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## Existential Approach In Girish Karnad's Plays

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### Abstract:

The present paper aims at tracing the existential approach in Girish Karnad's prominent plays. Girish Karnad was a modern playwright, who influenced the writing of western philosophical theory that expressed modern Indian society problems. He presented these dilemmas and problems in his plays deliberately. Existentialism is a contemporary twentieth-century philosophical movement that succeeded after the dreadful Second World War, basically it addresses the problems of individual human existence, which searches for our identity and meaning of life through our actions. Existentialism presents a philosophy of hope, ecstasy and exultation. It insists that philosophy should be connected with an individual's own life and experience. The promoters of existentialism philosophers are Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, and many more who have defined existentialism in their works. Inspired by them, Girish Karnad, an Indian English dramatist, started developing and taking out the theme of existentialism in his writings and creations. So, the present paper will mainly focus on the reflection of existentialism and the presentation of existential dilemmas of modern Indian society in Girish Karnad's plays like Yayati, Tughlaq, Hayavadana and Nagamandala.

**Key Words:** Existentialism, Philosophy, Ecstasy, Exultation.

### Introduction:

Karnad is a multi-faceted personality, an erudite playwright, who contributed significantly to the establishment of Indian theatre. Karnad's love and passion for playwriting and theater made him unique and famous. He was also fortunate as he came in contact with great playwrights and directors like B.V. Karanth, Ibrahim Alkaji, Satyadev Dubey, Om Shivpuri, Prasanna and Shyamanand Jalan, etc. In his plays, he has given the shade and shape of the Indian environment to the complete despair and Indian rationality, whether it is geographical, linguistic, subject related, ethnic or special circumstances. In Karnad's ideas and imagination, along with a glimpse of Indianness, there is also a glimpse of Western modern ideas. He has

presented the inner side of Indian society through his imagination using myth, folklore and history. From this fact, it can be concluded in such a way that they were not completely different from the Indian environment. This was because he was educated in statistics and mathematics which helps him to maintain perfect uniformity in the structure of his plays. In this regard Karnad says-

*“Mathematics develops our reasoning power and gives a creative writer the knowledge to maintain balance.*

*Writing a play is like building a house in which each part fits together to form a proper infrastructure.*

*Likewise, I also make changes in one part, so that its effect is reflected on the other part.” (Nayak 2001:08)*

This is the reason that Karnad has very artistically preserved Indian traditions, culture and social concerns through his plays and presented India's cultural diversity with modern sensibility. Karnad takes Existentialism as a reliable tool for the spiritual assessment of man and uses folklore to establish a connection between humans and their existence. He served as a translator of his plays as well as the plays of other playwrights too, and contributed to the understanding of tradition and culture easily.

In the modern age, life and the world have been explained by many thoughts and philosophies. Existentialism is also such a thought stream, starting from Germany and France, and spreading all over the world. The English word 'Existentialism', which gives prominence to the existence of the individual. In the nineteenth century, due to the prevalence of various types of inventions and theories, the influence of science and socialism on human life started increasing. In front of which the individuality and freedom of the individual started to be neglected, then as a response, such an argument developed, giving utmost importance to individual freedom, strongly opposing science and socialism. This argument is famous in the field of philosophy and the art is known as 'existentialism'.

Traces of existentialist thought can also be found in the philosophy of Kant (1724–1804) and Descartes (1596–1650), but its systematic and organized form is found only in the works of the Danish scholar Soren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). Kierkegaard was the first to raise the voice of the existence of human personality. He composed his texts in Danish language. Later, around the First World War, his texts were translated into German and existentialist ideas began to spread around the world. Many thinkers and writers, especially from Germany and France, adopted existentialist ideas. The scholars who interpreted from their own point of view included Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Martin Heidegger (1899), Karl Jaspers (1883) of Germany and Gabriel Marshall (1889) of France, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) and Albert Camus. (1913-1960) are particularly noteworthy. According to the traditional ideology, first, thought emerged in the creation, and then, according to it, the object emerged. Plato believed in this ideology, that's why he was called thinker and philosopher. Even in the medieval period, Tattva or Saar (Essence) was given more importance than substance or person, while the point of view of existentialists is just the opposite. First there will be the existence of the object and then there will be formulation of ideas or principles in relation to it. In fact, all ideas or principles are the result of thinking of a person, because apart from a person, other substances and creatures do not think - therefore, it should be said that first the thinking human or person came into existence and after that various ideas or principles were formulated by him. Therefore, the existence of a person is important, while the idea or principle is secondary. The existence of a person is based on some external entity and circumstances or on

