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## **IDENTITY CRISIS IN SAUL BELLOW'S HERZOG AND ARUN JOSHI'S THE FOREIGNER**

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### **Abstract:**

*Saul Bellow, the most sophisticated novelist of 20th century and recipient of the 1976 Nobel Prize for literature has written about modern man's existence, quest for identity, absurdity and sense of loneliness. He focuses upon the mental imbalance and insanity of modern men. Whereas Arun Joshi the winner of Sahitya Academy Award in 1982, is one of the most outstanding novelists in Indian writing in English. He has written about the problem of existence, quest for identity, identity crisis, and alienation. The attempt of this paper is to study Saul Bellow's Herzog and Arun Joshi's The Foreigner .It shows how both of the writers are similar in their depiction of human existence. The paper focuses upon the theme of identity crisis in the respective novels where the characters are trapped into the existential dilemma. They don't find out the ideal way of living their life and therefore suffer throughout.*

**Key Words:** human existence, absurdity, identity crisis, sufferings, alienation, etc.

Venkataramana Balaga asserts about Bellow's writing in the article "Saul Bellow's Intellectual Hero: Herzog and his Engrossment with Emotional Upheaval" : "His fiction typically addresses the meaning of human existence in an increasingly impersonal and mechanistic world. Writing in a humorous, anecdotal style, Bellow often depicts introspective individuals sorting out a conflict between the Old world and the New world values while coping with personal anxieties and aspirations." (99)Herzog narrates a story of a middle-aged college professor of History who lives temporarily in his country home in the Berkshires namely Moses Herzog. He is a protagonist in the novel and most of the important action takes place in the mind

of Moses Herzog. He is in the internal conflict when the novel starts. He has developed the habit of writing letters which he never sends, to family, friends, acquaintances, scholars, writers, and the dead. The novel opens shortly after his divorce from his second wife, Madeleine who has taken up with his closest friend; Valentine Gersbach. He is not able to understand the mishappenings that occurred in his life. He grows paranoid and is convinced that various figures in his life - his doctor, his lawyer, his therapist, and his aunt - conspired in the destruction of his marriage. He begins writing letters to friends, acquaintances, public figures and philosophers, none of which he sends. His act of writing letters is his attempt to recover from the crisis that he has faced.

As Mushtaq Abdulhaleem Mohammed and Abdulkarim Musir Hamadallah write “Bellow emphasizes the role of the intellectual who is overwhelmed and overburdened by personal and impersonal crises in a perplexed society.” (180) Bellow has shown Herzog as a man who takes writing as a tool to win over his disturbed emotions. He has lost his married life twice. Bellow has used this technique of developing novel in the series of letter which is narrative technique used by the novelists. It comes into the genre of epistolary novel. M. H. Abraham defines it as “the narrative [which] is conveyed entirely by an exchange of letters.” These letters help him to contemplate over the crisis that he was going through. As he writes: “If I am out of my mind, it’s all right with me “ (01) Herzog symbolizes fragmentation of the human identity on the account of modernization and the age where the moral values are in scarcity where a woman like Madeleine does not hesitate to beat her husband .She represents the worst condition of man woman relationship in marriage. Herzog himself affirms that Madeleine marries an ambitious man like him so as “to trip him, bring him low, knock him sprawling and kick out his brains” ( 93) Tony Tanner writes about the novel that it “seems to summarize and contain all the questions, the problems, the feelings, the plights, and the aspirations” in modern age.” (87) The novel is an acute presentation of the modern man who is perfectly trapped into the maze of fast paced, ambitious, material and morally debased world. As Qiutao Fan writes in the article “The Obsessed Individual in the Intellectual Crisis: A Kohutian Reading of Herzog”: “Herzog represents Saul Bellow’s realistic view of the complexities of modern society and man’s predicament, especially the dilemma faced by intellectuals.” (64)

Herzog is a literary product that has historical background of the United States in the 1960s. It was a period utilitarianism was at its height. With the development of new technologies, the postwar America greatly accumulated an abundance of material wealth and the spirituality and moral values were in scarcity. No doubt there was surprising development in modern scientific technology but at the same time “the increasing pressure of the Cold War brought about a series of problems: unemployment, poverty, crime, violence, social unrest and so forth.” In such circumstances, human values and moralities faced severe challenges.” ( qtd. Qiutao Fan: 63) Saul Bellow has written this novel as a byproduct of some historical events such as The Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War, and the Vietnam War which caused widespread disillusionment. Similarly other great artist such as the poet T.S. Eliot wrote the masterpiece The Wasteland which depicts modern man’s dilemma of existential problem. Moses acknowledges the facts of war and death, but he does not become alienated as a result of them. He makes reference to both T.S. Eliot and the Holocaust, criticizes the leaders of his country for the war in Vietnam, and condemns an "aesthetic" view of history that ignores death and murder. Qiutao Fan writes: “With different lengths and various contents, Herzog’s letters and notes are randomly and chaotically scattered throughout the narrative. The letters to the celebrities directly reflect his great concerns about human existence and human civilization.”(66) Anyhow Moses wants to recover from the crisis that occurred in his life. Saul Bellow has shown some positive aspect in Moses at the end of the novel where he spends the night with his good friend Lucas Asphalter. Through Lucas, he arranges to meet with his daughter, June. It is through his sound and careful relationship with his daughter Bellow has highlighted the importance of relationship in one’s crisis moment. The next morning Moses takes June to the aquarium. As they leave the aquarium, Moses gets into a car accident. June is not hurt, but Moses is knocked unconscious. Later he finds himself into the jail since he is charged with possession of a weapon that he had taken to take revenge upon Madeleine his ex – wife and Valentine, her lover. Moses is taken to jail. His brother Will bails him out. At the outset of the novel Moses arranges a night with Ramona, who comes to visit him. It is in his relationship with Ramona, Bellow has given answer to Herzog’s all questions Moses begins relating to women in a new way. He stops thinking of marriage as an easy solution to his problems; on the other hand he looks at sex as a means to heal himself. By the end of the novel, he has found contentment in his country home and the pleasant weather and don’t want to write letter anymore which is a token of his mental stability. Mushtaq Abdulhaleem Mohammed ,Abdulkarim Musir Hamadallah rightly remark about Herzog’s existence : “ Through placing a professor in the middle of an intellectual

