachment lies in actually getting involved." (Joshi, 1993, 188) This is perhaps, the beginning of Sindi Oberoi's new interpretation of detachment. Shiela (Miss Khemka), remarks towards the end, "I thought you had become too detached to get involved in this mess." (Joshi, 1993, 192) Both smile, perhaps this smile marks qualitative change in Sindi Oberoi's stance of non involvement.

## **II.5 Impressions**

In Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner* and Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*, the protagonists Sindi Oberoi and Nanda Kaul face existential concerns in their life. Their circumstances are, however, different. In *The Foreigner*, Sindi Oberoi, experiences rootlessness right from his childhood, as he loses his family when he is just a child. He works as a dish washer in Soho (Britain), then a barman, and later as a librarian in a village. He studied mysticism with a catholic priest. He does not belong anywhere. Deprived from love of parents, he tries to seek fulfillment in terms of human relations, but he cannot escape his deep sense of insecurity and unreality. He is not capable of forming a permanent relationship. It is this feeling of impermanence that does not allow him to accept June Blyth's proposal of marriage. His sense of unreality of social relations, of impossibility of forming any lasting relationship that plagues him all his life. He remains an outsider to any kind of family feeling, any wish to be tied down to any relationship. In fact he does not love even himself because he has a sense of insecurity. He says, 'I am not the kind of man one could love.' For him nothing is permanent in life. He does not want to get involved. He thought of marriage as a lust for possession. It is this shying away from any involvement, his pose of 'living without desires' that makes him a foreigner. His

experience of early relationship with Kathy, in London, might be responsible for his negative thinking. He says, "All that I had thought was pleasurable had ended in pain, and after all this I was as far from finding the purpose of my life as I had been to start with." (Joshi, 1993, 144) Sindi is in love with June but he obstinately decides to remain undetached. His love for June, he says, 'was streaked with hatred and anger', which was because "I had become possessive, selfish and greedy – all that I had struggled against for years." (Joshi, 1993, 110)

After June's death Sindi became rootless and lonely. He 'drifted into meaningless uncertainties about life, existence and himself.' He realizes that his philosophy of detachment, of inaction was fallacious. 'Detachment consisted of right action and not escape from it,' which is what Muthu also tells him, requesting him to run Khemka's business.

Sindi Oberoi, the outsider to the feeling of love, the practitioner of detachment, finally gets involved into the affairs of Khemka's business, and he might get involved with Miss Khemka also, though it might appear absurd to him. Sindi Oberoi's Angst, his feeling of alienation appears to give way to the 'right action' towards the end of the novel.

In Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*, the protagonist, Nanda Kaul, is a lonely woman. She is driven to loneliness. Her alienation is different from Sindi Oberoi's loneliness and alienation. Nanda Kaul was confined to the heavy household chores being the wife of Vice-Chancellor, and the mother of sons and daughters. She knew of her husband's infidelity, but was stilled into silence. She was virtually the prisoner of home, of her pregnancies and duty towards her children. Nanda Kaul had suffered all, groaning under the burden of duties, with self-pity and pain. She was driven to loneliness by her family.

Nanda Kaul's alienation is the result of the bitter experience of her marital life. She had lived a purposeless life, unloved and enslaved by her husband. She does not now like the intrusion of her great-great-granddaughter, Raka, being forced on her. Now she longs for a quiet, secluded life without any burden. Her alienation, her feeling of detachment is the result of her suffering, which is not the

case of Sindi Oberoi. Nanda Kaul's anguish results from the apathy of her children and the betrayal by her husband. The existential trauma of both the protagonists is the result of altogether different experiences in their life.

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