
**An Investigation into the Existential Concerns in Stories by Mostafa Mastour
Corpus of the Study: The Stories “Kiss the Lovely Face of God”, “Pig Bone and Leprous Hands”, and “I Am Not a Sparrow”**

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Mostafa Mastour is among the great contemporary writers who has addressed serious aspects of human life in his works, and has raised essential questions on human and the nature of existence, and provided, to the extent of his ability, ideologically-unbiased answers to these questions through the words of the characters in his stories. One of the issues that strike the reader of Mastour's stories is the similarity of the themes of his stories to the existentialist perspectives and existential concerns. In stories by Mastour, such topics as instability of the world, uncertainty in beliefs and faith, contemplation of the existence of God, human anxiety and loneliness, fear of death, and meaningfulness or meaninglessness of life are dealt with. Such issues have been constant concerns of human beings, regardless of their historical and geographical settings.

The present research aims to investigate the existential concerns that have been expressed in stories by Mostafa Mastour and how the writer has answered those questions.

2. Theoretical Framework

Existentialist thoughts took shape when Western scholars lost hope in the functionality of modernity in creating a better world. Existentialism has been divided into two schools, namely theistic and atheistic. In theistic existentialism, it is believed that faith in God will save mankind from concerns of life and grant him peace and tranquility. On the opposite side, atheistic existentialists hold that the world is not a place to give meaning to

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the existence of human being nor to bring him comfort. Existentialist perspectives have manifested noticeably in the works of several Iranian novelists, especially over the last few decades. Such writers have attempted to express existential concerns and find a way to give meaning to life, and have portrayed the anxieties and worries of the modern world in their works.

3. Method

The present research takes a descriptive-analytical approach to investigating concerns such as questioning about the existence of God, questioning about the meaning of life, as well as death and its nature in the three stories by Mostafa Mansour.

4. Results and Discussion

Having analyzed the fictional works by Mostafa Mastour, we realize that the writer has introduced existential questions through the words of the characters of the story and has tried to answer those questions based on his own perspectives.

The most important issue raised in *روی ماه خداوند را ببوس* (Kiss the Lovely Face of God) is questioning about the existence of God and the manner of His presence among people, which is mostly expressed through the words of the protagonist of the story. Another aspect related to the manner of God's presence is the passionate, faith-based attitude toward God. In "Kiss the Lovely Face of God", the passionate, love-filled attitude toward God is expressed by Alireza. He has an *irfanic* (~ mystic / of true knowledge) perspective and his beliefs are similar to those of *arefs* (~ mystics / holders of true knowledge) and theistic existentialists. In the story *من گنجشک نیستم* (I am not a Sparrow), an *irfanic* and aesthetic attitude toward life can be seen in the character Amir Mahan. With a perspective rooted in faith-based, *irafnic* thoughts, Amir Mahan regards discovering logical relationships between events and occurrences as futile and considers it as contributing to the separation of mankind from peace and certainty.

In "Kiss the Lovely Face of God", questioning about the meaning and nature of life is introduced as one of the main concerns of the characters in the story. Essential questions about the existence and the nature of life are also raised in the story *استخوان خوک و دست‌های جذامی* (Pig Bone and Leprous Hands). In the story "I am not a Sparrow", Danial, failing to find answers to his questions, doubts the nature of existence and is faced with the crisis of meaninglessness of life.

Mostafa Mastour attempts to introduce *irfanic* perspectives, in addition to the pessimistic attitude toward life, through the words of the characters in his stories, and creates a kind of polyphony. In “Kiss the Lovely Face of God”, one of the characters has reached a level of *irfanic* intuition and insight, thus has no complaints about any adverse event in the world. In the story, the protagonist fears the non-existence of God and nihilism in life. He is scared of death and nothingness afterward and tries to find a purpose in his worldly life to give his life meaning and purpose and keep his name alive.

In “Pig Bone and Leprous Hands”, a few dialogues about death unfold between the characters. One of the characters has a refuge-seeking attitude toward death, since he believes that mankind will go to God after death, and “being with God” is a good place to be, so death must not be feared.

Mastour has an *irfanic* perspective toward death in “Kiss the Lovely Face of God”. *Arefs* consider death to be a bridge to unity with the eternal beloved from whom the worldly life has separated mankind.

5. Conclusion

Existential concerns form an important part of the perspectives of the characters in the stories by Mastour, and the writer promotes the faith-based, *irfanic* perspective in order to answer such concerns. The characters in the stories by Mastour freely speak according to the perspective they hold toward the essential issues of existence, and the writer tries to portray nihilism, pessimism, rebellion, and chaos prevalent in the contemporary world through juxtaposing different voices in his works. Mastour considers superior the way and approach of those who submit to the will of God and cling to faith in God in order to free themselves from such concerns and problems, and he believes that the way to achieve peace in this restless world is to reach an *irfanic* understanding and to have a love-filled faith in God and His manifestations in the world of being.

Rather than having a religious tint (in its traditional sense), Mastour’s stories show a type of *irfanic* perspective. Through creating polyphony in his works, he juxtaposes atheistic beliefs with *irfanic* beliefs, and while the voice of faith and *irfan* is more effective in his stories, the characters in the stories struggle with their questions and concerns until the end, questions and concerns that mankind has carried throughout history.

Keywords: Novel analysis, polyphony, existential concerns, Mostafa Mastour.

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