the fruits of his actions before that, is not appropriate in the view of existentialists. Each person is the maker of his own destiny, what a person chooses for himself, he gets, or it can be said that as a person wants to make himself, so he becomes. So, what a person becomes, what not, it depends on his own decision. Existentialists further say that if you do not become what you want, then do not accept becoming something else. We are compelled to accept the unpleasant or the unwanted because of our pain, distress or fear of death.

As it has been told earlier that the symptoms of existentialist thinking started appearing from 16th and 17th century itself, which was later given a systematic and well-organized form by many scholars. But in the terrible bloodshed of the Second World War (1939-1945), the destroyed human civilization and its grave, the rapid development of industrialization and the competition of machines caught hold of this thinking. Industrialization crippled the life of the humans. The efficiency of machines displaced people from their workplaces. When this terrible crisis of our existence was realized, then people's attention was drawn towards the disintegration of personality. In India, after the attainment of independence, the colourful dreamy palaces of the people, all of them collapsed. Unemployment, inflation, corruption, injustice and exploitation remained dominant in the post-independence social situation. The person got entangled in the darkness of despair. As a result, man became a victim of disloyalty, frustration, arrogance and sadness and started feeling himself standing at the crossroads as a misguided wanderer. Desperation, exile, alienation, isolation, fear, pain, terror, futility etc. existentialist tendencies pervaded Indian public life as well, but the background of the emergence of existentialist thinking in India is different from that of France and Germany. There, this thinking gained momentum in response to the widespread carnage of the World War, whereas here in India, the communal riots, capitalist system and unemployment arising out of the Indo-Pak partition became the reasons for the emergence of this thinking. On the other hand, ancient Indian thought such as the futility of the world, the sense of death, the nihilism of Buddhist philosophy, sadism, atheism etc. also provided fertile ground for the cultivation of existentialist thought.

Existentialism accepts sadness and depression as an essential element of life, considering death to be the prime, like the ultimate true sorrow of the Buddha. Some points similar to existentialism can be seen in the Sankhya philosophy of Acharya Kapil, the thoughts and poems of Brahaspati, Charvaka, Sriharsha, Jainism, Buddhism and medieval saints. According to Buddha, unhappiness is eternal and happiness is illusory. Accepting happiness gives rise to sorrow and fear, because the world is burning in fire and there is no chance for joy anywhere. Death reigns everywhere on earth, life is full of sorrows. Existentialism also believes that this world is full of sorrow, pain, distress, frustration, it is only in moments of sorrow and crisis that a person recognizes his worth and struggles to protect his existence. Buddhism was born in response to the Vedic rituals, the sacrifice of innocent animals in Yagya, the rigid caste system of the Brahmins, etc. Existentialism was born in response to the horrific bloodshed and carnage of World Wars I and II, its thinkers firmly oppose every inhuman and mechanical forces that destroy humanity.

Existentialist thinkers like Kafka and Sartre also took support of cosmic direct experience to confirm their thinking. Charvaka do not believe in fatalism or determinism, similarly according to the existentialists, the individual is not a slave of fate or destiny. He can do anything auspicious or inauspicious by his decision and freedom is the natural instinct of his life. In this way, a close relationship between both ancient Indian thinking and existentialist thinking is targeted eminently by Girish Karnad in his plays. Existential thinking had a wide impact on various forms of Hindi literature mainly poetry, story, novel and plays. Agyeya, Kailash Vajpayee, Rajkamal Chowdhary, Laxmikant Verma, Jagdish Chaturvedi, Shrikant Verma etc., and many other poets, novelists and dramatists presented their thoughts and compositions under the light of existential thinking.

