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Existentialism: A case Study of Mustansar Hussain Tarar’s “Mantiq-ul-Tayr Jadeed for the search of Identity in Sub-continent

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Abstract:

“Humanity is a pivot to personal and collective life of human being. God has blessed him with remarkable gift of essence. Soul is not only a reflection of spiritual aura but also an intellectual aspect which furbish excellence in man. So, that a man could prove himself a reasonable social being among the quagmire of oscillating being demands of society and flourish literature. Knowledge is a stimulus for intellect and reasoning in human being. Life is an eternal reality. The quest for identity has been a significant theme in the cultural and historical evolution of the Subcontinent. This research explores philosophical lens of existentialism through Mustansar Hussain Tarar’s novel Mantiq-ul-Tayr Jadeed. By blending metaphysical and existential themes with the region’s socio-cultural history, this study seeks to understand the profound layers of identity construction amidst colonial legacies, religious diversity, and cultural syncretism. The paper analyzes how the storyline rooted in Fariduddin Attar’s ‘The Conference of the Birds’, which provides a modern reinterpretation that resonates with the Subcontinent's struggles for meaning, individuality, and spiritual awakening.

Key Words: Humanity, Reflection, logic, Philosophy, Mantaq-ul-Tayr, Fareed-ud-Din Atar, psychological, harmony, metaphorically.

Introduction:

Humanity is closely connected to the personal and collective life of human beings. God has endowed humans with the great treasures of knowledge and spirit. Knowledge is the driving force behind human autonomy and sound reasoning. The spirit is a form of inner experience that nurtures all of human beings' positive capabilities in the best possible way, enabling them to remain a balanced social entity in response to the ever-changing demands of their personal and communal lives. Literature has always flourished under the influence of these inner experiences. Life is an eternal reality, and understanding human nature is no easy task. In the context of literature's humanism or its service to humanity, it presents the concepts of good and evil, while also advocating for Islamic equality, brotherhood, and the creation of a peaceful society. "Mantiq al-Tayr" (The Conference of the Birds) also introduces interfaith harmony on a universal level. The author presents the contemporary meaning of harmony in the realms of philosophical logic, metaphysics, ethics, psychology, and consciousness studies, from which the concepts of multiplicity and unity emerge. Religion, mysticism, and knowledge encompass both the instinctive and conscious identity of human psychology.

The search for identity is a recurring theme in human history, especially within regions such as the Subcontinent that have experienced significant socio-political upheavals. The melding of indigenous traditions with the imprints of colonialism, the influence of Sufi mysticism, and the inter-religious dynamics form a unique tapestry of existential inquiry. In this context, Mustansar Hussain Tarar's *Mantiq-ul-Tayr Jadeed* stands as a narrative that rejuvenates Fariduddin Attar's classical *Mantiq-ul-Tayr*, contextualizing it within the 21st-century challenges of identity and belonging. This article examines Tarar's novel as a literary exploration of existential questions, utilizing Sufi allegories and metaphysical discourses in the frame of existentialism.

Theoretical Framework:

- **Existentialism and the Subcontinent:** Existentialism by Popper, a philosophy centered on individual freedom, choice, and meaning-making, offers a lens through which the fragmented identities of the Subcontinent can be studied. Historical colonization, the partition of India, and the subsequent sociopolitical developments have deeply influenced the region's collective psyche. In Tarar's work, these existential dilemmas are portrayed through allegories, symbolism, and the protagonist's journey—mirroring the metaphysical questions posed by Attar centuries ago.
- **Symbolism and Allegory in Identity Formation:** Tarar's novel encapsulates Attar's birds as metaphors for the diverse communities and spiritual seekers of the Subcontinent. Each bird's journey reflects existential struggles, from the quest for authenticity to the challenges of reconciling faith and modernity.
- **Freedom and Choice:** The novel highlights the freedom to choose one's path amidst societal constraints, echoing existentialist ideas.
- **Authenticity and Individuality:** Characters grapple with the tension between conforming to societal expectations and pursuing personal truths.
- **Absurdity and Meaning:** The socio-political landscape of the Subcontinent mirrors existential absurdity, prompting characters to seek higher meanings through spiritual journeys in the whirlpool of chaos.

