

# BRITISH IMMIGRANT'S FATHER-AND-SON: PSYCHOANALYSING KUREISHI'S *MY SON THE FANATIC*

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## ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini mencoba menerapkan teori-teori psikoanalisis Freud terhadap sebuah karya sastra. Teori-teori yang digunakan adalah unconscious (bawah sadar), conscious (sadar) dan identification (identifikasi). Sebuah cerita pendek yang berjudul "My Son the Fanatic" dipilih sebagai objek kajian. Cerita tersebut berisi tentang hubungan yang buruk antara seorang ayah, Parvez dan anaknya, Ali. Parvez sebagai seorang imigran mencoba memaksakan impian-impianya kepada anaknya. Mimpi-mimpinya tersebut merupakan bagian yang laten atau bawah sadar dari jiwa. Di lain pihak, Ali melakukan identifikasi terhadap ayahnya. Akan tetapi, keduanya gagal dalam usahanya masing-masing. Identifikasi Ali gagal dan ia mencari figur ayah pada Tuhan dalam Islam. Hal ini memperburuk hubungan antara keduanya sehingga Parvez melakukan kekerasan terhadap Ali. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa teori-teori Freud dapat diterapkan dalam karya tersebut.

Kata kunci : Konsep-konsep Freud; bawah sadar; sadar; identifikasi

## INTRODUCTION

**S**tudies of psychoanalysis are conducted to see the thwarted ways that the mind suppresses feelings. The feelings include anxiety, fear to hostility and sexual desire. These can be attributed to many sources, such as traumas of personal history, instincts of the body. The studies employing psychoanalysis are also directed to the dynamics of interpersonal relations and with the way the self is formulated through its interactions with the familial and socio-cultural environment. As to the relation between psychoanalysis and literary studies, there are also studies of characters in literary works under psychoanalytic perspective.

These studies are focused on the mind's operations in literature which covers the unconscious and the instincts or with the family relations, personal history, and the social environments that form the self (Ryan, 1999:35). Another strand in this type of studies focuses on the writers' unconsciousness as reflected in their works.

## THEORY

In relation to the structure of personality, Freud propounded his theory about the components that comprise a personality. He stated that two important elements of human beings include what he termed unconscious and consciousness (Freud, 1991:351-356).

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The former is considered to be the reservoir of sexual instincts and of desires and feelings which are regarded as unacceptable by the conscious. The term conscious denotes the part of human's mind which is aware to external stimulation and internal impulse. In other words, it is the awareness part of mind. The two elements interacted and consciousness will always attempt to eradicate the aspects of unconscious. What lie in the unconscious must be controlled, suppressed, or even eliminated from the conscious. On the other hand, these aspects of unconscious continually try to gain satisfaction or release and need expression. The results can take the forms of indirect or thwarted expressions. In a similar manner, desires are also repressed and this results in an energy that is directed towards conscious representation. The conflict between these instincts and desires and the suppressions enforced by the ego will result in the distortions or displacement of unconscious forces since these urge expressions. As a consequence, neurotic symptoms or dreams will appear.

Other concept that Freud proposed is 'identification'. He stated that 'a little boy will exhibit a special interest in his father; he would like to grow like him and be like him, and take his place everywhere.' (Freud, 1957: 105). However, he further argued that in such a process of identification, an ambivalence occurs. Identification contains both the sense of being similar to as well as being against a father figure. Freud hypothesized that the reason for such a split is due to the boy's notion that the father stands in the way in the boy's relationship with his mother. The father becomes a hindrance to the boy's cathexis towards the mother.

### SUMMARY OF THE STORY

This article selects *My Son The Fanatic* (Kureishi, 1997) as a literary work to be studied under psychoanalytic perspective. The story is part of short-story collection entitled *Love in a Blue Time* (Kureishi, 1997). The work was written by Hanif Kureishi, an English-born Pakistani. The story is about

an émigré family who comes to UK from Pakistan. The father is a taxi driver who has assimilated into the English culture, snobbishly looking down his nose at those who do not behave properly. At the start of the story, Ali is a seemingly typical, self-satisfied second generation son of an immigrant who is an account college student and enjoys his life in England. He has a relation with a local girl. In an unconvincing manner, Ali breaks off the relationship because of his sudden new interest in Islamic teachings. His new stand in life brings displeasure to his father. The story also depicts the multi relations between one man, Parvez, a Pakistani immigrant in the UK who plays roles as a father to his only son, as a husband to his wife, and as a cab driver to a prostitute.

This paper will try to describe the actions of two important characters, namely the father, Parvez, and son, Ali and then reveal what types of unconscious elements are behind their actions in the related work. Besides, the identification as propounded by Freud will be examined in relation to the story.