### **Existentialism in the plays of Girish Karnad**

Girish Karnad's plays have their own distinct identity because of the assimilation of old & new, indigenous & foreign values. In fact, Karnad's plays are not only in Kannada. They might have been written in Kannada, but they are indicative of contemporary Indian theatrical trends. He not only presented Kannada drama on the Indian theatres, but also led it towards a common stream of world drama. He has given a new perspective to ancient Indian stories by embedding them in existentialist thought.

Throwing light on the process of writing his first play 'Yayati', Karnad tells in an interview to Rajinder Pal in Enact magazine that while writing this play, he was dominated by existentialist thinking- "Ages between the father and the son, which seemed to me terribly powerful and terribly modern. At the same time, I was reading a lot of Sartre and the Existentialists. This consistent harping on responsibility which the Existentialists indulge in suddenly seemed to link up with the story of Yayati." Authenticity of existence, freedom, sense of responsibility, commitment and action etc. are the main components of Sartre's existentialist thought. According to Sartre, each person has to bear the burden of his own responsibility.

Due to the curse of Devyani's father Shukracharya, Sharmistha was forced to become Devyani's maidservant. Even after this, Devyani was not satisfied, as soon as she got the opportunity, she kept humiliating Sharmishtha by calling her a monster-clan, spewing venom against her. Sharmistha also retaliated by establishing a physical relationship with Yayati. Devayani could not tolerate the illegitimate relationship between Yayati and Sharmishtha, and leaves the palace. She doesn't even care that Prince Puru and his newly married wife Chitrlekha were about to visit the palace and both were to be welcomed with full state honours. Enraged by the incident of Devayani leaving the palace, her father Shukracharya curses his son-in-law Yayati for untimely old age. Yayati is shocked by the news of this curse; he is never ready to accept his untimely old age. For him, old age is death, and considers youth as life. He has only two goals in life- enjoyment and immortality. His exclusive sex-lust has pushed him towards untimely old age, but he is not ready to accept it. Rather, he considers Sharmishtha responsible for this, alleging that-

*"Demonic Sharmishtha, you are the reason for all this... This situation has arisen due to the trap of your words." (2001:54)*

He forgot that this illegal relationship was established with mutual consent of both. So, Yayati himself is equally guilty. Slowly Yayati's selfish character starts to surface. He doesn't even trust his son anymore. For Yayati, youth meant complete existence and it is not acceptable to him to lose it under any circumstances. Yayati makes every possible effort to save his youthful existence, he sends the news to the public that, whosoever accepts his old age for five-six years and gives his youth to him, he will give him half of his kingdom as a gift. Yayati feels that the public will come running as soon as they hear the news, but is deeply shocked when Puru informs him that not a single person is ready to accept his old age. Sharmistha informs him of the reality of life-

*"Why should they accept the fruits of your deeds? Is sin and virtue a wealth, which can be traded?"*  
(2001:58)

Everyone bears the fruits of deeds; he cannot escape from them. But Yayati does not want to enjoy the fruits of his actions himself but wants to impose them on others. Puru accepts his old age. This is the discrepancy that Puru takes over the responsibility of Yayati, and ignores his responsibility towards her newly wedded wife Chitrlekha. This is the irony of the play. In reality, both Yayati and Puru are very self-centred individuals. One does not want to suffer the consequences of his actions, while the other wants to be called great. Puru did not even once consults Chitrlekha before adopting his father's old age. In this way father and son together have done great injustice to Chitrlekha. Yayati thought that Chitrlekha would compromise with the situation but Chitrlekha rebels that she had married a young man and not an old man. Yayati simply says that he will enjoy youth only for five to six years, after that he will return as young Puru. Yayati is very clever, and to convince Chitrlekha, he tells Chitrlekha about the shame of the Bharata clan, presents argument after argument. But Chitrlekha is also wise, she is not ready to live with the old Puru. All efforts of Chitrlekha fail, Yayati is not ready to restore Puru's youth. At the end, in a moment of deep despair, Chitrlekha commits suicide.