- **Sufi Mysticism and Existentialism:** Sufi philosophies, particularly the concepts of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Being) and the annihilation of the self, align with existential notions of transcendence and self-realization. Tarar's integration of these ideas highlights the spiritual dimensions of existential thought.

Analysis:

In his novel "Mantiq al-Tayr Jadeed," Mustansar Hussain Tarar attempts to convey contemporary meaning of existence through historical and religious values on a symbolic and metaphorical level. The concept of life and the afterlife is presented as a story. Both life and death are origins. The soul's presence with the body signifies life, while its state without the body represents death. This novel serves as a metaphor for the search for truth. Every cell of the human body contains a genetic code. These codes hold the psychological secrets of humanity, connected to the soul, mind, and consciousness.

Sultan Bashir Mahmood writes:

"There is something within humans that you may call the effect of genes, or soul, or inner self, or an invisible body (Astral Body) that can communicate messages outside the body."

Cloning, a scientific invention in the near future, is an experiment where an entire army will be created from identical human genes. According to this theory, all of them will have the same thoughts and behavior. Mentally, these genes will be able to communicate with each other's thoughts and have a special method of control. The author has similarly experimented with cloning on a literary level. The concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Existence) is such a process of cloning, in which all religions of India—Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam—appear to be connected through one relationship, one bond.

Humans, made up of millions of microorganisms, after a long battle in the mother's womb to gain human existence, complete the journey of their existence. From the cell to the completion of human existence, they pass through the mineral, plant, and animal stages to reach their destined goal.

Dr. Saadat Saeed writes:

"Throughout all the stages of human development, it encounters various emotions and feelings. In the gardens of its soul, instinct, intellect, and spirit each play their roles."

The discussions of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Existence) and *Wahdat al-Shuhud* (Unity of Witnessing) are presented in a Sufi manner. These mystical states have been depicted by different schools of thought in the form of birds. This spiritual and intuitive philosophy is presented by Tarar in *Mantiq al-Tayr Jadeed*. The changes in human intellect and intuition are symbolized by various birds, such as: *Hodhod* (Hoopoe) for consciousness, *Qamari* (Pigeon) for observation, *Tota* (Parrot) for soul, *Titar* (Pheasant) for wisdom, *Shahbaz* (Falcon) for the testimony of unity, *Daraaj* (Crane) for witnessing prophethood, *Bulbul* (Nightingale) for love, *Moor* (Peacock) for success, *Chakor* (Chakor bird) for blind desires, *Kabutar* (Pigeon) for messenger, *Fakhita* (Dove) for awareness, *Uqab* (Eagle) for thought, reflection, and high vision, and *Murg* (Hen) for love. These birds are presented as metaphors.

The 21st century has proven to be an era where scientific advancements have inadvertently led to the devaluation of human life. The brutality of time, the monopoly of global powers, the race for dominance, and the narrative of the New World Order have caused mental unrest both internally and externally across the world. The author presents a vision of a society free from all racial and religious prejudices, advocating for peace and harmony. Using creativity, the novelist molds the raw material of life into a purposeful form. Influenced by the theory of pro-evolution, there is a strong desire to create a peaceful and joyful society out of this world, laden with violence, destruction, and bloodshed

Discussion:

The author has created such a masterpiece of cloning on the literary canvas, which envisions the dream of a new society and a new human, free from the destruction of civilizations, extremism, ideological conflicts, the New World Order of superpowers, fundamentalism, cultural relativism, and religious pluralism. The world is made up of different societies and civilizations. In this era of globalization, where the world has become a village through technology, different ideologies are in a battle for supremacy, with the caravan of humanity beginning from Adam and spanning millions of years, ultimately forming a tangled heap. The game between the powerful and the weak continues:

"The global powers are engaged in preparing to dominate the world, enslave other nations, and control their minds."

Human beings wish to escape the impermanence of life, sorrow, and pain. They grow weary of the hardships of life and desire to transform into birds, traveling freely everywhere without any ties, bonds, or beliefs restricting them. The colors of this philosophy, along with the Islamic values of brotherhood and equality, are presented in *Mantiq al-Tayr Jadeed*. The idea of life after death and the eternal life after annihilation is represented through the form of birds, with the vision of a new, peaceful society. Here, instead of hatred and prejudice, an atmosphere of love, brotherhood, and equality prevails. On the literary level, this creative concept has established a new dimension of intellectual and artistic, as well as technical, mysteries. It is a narrative technique that presents a situation that would seem impossible to occur, but within the veil of this imaginative creation, we can hear the echoes of events unfolding in the present time and the moral system that is gradually vanishing in our age.

