

**RAMIFICATION DUE TO ERRONEOUS CHOICES IN IBRAHIM AL-KONI'S
*THE NEW WAW SAHARAN OASIS***

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The Tuaregs are nomadic people who live across the Saharan desert, including the North African Countries of Mali, Niger, Libya, Algeria and Chad. The Tuaregs are the part of Berber group of people. Berber or Amazigh means descendants of the pre-Arab inhabitants of North Africa who lived in scattered communities. The Tuaregs are almost two million in population. The Tuaregs are thought to have Libyan roots. The blog *Bradshaw Foundation* says, "Tuareg is an Arabic term meaning abandoned by God". They call themselves "Imohag" which means free men. The indigenous Tuaregs are nomadic pastoralists who move from one place to another which denotes that they are known for their freedom.

A nomad means, "One who wanders for pasture". Nomads don't have a specific habitat to reside instead keep on moving. The Tuaregs are proud of their nomadic culture. They keep searching for their paradise and never settle anywhere. They consider settling down permanently in a particular place for more than forty days as a sin and so they keep on travelling. Some Tuaregs are semi-nomads, which mean, they built temporary hut in a particular place, cultivate their food and then move on.

Most of the Tuaregs follow Islam religion. The admirable fact is that though they follow the Islamic religion, they did not abandon their old practices and beliefs. For example, they believe the Spirit World and the doings of the jinns. They also believe in desert Gods. The most salient feature of the Tuaregs is that though they are Muslims, women don't wear veils instead men wear veils. This gives rise to their popular name "The Blue Men of the Sahara" or "Men of Veil". Tuareg men begin wearing the veil at the age of twenty-five. It is said that the Tuaregs hide their face in order to cover their face from the sand and the harsh desert elements. There is nothing to do with religious custom but only a form of protection which later became the part of their culture. The unique factor is that men hide their faces but not the eyes.

The Tuaregs has strong family ties. Usually they are of large families. Everyone in the family has a work to do. The father is the authority figure in the family. The Bedouin fathers are respected and are also considered and worshipped like gods by both the wife and children. The Tuareg women are treated with high respect. In the blog, *The Bedouin Way*, "In return, we Bedouin men place our women in high regard, calling them our "Queens". In the Muslim religion, we believe that men and women are created from one soul to be partners to each other. Men and women have the same religious responsibilities, and we hope both will receive the same rewards on the day of judgment". Tuareg women have great freedom and takes part in tribal decisions.

The Tuaregs are known widely for their hospitality. They treat their guests with utmost kindness and care. They go to any extent to feed their guest which is the most appreciated nature and culture of the Tuaregs. The Bedouins are spoken highly for their hospitality. They treat their guests with love, care and kindness. They almost treat them like Gods.

"Traditional Bedouin life is centered around animals" (Losleben 22). Bedouins mean "desert dwellers". Bedouins are traditional nomads. Most Bedouins are animal herders and in fact are categorized according to the animal species that are the basis of their livelihood as camel nomads, sheep nomads and goat nomads. They tend to live in the suburbs of the desert so that they can acquire sufficient amount of hay for their animals. Much importance is given to their animals. Animal Human relationship among the

Tuaregs is astounding and something to be marveled at. Animals are much respected in the Tuareg community. They don't hunt animals unnecessarily or for fun. They don't hunt more than one animal for their food, which is their ethic and strictly adhere to it.

The Tuaregs thus has a rich, unique culture and tradition which in the modern days is at stake. In Ibrahim al-Koni's novel, *The New Waw Saharan Oasis*, the deterioration of their rich culture is witnessed. The crisis starts when the Tuareg community chooses sedentary life over nomadism. The poet in the novel tries to find his self through nomadism but he couldn't because of the tribe's decision to settle in a particular place.

Existentialism is a twentieth century that highlights individual existence, choice and freedom. 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. 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 youtube).

In Ibrahim al-Koni's, *The New Waw Saharan Oasis* 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 adversity. But the poet's search is different. The poet in the novel *New Waw Saharan Oasis*, is born an ordinary man, who along with his tribe follows nomadism. But he has a natural tendency to add essence in his life through poetry. So the essential property in his life is poetry. He strongly feels that without poetry he is nothing and his life would be a void. The essence called poetry gives the purpose for his life. "They also claimed that the people bickering about the bird's size, colour, or behaviour were nothing but poets, who typically see what ordinary people don't, hear what other people don't, and say what others don't." (Koni 69). The poet in the novel feels complete when he has his essential property with him.

The poet burns with passion and zeal for poetry that he is not ready to sacrifice his poetry for anything in life. Even when his tribe forced him to take up the post of leader, he denies it for the sake of poetry. Such is his ardour and dedication for poetry. "But I am a poet, and poets have never made suitable leaders." (Koni 24). But later he is influenced by the tribe to become a leader and lost his life as he is forced to ignore his essential property of life, poetry. "They would say that a man who enters the tent of leadership must forget about love, just as he had previously forgotten solitude and poetry. In the leader's tent there was no room for any fantasy, and love is a fantasy." (Koni 26).

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 varies 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 without hurting or disturbing 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.

The poet who wanders in the desert in solitude and enjoys with his lover is made to fall in the pit of leadership. According to him, the purpose of his life is to be a nomad searching for paradise, and to be in bliss by reciting poems. But he is forced to take up the post of leader which led him to his death. "Haven't we killed the leader himself with such talk? When he tried to convince us that a poet is ill-suited to serve as leader, didn't we tell him, 'This isn't appropriate'?" (Koni 45).

According to the existentialists, man exists first, encounters himself, surges into the world, and then defines himself. Existentialists are against the society which imposes its ideas on a child. Right from the childhood, the parents or the society imbibes their stereotypical ideas into the child's head. Though parents support their child, they indirectly suck out the choice, freedom, free will and the personal

responsibility of their child.

In *The New Waw Saharan Oasis*, upon the death of the leader of the Tuareg tribe, his nephew, the poet is forced to serve as a leader. The poet reluctant to agree to the mantle of leadership but reluctantly serves as a leader. "Do you want us to violate a tradition that no one in our community has ever violated?" (Koni 23). He is emotionally manipulated by the tribe in the name of tradition. The tribe tries to impose their traditional values, beliefs and rules which is faithfully obeyed and accepted by the poet. As existentialists believe, it destroys the individualism of the poet and he is dehumanized and reduced to being into an object.

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

In *The New Waw Saharan Oasis*, the poet is stuck between whether to choose the post of the leader or not. But after choosing the post of leadership which is not suitable for him it leads him to death. "He took long strides, forgetting that the Law has also stipulated how the leader should walk, forgetting that the forefathers had not neglected to shackle the leader's feet, to teach him to imitate the way cranes walk." (Koni 29). The poet is taught everything which he couldn't tolerate because once he lives a life of freedom and enjoys his life of solitude. But the poet is the sole responsible for his own death because of his wrong choice and his tragic life. According to Existentialism, it is the choice made by him which led to his destruction.

It isn't fate or destiny which makes the poet to take such a decision. It is his self made choice. Poets are the ones who enjoy each moment to bring it in their poetry. They bring out their sorrow, anguish, happiness and all their emotions in their poems without which they cannot survive. But the passionate poet gets into something which is not suitable for him due to his indecisive nature. Every action has a reaction. So man is responsible for his own acts.

Existentialism is a philosophical perspective that focuses on the experience of an individual and the way he or she understands and recognizes the world. But the imperative fact is that society should not confine 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 drastic 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 sneaks into the minds of the Tuaregs which led to their fall.

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