Suicide is a serious philosophical problem for existentialists. Life is full of inconsistencies and there are only three ways to deal with inconsistencies - first suicide, second to be hopeful and third to live life with all its illogicalities. It was an unbearable situation for a self-respecting woman like Chitrlekha to live with her father-in-law's ruthlessness and husband's neglect. She is not a compromising woman, and she wants to decide for her own life. So, he voluntarily chose death and commits suicide. According to existentialism, to accept the supremacy of one person or the other means to give more importance to the other. In other words, to accept the greatness of a person simply means to crush one's individuality or to lose one's individuality. In the play, Puru is constrained to acknowledge the greatness of his father. He is tired of listening to hundreds of stories of father's might from his childhood till his youth. In front of the great image of his father, he used to feel his existence inferior and meaningless, -

*"I am afraid of my existence. When I look inside myself to prove the significance of this body, I do not see anything there. Even if you have the courage to ask questions to yourself, that too is a lot, father..."*  
(2001:48)



He was waiting for a special opportunity to prove that he can become even greater than his father, can fill the hollowness of his existence. So, when the time comes for the exchange of his youth with his father's old age, he deliberately chose his father's old age. It may be a unique example of paternal devotion in the eyes of the public, but by doing so Puru becomes free from his inferiority complex and dominance of father's personality. Most of the characters in the play 'Yayati' are escapists. Devyani escapes from the palace and Chitralkha from life. Yayati is also disillusioned with his youth in the end, so he flees to the forest with Sharmishtha. Puru escapes from the responsibility of being a husband in the name of greatness.

'*Tughlaq*' is a thirteen-scene play by Girish Karnad, and was written in 1964 and first presented in English in 1970. If someone is the most existentialist character in Karnad's drama-theatre till now, then it is Muhammad Bin Tughlaq, the main character of the play '*Tughlaq*'. In the character of Mohammad Bin Tughlaq, known as 'Cynical Sultan' in Indian history. The playwright has depicted insecurity, inconsistency, alienation, panic, despair, frustration and existential tendencies like tension, exile etc. have been directed. Tughlaq ascends the throne by taking an oath for the welfare of humanity, but after a few years his great ideals, sky-high plans and dreams all turn to dust. In response, Tughlaq goes on killing all those who hinder him from fulfilling his desires, and in the end finds himself fighting a lifelong battle with the shadow of his own confused existence. There is enough contradiction in Tughlaq's personality. On one hand he is liberal, philosophical, studious, and on the other hand extremely cruel and ruthless killer. Tughlaq wanted to establish an ideal state where Hindu-Muslim harmony existed, but the people of the state do not understand this aspiration of Tughlaq. He is not able to convey his idealism to the public, or say that he cannot see the truths of his era. He thinks ahead of the era and expects the same from the public, but the contemporary reality is something else. Thus, there is a sharp conflict between his idealism and contemporary reality and there is a high wall of incomprehension running between Tughlaq and his people.

Tughlaq is very ambitious and himself is more burdened by his own ambitions. He comes up with plan after plan in order to fulfil his ambitions as soon as possible, but he is not able to implement those plans successfully. An efficient ruler is one who not only makes a welfare plan but also successfully implements it. He does not see the far-reaching consequences of his reformist policies, due to which impostors like Azam and Aziz take wrong advantage of those policies. Tughlaq announced to remove the injustice done to the people on the second anniversary of his throne, then Aziz cheated him in the guise of a Hindu Brahmin, while moving the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, Aziz used to cheat poor helpless women and other passengers as well. Moreover, when copper coins were introduced in place of silver coins, Aziz emptied the entire royal wealth by piling up fake coins. Troubled by this dishonesty, mindlessness and narrow-mindedness prevailing all around, Tughlaq reached insanity, where he sees the solution of all his problems only in slaughter/massacre.

