

## Poornachandra Tejaswi's *Swaroopa* and *Abachoorina Post Offisu*: An Existential Study

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### Abstract:

Existentialism has had a very great influence on the varied fields all over the world. Though the origin of the philosophy can be dated back to the age of the philosophers like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, this philosophy flourished in Europe during post II World War, and this period is termed as the 'Modern Age' in the history of English literature. Once Existentialism became popular in Europe, it did not take much time to spread across the world. In India, Existentialism influenced literature during the post independent era. In Kannada literature, this period is termed as 'Navya Era' and Poornachandra Tejaswi is one of the popular writers of this era. Though Tejaswi did not identify himself with the writers of this age, the spirit of existentialism can definitely be seen in some of his major works. The current paper discusses the influence of existentialism on his novel *Swaroopa* and *Abachurina Post Offisu*, a collection of short stories.

**Keywords:** Navya, Existentialism, individual, Anxiety, Dogma, Corruption, Isolation.

### Introduction:

Existentialism, as a movement in the fields of philosophy and literature, evolved as a result of a very strong interplay between these two disciplines. The human being is the locus and focus of this ideology. The essence of existentialism consists partly in its identification of the problems and dilemmas which stem from existence, freedom and choice. Existentialism focuses on the question of whether or not existence is purposive, of the existential relevance or irrelevance of God, and or of the possibility of any transcendental force that lends support to the view that 'man' is the sole creator of his destiny. Notwithstanding internalized ideological diversity, all arguments within the system take an individual-centric stand.

The impact of existentialism on world literature is immense as this philosophy along with emphasizing the importance of the 'individual', addressed the contemporary social and

political issues. The influence of existentialism on Kannada literature occurred during the Post-independent period which is termed as 'Navya Age' in the history of Kannada literature. The remarkable aspect here is that, there was a transformation of not only the genre of poetry of Adiga, but also the works of Shantinatha Desai, Sriranga, Shivarama Karant, etc. This change was not a sheer accident, but the reflection of the changes in the way of thinking. Admittedly, individuals do not matter, but it is an evidence for intellectual revolution driven by the urge for reformation in any given milieu. The current paper discusses the shadow of existentialism on a novel and some of the short stories of Poornachandra Tejaswi.

Though entered into the Kannada literary world with Navya ideology and during the modernist period, very soon Poornachandra Tejaswi liberated himself from the influence of navya philosophy owing to the limitations of the same. While most of the navya writers dealt with the inner turmoil, conflict between man and man, Tejaswi explored the conflict not only between individuals, but also between man and nature. The existence of angst, the origin of cruelty in man and also a theoretical analysis of existential questions can be found in his works. In his works, we come across a good deal of the tenets of existentialism like- emphasis on alienation and authoritarian oppression. He concluded that the institutions like State, Bureaucracy and Legal System are the instruments of oppression. Individual is shown as the victim of the oppressive policies of the state.

### **Existential Isolation in *Swaroopa*:**

*Swaroopa* is a novel which is written with the framework of existentialism. The story of the novel revolves around the central figure M D Srinivasa. The other characters have little importance in the novel for the entire story is nothing but a probe into the internal turmoil of its protagonist. The novel can also be regarded as a monologue of Shrinivasa, who takes an opportunity to give vent to his inner confusion with his friend Hemantha, an upcoming scholar. As Shrinivasa begins to talk about his absurd condition and the awkward silence that has entrapped him, the novelist elucidates the fact that the absurd situation and the awkward silence are not unique to Shrinivasa alone. It is applicable to the listener of Shrinivasa, that is Hemantha and also to each and every individual on the earth.

As Shrinivasa begins to share his experiences with Hemantha, boredom and futility seem to be their main essence. Boredom, futility and absurdity are part and parcel of human existence according to existentialism. Hence his experience can be taken as the experience of

the entire humanity. The purpose of Shrinivasa's narration of his past life to his friend is neither to gain sympathy from him nor to find a solution to the haunting boredom and absurd condition. It is an attempt by him to take responsibility for all that has happened to him due to his past actions. The time that he feels to unburden himself of his past choices and consequences is the time of hunting for which he goes along with Hemantha. Hunting is an action that needs absolute silence and similarly, Shrinivasa needs absolute silence with no intervention from anywhere for the act of his confession. He hopes to break the absurdity and awkward silence around him and wishes to begin his life afresh gaining freedom from the burden of the past.

