

Repercussion Due to Erroneous Choices in Ibrahim Al-Koni's the Scarecrow

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to explore the Tuareg tribe of the Saharan desert in Ibrahim al-Koni's novel *The Scarecrow* through the philosophy "Existentialism". The Tuaregs are known for their traditional past and freedom. But this novel is a tale of greed and corruption and is analyzed in the aspect of "Searching for true-self".

The paper deals with the concept of how the indigenous Tuareg tribe turned their back towards traditional nomadic life, losing their culture preferring sedentary life. It portrays how commerce and materialization made them to make wrong decisions which led their life to adversity. The paper stresses the fact it is not right to blame fate or destiny for the man made wrong choices.

KEYWORDS: Tuaregs, Ibrahim al-Koni, Traditional past, Existentialism, Freedom, Choice.

"I rebel; therefore I exist."

-Albert Camus.

Existentialism is a twentieth century that highlights individual existence, freedom and choice. This philosophy is the study of existence and the ways humans find themselves existing in the world. The concept is that humans exist first and then each individual spends a life span altering their essence or nature.

Existentialism is a philosophy concerned with finding self and the meaning of life through free will, choice, and personal responsibility. The belief is that people are searching to find out who and what they are throughout life as they make choices based on their experiences, beliefs, and outlook. And personal choices become unique without the necessity of an objective form of truth. An existentialist believes that a person should be forced to choose and be responsible without the help of laws, ethnic rules, or traditions. (allaboutphilosophy).

Existentialism is the expedition and search for one's true self and true personal meaning in life. Ibrahim al-Koni's works are based on 'search' for something. It may be a spiritual search, search for paradise (Waw), search for identity or search for something that is lost. Eventually the characters in the works of Ibrahim al-Koni are in constant search of their 'true self'. "The main objective of this part will therefore be to show how myth is currently reconstructed in the heart of magic realist novels and how these contribute to

the search for identity and the preservation of cultural heritage in Alkoni's novels." (Cozza 121). The 'search' is one of the significant themes in his novels.

But in the desert trilogy of Ibrahim al-Koni, *The New Waw Saharan Oasis*, *The Puppet* and *The Scarecrow*, the search is based on materialism and corruption. The people of the tribe are manipulated by the conspirators that they could find their true self in the materials like gold and commerce which once they rejected and considered a sin. This act took the tribe to misfortune.

Existentialism originated in the nineteenth century by the famous philosophers Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche but neither of them used the term in their work. In the twentieth century, the renowned French existentialists such as Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Simone de Beauvoir popularized the existential themes such as freedom, commitment, boredom, alienation, absurdity, dread, and nothingness through their scholarly and fictional works. But Jean Paul Sartre is considered to be the first existentialist.

The prominent philosophers Plato and Aristotle said "everything has essence." Jean Paul Sartre said "existence precedes essence". Essence is "a certain set of core properties that are necessary, or essential for a thing to be what it is." (Existentialism). For example, the essential property in a pen is the ink filled chamber with the socket and tip and not the cover which is made up of metal or brass or wood. The essence gives purpose which is called "Essentialism". So obviously, existence precedes essence which means man exists first and it is up to him to add essence in his life.

Existentialism also stresses to find the purpose of life. But the reality to be pondered is that, the purpose differs in each and every individual's life. Each one's purpose differs according to their dreams. According to existentialism there is neither good nor evil. No one can judge whether something is good or bad. Anything that is done devoid of hurting or troubling others is acceptable. One has the choice to do whatever pleases him/her. None has the right to interfere in someone's life unless and until the latter hurts the former.

In Ibrahim al-Koni's *The Scarecrow*, the final volume of his desert trilogy, the people of the tribe is manipulated by the conspirators to abandon nomadism, their traditional way of life. But in the depth of their heart they know that their purpose of life is to travel and reach their destination, the paradise, New Waw. All the way through their life they are guided by the Spirit World but at a point they deny the Spirit World and decide to settle permanently in the desert. "The Spirit World never wrongs us. If a transitory calamity strikes us, we should welcome the lesson, because it is a mere trial." (Koni 82). The tribe is ready to accept anything from the Spirit World rather than settling down. But at a juncture they are forced to reject nomadism because of corruption and greed. Ultimately they lost their real freedom in life.

According to the existentialists, man exists first, encounters himself, surges into the world, and then classifies himself. Existentialists are in opposition to the society which imposes its ideas on a child. Right from the childhood, the parents or the society imbibe their stereotypical ideas into the child's head. Though parents support their child,

they indirectly suck out the choice, freedom, liberty, independence, free will and the personal responsibility of their child.

Existentialism can also be compared to Rousseau, the famous western philosopher's thought, 'Naturalism'. "Rousseau does not want the child should form any habit. The only habit that the child is to form is to contract no habit at all. Habit is contradictory to nature." (S.P. Chaube and Akilesh 64). Actually Rousseau wants everyone to be natural, live according to his/her own will with total freedom. He insists to be natural and to come out of the technological world. "By the term "natural man", he does not mean an uncivilized person. In fact, by this term he means that person who acts according to his original nature and is not compelled to follow social restrictions." (S.P. Chaube and Akilesh 119).