According to existentialism, man is self-conscious. He has the ability to choose his own path and he also creates his own values by living his own life. And the value that Tughlaq built in his life was the establishment of idealism in his state. His dream was that Hindu and Muslim cultures should unite together, and the main motive behind moving the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad was the same-

*"More importantly, Daulatabad is populated by Hindus. We want to establish a strong relationship between Hindus and Muslims by moving our Darul Khilafat there." (Karanth 2002:20)*

But the public does not want to move to Daulatabad after uprooting their settled houses and frozen businesses in Delhi. So, Tughlaq does not think of any other way than using force on the public.

*"Declare that the light from the windows of any houses in Delhi should not be seen, smoke should not come out of the chimney of any house. If this Delhi becomes deserted, then only I will be satisfied." (Karanth 2002:82)*

The result of his stubbornness was that, thousands of people die of hunger and thirst on the way from Delhi to Daulatabad. Existential thought says that the lonely and helpless persons are those who mostly search for the value system within themselves. Tughlaq is quite lonely in his family as he killed his father and brother to grab power. His real mother never forgave him for this crime. There is no one in his blood to call him a family. So, in family too he leads the life of an exile. If he could not connect with the family, then the one who tries to connect with the public.

The playwright has created two symbolic characters to represent the split personality of Tughlaq, Barani and Nazib. Barani Jahan epitomizes the bright side of her personality, and Nazib is the symbol of the dirty and destructive side. Tughlaq conspires and gets Sheikh Imamuddin killed at the behest of Najib. Tughlaq does not hesitate to make a good-hearted religious leader like Sheikh Imamuddin a pawn in politics and he also uses religion for politics. And this cycle continues till the murder of Shahabuddin. He himself kills Shahabuddin, but declares in public that Shahabuddin has been killed by the rebels while protecting the Sultan during his prayer. That's why there is now a ban on praying in the state-

*"The prayer that will be performed while burying the brave Shahabuddin will be considered as the last prayer in our state." (Karnad 2010:84)*

So that the religious image of Tughlaq remains intact among the public. The difficulty with Tughlaq was that his fractured faith made him a divided man, on one hand there is a philosopher poet, and on the other hand there is an emperor who takes care of the province. He is entangled in different roles, where will there be harmony between these two contradictory roles? According to Kafka, this world is a mass of contradictions. Despite this, human beings aspire for harmony and completeness. This completeness is what Tughlaq intended. He himself is imperfect or incomplete. He is neither an ideal son and brother to his family nor an ideal ruler to his people. In this way Tughlaq proves to be incomplete both in private and public life, and due to this incompleteness, there is a sense of trepidation, dissatisfaction and insecurity in him. This insecurity forces him to look at everyone with suspicion.

This viewpoint of existentialism is presented in the play of Tughlaq, which reflects existentialism in the character of Mohammad Bin Tughlaq. Girish Karnad's play Tughlaq tells the tragic story of an ideal, but overambitious king Muhammad Bin Tughlaq who is a complex character. He emphasizes his existence in magnificence and immorality but that leads him to disappointment, frustration, and alienation from society, and Tughlaq is seen as alienated from his society. In an age of religious fanaticism and holistic between Hindus

and Muslims, his broadminded religious tolerance seems foolish to the people of his state. He takes a lot of foolish decision which makes him alienated & frustrated, finally forces him to think about his existence. Regarding this, Poonam Pandey says-

*“Tughlaq, a visionary and idealist, finds himself in an existentialist situation a situation of confrontation with orthodox and bigoted Muslims who oppose him at every step. He does his best to put his ideas into practice and realizing his responsibility to himself and his countrymen he makes an independent choice. A true existentialist, Tughlaq says that justice works in his kingdom without any consideration of might or weakness religion or Cree and he earnestly wishes to attain greater justice, equality, progress, and place, not just peace but a more purposeful life.” (2010:87)*