The incidents of his past haunt him like ghost- his love with Jayanthi, whom he could not marry as she did not belong to his own caste and he could not convince his parents and the guilt he feels for the same. Her marriage with a different person though relieves him of his guilt, it also becomes the source of his anxiety for the difference he sees in the attitude of Jayanthi the girl whom he loved is much different from and Jayanthi in reality. In one of his past hunting expeditions, Shrinivasa has killed a man thinking him as a wild boar he was aiming. But he manages to close the case with the police as he is both politically influential and financially empowered. While confessing these two experiences of his past, though Shrinivasa feels much guilt he does not attribute the guilt only on himself. He feels that those two acts were deliberately done by him and the society is indirectly responsible for his acts.

He has got one more incident to narrate to his friend. One day when he was pondering over the metaphysical and existential questions about life in a coffee shop, he happened to encounter a beggar who came stretching his hand to Shrinivasa begging. The stature of the beggar aroused sudden anxiety in Shrinivasa and he screamed at the beggar. This made the hotel authority to oust the beggar from the hotel. Pondering over this embarrassing incident as Shrinivasa started from the hotel forgetting to pay the bill, the manager reminded him to pay the bill. This added much to his embarrassment for at that time Shrinivasa felt as though people were laughing at him. Much time has passed after the occurrence of this incident; yet, Shrinivasa feels a sort of hesitation and uneasiness even to this day. The awkward silence that bound him is as fresh as ever. These are the assorted incidents from the life of Shrinivasa. But they have contributed to his present situation and anxiety that he faces. The responsibility that a man has upon his choices and decisions, and the trauma created by the consequences of one's action are the issues discussed in *Swaroopa*. The novel can be regarded as an existential work for the entire narration is done from the subjective point of view.

**An insight into the stories in *Abachoorina Post Offisu*:**

The collection of short stories *Abachoorina Post Offisu* (The Post office of Abachur) has the existential touch. Chobanna is the protagonist of the story which has the title of the book. He is also a victim of the crime done by human beings on their own species. Here, the mother-in-law of Chobanna, Machamma spoils the life of both her daughter Kaveri and her son-in-law Chobanna. Chobanna is the postmaster of the post office of Abachuru, who writes and reads the letters of the people of the village where most of the people are illiterate. But his mother-in-law, who wants to establish a hold on him, does not allow him to go near his wife. Chobanna also suffers due to the non-co-operation of his wife. He, to come out of this traumatic state and to gain peace of mind runs away from the village. Directly or indirectly, the opening of the post office in Abachuru, which is a symbol of civilization, also acts as a medium which permanently closes the family life of Chobanna. Chobanna is the symbol of eternal suffering for which man is destined for the reasons unknown.

'Avanati' (Downfall) is the next story in the collection where the author broods over the wasting of the immense talent of an artist whose art never gets recognised in society. If an artist fails in making proper use of his talent, it is not only his personal failure; it is the failure on the part of the society also of which he is a part. We have two characters in the story- Soorachari, a highly talented sculptor, who neither understands that he has to make use of his talent somehow, nor the society recognises his talent. He earns his living doing menial works much below his capacity like, mediating for buying and selling the cattle, preparing the absurd and awkward shaped statues and articles related to black magic, working as a matchmaker etc. The other character is Gowri, an exceptionally beautiful girl married to a very ordinary man by name Subbayya. People, while appreciating her beauty, do it ironically. She is also unfortunate for the three children born to her die in infancy. On one occasion Soorachari comes to Subbayya on some business and happens to listen to the story of the death of the three children born to Gowri by him. Immediately he suggests a very harsh remedy which not only would inflict great pain on her but also would cause damage to her physical beauty. The story ends with Subbayya's acceptance for the treatment. Thus, the great beauty is destroyed by the great talent and no need to evaluate the society's contribution for the same.