Most importantly, it is the arbitrary act that existentialism finds most objectionable—that is, when someone or society tries to impose or demand that their beliefs, values, or rules be faithfully accepted and obeyed. Existentialists believe this destroys individualism and makes a person become whatever the people in power desire thus they are dehumanized and reduced to being an object. Existentialism then stresses that a person's judgement is the determining factor for what is to be believed rather than by arbitrary religious or secular world values." (All About Philosophy).

This is what occurs in the current modern society. A man who lives according to his free will is imposed stereotypical thought by the society and his individualism and uniqueness is destroyed and is dehumanized. Man, instead of enjoying his freedom and instead of exposing his imaginative thoughts is almost jailed into a formulaic, routine life.

According to the existentialists, whatever the situation may be, once a man enters the world he is accountable for the things happening in his life. It is the choice that matters. The path a man chooses is based on his character. In *The Scarecrow*, the tribe decides to settle in the desert permanently abandoning nomadism. At the beginning everything seems to go well. But later they realize they are being slave to the land and lost their freedom. Plagues affect the tribe and the herbalists are not able to cure them. An herbalist uttered, "When a herbalist is perplexed about the cure, the patient is left with the choice between a sorcerer or a diviner." (Koni 52). This symbolically signifies the choice the tribe has to choose between nomadism and sedentary life. "Travels, travels. The only antidote for the pains caused by the Spirit World is travel. The only balsam that treats yearning is travel." (Koni 88). The tribe lost so many lives because of the choice they made to settle despite knowing the consequences it would create.

According to Jean Paul Sartre, man should live authentically. "If there are no guidelines for our actions, then each of us is forced to design our own moral code, to invent a morality to live by." (Existentialism). People look for some authority for answers. But the word 'authority' is itself false because they are also humans who are looking for an answer in life. Authorities are people just like everyone and struggle to figure out who they are. So it is not likely to depend on them for answers.

In the novel *The Scarecrow*, the people of the tribe look for an authority through the leader. They believe him completely that they meet him according to his commands.

They are anxious that they would get an answer from the leader. But the leader is a tyrant who orders the soldiers to kill the whole crowd mercilessly.

People shoved each other aside, trying to escape from the circle of fire, desperate to save themselves, but the soldiers stabbed them with swords and spears. Many fell to the ground, bleeding profusely, and then were trampled underfoot by the mob. Others retreated only to be choked by waves of smoke. They perished, like the rest, in the tongues of flame. (Koni 98).

When people look for an authority for an answer, they don't get satisfied because the authorities are also mere people looking for an answer in life through other sources.

Fate or Destiny is the progress of occurrences outside a person's control, considered as predetermined by a mystical power. There is something in every life that is controlled by an ultimate power which cannot be denied. But as Shakespeare says, it is up to one to control the destiny which is the reality. It is true that God exists. But if a person makes wrong choices, God cannot help it. It is then of no use to blame fate.

In the Bible also, Adam and Eve took a wrong choice to devour the apple afforded by the serpent without even thinking about the repercussion they would face for the sin. They were in a state of Hamlet's famous phrase, "To be or not to be". They had a choice "to eat or not to eat". But they failed in making a right choice. Eve was captivated by the apple whereas Adam was captivated by the female charm.

Every action has a reaction. So man is responsible for his own acts. But some events and situations in a man's life are unpredictable and it is God that allows in life to punish, mould and make things better in a man's life. It is up to a man who takes it positively and handles it in a positive manner rather than being disheartened.

Existentialism is a philosophical perspective that focuses on the experience of a person and the way he or she understands and being familiar with the world. But the imperative fact is that society should not imprison an individual's life or actions that it suppresses an individual's life and suppresses his thoughts, actions and creative ideas. Sometimes fate can be changed by wisdom. It is definitely not right to point the finger at fate for every errors committed by a man.

The value of existential thought lies in the freedom of a person. The primary virtue of existentialism is authenticity. Here, the people of the Tuareg tribe are authentic which mean they are true to their conscious. The leaders and the people of the tribe in the desert who has freedom and travel with a purpose face a radical change because of corruption. It leads them to a state of disorientation, confusion, agony and the world became meaningless for them. This is because of the wrong choice they took in a fraction of second by selecting commerce instead of their freedom. Greed creeps into the minds of the Tuaregs which lead to their fall.

"Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed"

-Mahatma Gandhi.

Greed is a desire to possess more than one need or more than what is needed. It is voracious hunger for something which is already in surplus. None can fulfil the requirements of a greedy person. Man becomes self-centred when he is possessed by greed. This is what happens in the desert trilogy of Ibrahim al-Koni. Greed for commerce peeps into the life of the Tuaregs who are leading a traditional life. They not only abandon the tradition but also turn out to be corrupt. Greed and corruption is the reason for their punishment from God.

One needs wisdom, insight and knowledge to make the correct choice. When one allows greed to perforate into the heart the choice obviously becomes erroneous. Greed conceals the good intentions and so obviously everything turns out to be wrong which ultimately lead a person to commit crimes. So it is also important not to be ravenousness for the awful instead choose the right one with wisdom.

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