Tughlaq's decision of the capital shifting from Delhi to Daulatabad was not taken well by the nobles and a lot of people were tortured and suffered on the way from Delhi to Daulatabad. Tughlaq's inevitable decision of bloodshed, torture, and hanging of the subjects on suspicion during his tyrannical mismanagement, finally leads him to be alienated and faces loneliness and frustration. Though he is fully conscious of his failure, frustration, and disillusionment, that's why he realized that all his ideal outlines have no outcomes. Thus, he tried to promote the understanding of human existence amidst suffering and uncertainties, therefore, King Tughlaq does not sleep at night because his concern is to make others feel the truth about his existence. According to existentialist thinkers, now man has become a mere irony. Tughlaq also has the same irony that his most trusted person in his plans betrays him. No one understands him, no one becomes a part of his dreams. No one has the ability to look beyond their personal interests. No one understands anything except deception and rebellion. Even his own stepmother, to whom he is deeply attached, cheats on him, and Tughlaq does not spare her either. In the end, all alone and surrounded by hordes of zombies, he succumbs to loneliness and insomnia. Tughlaq (Karnad) finds himself in an existentialist situation which is revealing a feeling of anxiety, despair and alienated which is reflected through the following lines-

*“God, God in heaven, please help me. Please don't let go of my hand. My skin drips with blood and I don't know how much of it is mine and how much of others. I started in your path, lord, why am I wandering naked in this desert now? I started in search of you. Why am I becoming a pig rolling in this gory mud?”*  
(Karnad 2002:67)

All his hopes shattered and he fails to realize the truth of human existentialist truth born of action and experience, and a true depiction of existentialism can be seen in his character.

The play '*Hayavadana*' deals with the pangs of a person's incompleteness and the search for perfection, also has a poignant expression of existentialist thinking. The pain of incompleteness or the sense of incompleteness is the result of existential thinking. After the two world wars, the optimistic voice became so weak that after losing the prestige of being called a great man or the Messiah, man considered his smallness and imperfection as his capital. According to existentialists, the notion of absoluteness is false, it is not in human nature to be



completely satisfied and happy. Even in the play 'Hayavadana', all the characters appear dissatisfied with themselves or their situation. All the characters of this play are half-incomplete or say half-complete.

*"None of the main characters in Hayavadana is complete." (Karanth 2007:78)*

The irony of the play is expressed by the worship of Shri Ganesha statue in the very beginning of the play, and Ganesha himself is the symbol of imperfection.

*"Lord Ganesha, himself a symbol of incompleteness, and is the destroyer of incompleteness." (Karanth 2007:17)*

It is no less than a mystery for the Sutradhar Bhagwat, he says-

*"Whose face is like an elephant, body is like a human, teeth are broken, stomach is torn, who are so perfect from fingernail to tip, incomplete, what imperfection do they indicate? And what a mystery it is that such a disabled Lord should be called the remover of obstacles?" (Karanth 2007:81-82)*

The three main characters of the play constantly struggle with the question of this imperfection. Devdutt is the son of a Brahmin, so he is an intellectual. He has let down great great poets, but Devdutt is as sharp in his intellect as he is in his body. Tender Devdutt enchants his wife Padmini with his erudition, but cannot satisfy her. Padmini is irritated by Devdutt's physical tenderness.

It is this irritation and hatred that attracts him to Devadatta's friend Kapila. Kapila is the blacksmith's son and stout. There is no match for him in stick-fight, arena tricks, exercise, swimming etc. Padmini gets attracted towards Kapila's physical fitness, as Padmini is looking for a perfect man. For Padmini, a perfect man means sharp in intellect and strong in body, i.e., a man with unmatched mind and unmatched body. Therefore, when it comes to joining the severed heads of Devdutta and Kapila in the Kali temple episode, Padmini very cleverly joins the heads with the wrong bodies. As a result of this transposed heads, he gets Devadatta with Kapila's body. That is, she gets the brain of Devdutta and the steel body of Kapila together. Devadatta is sharp in intellect but lacks physical strength and Padmini is amazed by his knowledge but is not partially satisfied with him at the physical level. Whereas, Kapila has physical strength but lacks intelligence, so Kapila is also incomplete. One lacks physical strength and the other lacks intelligence. This lack proves both to be incomplete and Padmini needs complete men, neither half-complete man nor half-incomplete man. In other words, this desire of Padmini to wander for the perfect or ideal man is actually a reaction of female life. The life of a woman itself is full of shortcomings. If seen from this point of view, Padmini herself is also incomplete and it is a psychological truth that a person seeks some means or the other to fill his inner inadequacy. Padmini also tries to fill her absence through Devdutta and Kapila, so all the three characters suffer from incompleteness. The sense of incompleteness in the play pervades from the beginning to the end on a very deep level, the same ambiguity of human personality is revealed by her-