predicament, Bellow wants to ridicule the role of the intellectual in postwar American society. Dissatisfied with this negative role, he wishes to change it into an affirmative one.”(191)

Similarly, Arun Joshi portrays modern man’s dilemma of human existence in his *The Foreigner*. *The Foreigner* tries to narrate the essential nature of human existence. Bellow in *Herzog* shows the identity crisis of one intellectual hero whereas Joshi in *The Foreigner* shows fragmentation of identity on the account of the clashes between two cultures. The protagonist Sindi Oberoi ‘s identity is fragmented who does not understand his own self .He feels goalless like Saul Bellow’s *Herzog* As Kavita Yadav writes about the existence of Sindi Oberoi of *The Foreigner* : “Deprived of parental love and affection in his very childhood, he becomes broken anchorless. With the death of his uncle, who brought him up in the absence of his parents, Sindi has lost his emotional anchor forever.”(261) The novel narrates the life journey of the male protagonist Sindi Oberoi, a man born of Kenyan-Indian father and English mother. His parents died in a plane crash near Cairo and Sindi becomes an orphaned at the age of four. There is similarity in the sufferings of Bellow’s *Herzog* and that of Joshi’s Sindi. They are deprived of true love and care .In the very opening pages of the novel *Herzog* ,the protagonist *Herzog* is observed as completely tormented on the account of the betrayal of his second wife Madeleine on the other Joshi’s Sindi also lacks emotional nourishment which later results into identity crisis.

Sindi’s life journey shows him as one of the strugglers. He works as a dishwasher and barman at Saho then moves to Scotland where he works at a small village library and discusses religion, God and mysticism with a Catholic Priest .He studies in Boston where he meets June and Babu. Finally he comes to Delhi and settles down but finds his existence meaningless in the alien country. As he says: “ I was considered quite a misfit.” Here Joshi wants to highlight the alienation and meaninglessness of human being. R.S Pathak has expressed this in the following lines: “Alienation is one of the greatest problems confronting modern man. Its corrosive impact can be seen in the form of generation gap, the anti war movement, the hippie phenomenon, the credibility gap.....and so on. “ (68)Arun Joshi in *The Foreigner* aptly observes the alienation of Sindi Oberoi which later results into his existential agonies and sufferings. In the novel Sindi says: “My foreign background stood against me.” It shows his psychological trauma in the strange land. Arun Joshi has portrayed Sindi as a man who believes in the theory of detachment. But with advent of the female friend, June his idea of detachment is

shattered. Sindi's philosophy of detachment upsets June and she finds a companion in Babu, a young Indian student. Both are supposed to be married but unfortunately both get separated on the account of Sindi's physical relationship with June. Seeing her in depression he just consoles her through lovemaking, which later resulted into the breakdown of her marriage with Babu. Babu who finds himself unable to understand the situation at last commits suicide. June too dies later since she is left behind by both Sindi as well as Babu. Sindi's false concept of detachment is responsible for her as well as Babu's death. Thereafter, Sindi decides to leave America and comes to India where he settles down. His shifting from America to India is very significant as per his self-realization is concerned. As Kavita Yadav comments: "The rootless Sindi finds a direction and purpose of life. He is not alienated from the society but from himself. Shuttling between attachment and detachment; love and hate; participation and withdrawal; he finally settles down in India for he truly belongs to it. From a life of alienation in America and England, he moves to a life of identification in India." (263) There is similarity in the depiction of existential sufferings by both of the novelists. The characters are trapped into the existential dilemmas and they live their life in conflict, anxieties and depression. Bellow's Herzog feels helpless like Joshi's June when his second wife Madeleine deserts him. In Arun Joshi's *The Foreigner* too the characters Sindi, Babu and June live in a state of mental trauma. Sindi tries to find out his roots in when he finds himself nowhere. It is an existential dilemma in the life of the people who become the victims of identity crisis. Sindi faces mental trauma in his love relationship with his female friend, June on the ground of his philosophy of detachment. June too feels suffocated in her relationship with Sindi. However her physical relationship with Sindi gives her sense of guilt and existential anxiety. Anyhow she sees a new hope in Babu to whom she was supposed to marry. Unfortunately, Abu becomes an ultimate victim of the love relationship of Sindi and June and commits suicide. Thus, both Bellow and Joshi have done a wonderful attempt in the portrayal of human existential sufferings where the human beings are trapped in the mental trauma and anxiety. They similarly portray identity crisis in their respective novels. The study of these novels is very significant today in the 21st century where human existence has become futile. People in this century are facing the problems of existence. They don't know the purpose of their life like Bellow's Herzog, Daisy, Madeliene, Valentine Gersbach and Joshi's Sindi, June and Babu. If they had known the value of their life they would not have behaved in this way. Therefore the attempt of the respective novelists is not only to portray the identity crisis in the life of human beings but also they want to correct the behavior of the people in order to avoid it.

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