"Behind the imaginative creation lies the expression of the overall social, political, historical, cultural, civilizational, and cultural spirit and events, which gives rise to a profound, all-encompassing weight."

Urdu literature, from its inception, has been infused with a narrative style. Through stories, the moral training of humanity has been carried out for the establishment of persistence in society, the concept of good and evil, and the revival of Islamic values. Folk songs, tales, and stories have provided intellectual, cultural, political, and ethical stability to the human mind.

Sufi saints also adopted this method of teaching to promote Islamic values among the masses. To emerge from centuries of intellectual misconceptions and cultural degradation, the concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (Unity of Existence) at the public level held significant importance, as it abolished the distinctions between the suffering and disheartened human

beings on earth. Notable figures in this tradition include Kabir Das, Meera Bai, Shah Hussain, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, Bullah Shah, Rahman Baba, Sachal Sain, and Khwaja Fariduddin Attar.

Dr. Saeed Ahmad writes:

"The plot of stories is the struggle between good and evil. The presence of supernatural elements in these tales is the formation and embodiment of human aspirations."

Conclusion:

This novel encompasses both the beginning and end of life, illustrating how humanity endures agonies through centuries-long journeys. The seeking soul, in the mirror of changing eras, reflects the meaning of human existence. It highlights the shared Indian civilization fostered by traditions of Kabir, Nanak, and Chishti. When this civilization and society disintegrated, and the communities living here started indulging in greed and bloodshed based on ideological foundations, efforts were made to redirect humans toward the world of yoga and mysticism, away from the region's political, social, religious, and cultural issues.

At times, the novel depicts illusion as a guarantor of life's continuity. Life is portrayed as a dream, utilizing the technique of free association of ideas. The process of Pakistan's establishment and the severance of generations from their roots, as they migrated to new lands, shedding tears of blood for survival, also substantiates the creation of a new society and world. The author dreams of liberation from mental unrest and conflict resulting from the chaos and turmoil of human life. In the novel, when human souls ascend toward the heavens seeking liberation from life, this ascent is metaphorically depicted as the flight and gathering of birds, symbolizing human intuition and inspiration.

Through the character Musa Hussain, the novelist presents a dialogue with the modern birds of "Mantiq-ul-Tayr." The opera performed centuries ago by Fariduddin Attar in Nishapur is reimagined symbolically in this novel. When the power of creation emerged to illuminate the silent universe with colors and light, the spectacles of the cosmos materialized in moments. Using the complete creative authority vested in him, the novelist skillfully crafts the material before him into literary expressions. The terrestrial canvas of "Tilla Jogian" is chosen as the setting for the birds of "Mantiq-ul-Tayr," fittingly portraying historical, natural, human, and ethical environments.

In this novel, the interweaving of physical and spiritual dances—the fusion of soul and self—tells the story of human flourishing. When life, yearning for companionship amidst the loneliness and desolation of the singular self, began anew within its own essence, the logic of seeing the whole from its parts gave birth to the existence of the world. Across centuries of journeys, for the sake of spiritual tranquility, temples, monasteries, churches, fire temples, mosques, gurdwaras, and human beliefs and religions came into existence. In modern times, class oppression, ethnic hostilities, Hindu-Muslim animosities, and Sikh-Hindu conflicts have turned Eastern society into a hotbed of disputes and prejudices. This chaos gave rise to sanctuaries like shrines, cloisters, circles, "Jogian" hills, and "Rajneesh" centers as human refuges.

To keep the mysteries alive for the dream of a peaceful imaginary world separate from a realm of hatred and prejudice, poly-historical and polyphonic concepts are symbolized through birds:

“The autonomous and self-sufficient voices that Bakhtin spoke of resonate like echoes in the novel’s narrative, presented in accordance with the eras. Political, social, historical, literary, and cultural scenarios, as well as specific environments, are depicted through the language of birds.”

Sultan Bashir Mahmood, Talaash-e-Haqiqat, Dar-ul-Hiqmat, International Islamabad,
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