*“What are you afraid of, Devdutta? What does it matter that you are going soft again, that you are losing your muscles? I am not going to be stupid again, Kapila’s gone out of my life forever. I won’t let him come back again. Kapila? What could he be doing now? Where could he be? Could his body be fair still and his face dark? Devdutta changes. Kapila changes. And me?” (Karnad 2009:49)*

Padmini's son is also a victim of incompleteness, he is not like normal children. There are no curiosities like children in him, neither laughs nor speaks. He always remains silent-

*"He is hopelessly incomplete, for he has lost the child's natural ability to laugh and wonder at things around him." (Dhanavel 2011:93)*

He too is the product of incomplete parents. On one hand 'Hayavadana' is a play in search of perfection and on the other hand, there is also a pathetic love story of a woman who loves two men, but society limits her to only one. According to existentialist thinkers, all traditional, social and moral principles are invalid for human life, because it is the nameless forces under whose burden man is groaning. Conventional, social policy rules bind the person, do not allow him to be free, but man is a liberated soul and always yearns for liberation. Every society runs according to a policy and expects people to follow these rules. But Padmini does not do so. Actually, this is the agony of Padmini's heart that why is a woman always expected to love only one man for life, while a man is free to love many. Love is love, what does it have to do with man and woman. It is a pleasant feeling. But the free love of a woman has been curbed in the society. Padmini is in love with both Devadatta and Kapila. She was also willing to live happily with both. But this wish remains a wish. If there was a man in place of Padmini and there were women in place of Devdutta and Kapila, then the society would not have any objection if all three lived together. But the problem here is a woman living with two men which is against the patriarchal social structure. The solution to the problem is therefore depicted as the death of all three characters. The character of Padmini has become very powerful in the play, she is not afraid of any limit. Padmini is the only female character of Karnad of all characters, who confronts the patriarchal values asked. But, at the end of the play Padmini dies, she has to commit sati. What happens to a woman who challenges the patriarchy here? But when the existentialist character is afraid of death, death is a preferred thing for him/her.

Existential thinking is a fierce opponent of rationalism. Existential thinkers like Nietzsche have given special emphasis on the instinct of life because they felt that excessive rationalism destroys the spontaneity of life. Heidegger also believes that the inner experiences of the individual are more important than the intellectual knowledge of the natural world. The conflict between mind and body is also depicted in 'Hayavadana'. Extreme rationalism binds a person, drags him away from the instincts of life. Society and its rules and regulations are the product of rationalism itself, which gives freedom to the individual. Rationalism is opposed by Kapila in the play. Thus, existentialist thinking is embedded in every line in this play of Karnad.

The play '*Nagmandala*' is based on the popular folk tale of South India, describing the story of such a helpless woman, who is made a prisoner in her own house. Rani's husband Appanna falls for a prostitute. He locks her in the house every day and goes to his mistress. The queen kneels alone inside the house, sometimes she talks to herself and sometimes she gets lost in dreams. Ever since she got married, Rani is all alone. The husband does not allow her to leave the house and himself does not stay at home. Thus, Rani feels herself a stranger both outside and inside the house. The alienation arising out of monotonous married life also incites him to commit suicide. She is fed up with this captive life and has frequent thoughts of suicide –

*"Rani is so depressed as she conceded to the suicidal ideation due to her isolation and alienation." (Karnad 2007:50)*

There is a void in Rani and Appanna's married life, both are incomplete as a husband and wife. Living in the same house, both are strangers to each other. There is no communication between the two. The job of the Rani is to cook and feed the husband, and the job of the husband, Appanna, is to take the food and keep Rani locked in the house. Rani is doomed to live in suffocation, loneliness and alienation in this loveless relationship.