In the story, 'Kubi mattu Iyala', (Kubi and Iyala), the author gives us the picture of a society where people are not ready to welcome the positive changes in their lives. The protagonist of the story, Dr.Kuberanatha, who wants to take the people of Bhyrapura from ignorance to enlightenment, fails pathetically in his attempt. Not that he is misunderstood by the people or he becomes unpopular with them, but in his mission of bringing out the people from the dark world of superstitions, he indirectly contributes to push them into the same. Dr. Kuberanatha comes to Bhyrapura, a dungeon of ignorance and superstitions with the aim of reforming the people of their beliefs and waging a war against rampant corruption prevailing there. Until the arrival of Dr. Kuberanath, Ramaraya, the compounder of the hospital plays the role of a doctor and also exercises considerable influence on the people. Once Dr. Kubi (as he is popularly called in the story) takes up the charge of the hospital, he becomes very popular among the people. The major reason for his popularity is the propaganda made by Ramaraya that Dr.Kuberanath is omnipotent as he is able to cure anybody of any disease on the earth. There comes a twist in the story with the murder of Iyala an innocent girl in the village. When no one is able to decipher the mystery behind the murder of Iyala, Kubi finds out the culprit. A fatally injured worker due to the accidental explosion in the quarry is admitted to the hospital. He is on the verge of death when Dr. Kubi starts his treatment. The injured man in his half-conscious state repents his act of raping and murdering Iyala with the belief that he would be cured of his sexual diseases by doing intercourse with a girl who has recently attained her puberty. When Kubi breaks this news to the people of Bhyrapura, he appears almost like a demigod to them. Here lies the irony of the story. Kubi, who wanted to bring out the people of Bhyrapura from ignorance, accelerates their drowning into the well of superstition against his will.

'Tukkoji' is the story in the same collection which depicts the relationship between family and profession. Tukkoji is a famous tailor in the village. Assisted by his wife in his profession, his clothes are almost like the second skin to the people of the village. Everything is fine until the entry of Tukkoji's son Krishnoji to their family. Now Saroja cannot assist her husband as she used to do before the birth of the child for she has much to do with the work of the baby. Tukkoji finds short of assistance and this is reflected in the deterioration in the quality of his work. When he becomes unpopular, he attributes his failure to his wife Saroja and son Krishnoji. They neglect the child with the feeling that his entry into the family brought differences in the family. At one point of time they even carelessly leave the child on the street. Somebody takes the child with him but soon brings him back to his parents. It is then that the

parents face the turmoil and anxiety. They are normal only when the child is home. The paradox of the story lies in the fact that the child, which is the most beautiful gift of nature, instead of bringing peace into the life of its parents destroys it.

'Tabarana Kathe' (the story of Tabara), is the most touching story in the collection. In portraying the helplessness of an individual fighting against the injustice done to him by the red tapism of the bureaucracy, Tabara become not an individual, but a type. He also reminds us the character of the villager in the story, 'Before the law' who never gets entry into the court after spending his entire life on the threshold of the court and breathes his last there itself. Similarly, Tabara waits for his pension to be settled after his retirement, the money which he desperately needs for the treatment of his ailing wife in vain. Tabara is a government official who joins as a group IV worker in British India and retires in independent India. Until he retires somehow leads his life with a meagre salary along with his sick wife. After his retirement, the health of his wife worsens. The only source for him with which he can take his wife for treatment is his pension. But the settlement of his pension gets delayed. The red tapism of bureaucracy is ridiculed here. The writer satirises the system which has no mercy upon the weak. Tabara's wife's disease aggravates and brings her to a point where she is affected by gangrene and the doctors suggest the amputation of her leg. But this never happens as Tabara fails to arrange the money required for the operation. He begs the doctors to give her treatment now and later he would give money with his pension fund, but no one heeds to him and his wife dies. The gangrene that affects the wife of Tabara is the symbolic representation of corruption which is gangrene to our political system and bureaucracy, which if not cut off is sure to destroy the entire society.

### **Conclusion:**

Thus, though Tejaswi did not stick to Navya tradition forever in his literary journey, his works that show the banes that haunt the society definitely show the tenets of existentialism and prove to be the best stories in Kannada literature in this genre. While *Swaroopa* adheres to the philosophy of Existentialism in its narrative technique, the stories in the collection, *Abachoorina Post Offisu*, in the depiction of human anxiety and the societal problems show us the traces of the tenets of this philosophy.

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