'*Nagmandala*' openly opposes the double standards of morality prevailing in the society. In a male-dominated society, there is a different standard of morality for a man and a different one for a woman. Rani's husband Appanna beats her and locks the house and goes to the mistress every day. No one has any objection to this, no one has any sympathy for Rani except for Kurudavva and her son. But when Rani becomes pregnant by the serpent Nagappa in disguise of his husband Appanna, the villagers strongly oppose it. The entire sympathies of the villagers turn to Appanna. Appanna himself also slanders the character of Rani –

*"Even after keeping the lock locked from outside, she is still looking for a friend. Tell me, who has found you? To which bastard did she go, unbuttoning her saree?" (Karnad 2007:66)*

Appanna finds it right to keep a mistress, but wrong for Rani to love someone else. In fact, in Appanna's eyes, Rani is just property, his own personal property. He has suppressed Rani so much that Rani does not even have the courage to ask where do you go after locking me in the house every day. But in the end, the playwright has struck a blow to the patriarchal values by making Appanna accept Rani.

According to existentialist thinkers, the root cause of the tragedy of today's man is separation - separation of man from man, separation of man's outer and inner existence, separation between his physical and spiritual side etc. The tragic situation in human relations is the knot falling in mutual relations, an alienation, a strangeness, a condition where man is forced to cut off not only from society, but also from himself. The protagonist of '*Nagmandala*', Rani is also facing the same loneliness. She feels the presence of her husband only during the day-time, and the rest of the time she just talks to herself, locked in the four walls of the house. There is no communication between husband and wife. They live like strangers in the same house. Existential thinking also declines all those values, which violate the freedom of an individual. Be it a woman or a man, freedom is desired by all. For existentialists, individual freedom is a value in itself. The freedom that men have, should also be for women. A different form of incompleteness is visible in the critical play. Here the truth is also incomplete i.e., half-truth. Appanna's truth is something else and Rani's truth is something else.

On the other hand, Appanna's truth is that he never made physical relation with Rani, still she is pregnant. Here the truth of the queen is that she did not dedicate her body to anyone other than her husband. Both are correct in their places. In fact, this whole game is of that wishful snake, who disguises himself as Anna and meets the queen. Appanna gets entangled in the web of half-truths woven by the playwright through this wishful serpent and in the end has no choice but to accept the queen and her child.

## Conclusion

Girish Karnad as a playwright has successfully presented the essence and elements of existentialism in his plays. In the Indian setup, existentialism is harboured due to gender inequality, caste discrimination, traditional bindings and social injustice, which blurs the dream of freedom and vision. In spite of the differences in the predicaments, problems and sufferings between western and Indian characters, there is similarity in their outlook of existentialism. In this context Poonam Pandey states that-

*“Girish Karnad is a master dramatist of existential philosophy, which concentrates on Man who is at the centre of the universe.” (2010:69)*

This dilemma which makes the man chained, tired, frustrated, isolated, estranged and lonely in his society and the world at large. Realization of incompleteness is the result of existential thinking only. Karnad's Padmini reflects the sense of incompleteness and she wanders in search of the ideal man or the perfect man. He is just a creature dependent on others and Devadatta, for Padmini, he is incomplete because he lacks physical strength and Kapila is incomplete because he lacks intellect. Existentialists have also taken the problem of suicide seriously because for them suicide is a serious philosophical problem. In the plays of Girish Karnad, most of the characters commit suicide. Chitralkha in '*Yayati*', Padmini in '*Hayavadana*', Basavanna and Jagdev in '*Rakta Kalyan*', Paravasu in '*Agni and Barkha*' etc. Karnad's characters describe death, they rather choose to die and become free from pain forever.

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