### CHARACTERS' ANALYSIS

#### 1. Parvez

Parvez' roles in the story are predominant. In fact, this story seems to pay primary attention to his problems and desires. His problems may start from his curiosity over his son, Ali. Ali's behaviour changes in a strange manner in his opinion. He was initially bewildered, but then confused. He then begins to feel anxious since Ali starts to dispose stuffs, such as "computer discs, video tapes, new books and fashionable clothes" (Kureishi, 1997). Ali also breaks his relation with an English girl. This is followed by Ali's change of behaviour towards him. Ali becomes hostile about him. He is, however, unable to discuss this change with Ali. In fact, he feels that this change affects him negatively. He thinks that he has worked hard to provide his son what he needs, yet his son does not feel that way.

Parvez's anxiety over his son's changes of behaviour is unconsciously rooted in his

unpreparedness for the change. It seems that Parvez has a straight idea about life, that is, his son needs the fulfillment of material needs and pleasant social relations with other sex. He is not prepared that this kind of notion will gradually be shattered by his son challenging actions. In Freudian terms, this is “the state of expecting the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one.” (Freud, 1991:281-281). Why do the changes produce an anxiety in him? This can probably be explained by Fromm’s conviction that anxiety turns up whenever there is “a threat against vital (material and emotional) interests” (Fromm, 1941:181). The vital interests in the story are seen from Parvez’s feelings that he is being treated unjustly by his son because Ali’s disposing stuffs he has provided for *his* own interests and his being cynical to him. Both Parvez’s material and emotional interests are threatened. He has provided for Ali material fulfillment, but Ali throws them away. Ali’s actions are threats to him. Apart from that, Parvez also feels that he is losing control over Ali.

What happens next is interesting because, while being treated these ways by his son, he cannot bring up the problem. Instead, he cannot sleep and drinks whisky more and more. Parvez’s behaviour in facing such changes is not to face and discuss them with his son. What he does, instead, is a sort of escaping from the problems by drinking whisky, being not productive either. Three things can be read from this behaviour. The first is that Parvez is not close to his son. If he is close enough to him, he will invite him and ask for explanations for the changes. This shows the father-and-son relations in the family. Secondly, Parvez has probably strings attached in his bringing up his son. He has particular hidden purposes for his son which he keeps in his mind and does not let his son know about it. He does not want to discuss Ali’s behaviour because Ali will surely criticise him for not being close to him and for directing Ali to a particular path which may not be wanted by Ali. Thus, these also imply that Ali is strange to Parvez or even, as the story goes on, both do not

understand each other. Each is alienated from the other. Thirdly, it is interesting to notice that Parvez’s drinking as a means of escaping from the problem. There is a possibility that his act of drinking is related to the obsessive desire to be free from reality. He has dreams and his dreams are about to be thwarted. Thus, he also seeks a compensation for his dreams. The possible reason for this is that by getting drunk, he will be able to get connected to his pleasant content of unconscious or escape unpleasant reality. Dreams lie in the unconscious part of psyche.

In the next part of the story, we learn that Parvez does not want to discuss his problems with his friends at work either. His feelings is that he is too ashamed of being blamed from the way he brings up his son and for what he has boasted. There is a hint of narcissism on his part. What Parvez has in store for Ali is his dreams and not Ali’s. Parvez wants Ali to “get a good job”, “marry the right girl and start a family” (Kureishi, 1997:120). His “immigrants’ dreams” have been on the way to success before Ali changes his behaviour. He is proud of this when Ali is on the right track for the dreams. Yet, what is implied in his pride is his authoritarian attitude. He thinks that he knows the best for Ali and paves the way for what he thinks best by providing means for Ali. The problem arises when Ali begins to show signs of rebellion by not following what Parvez thinks is best for him.

Parvez finally cannot hold his feelings of frustration about his son and discusses the problem with his friends and Bettina. What is interesting from this behaviour is that Parvez looks for solutions to other people who may not understand Ali, this being another escape from the core of the problem. In this case, Parvez looks powerless vis-à-vis Ali. He is unable to explain why his son behaves in a strange manner, but he resorts to other sources of explanation. Relations between father and son are strained. They are alienated from each other and do not understand each other either. This will result in prejudice from Parvez’s side against Ali. Moreover, he talks to people who do not know his son. This of course leads to

misjudgement as seen in the following part of the story.

Parvez seeks advice from Bettina who advised him to keep watch at the boy's physical changes. The relation is strange in that the domestic problem supposedly discussed between Parvez and his wife is instead solved through other person outside the family. It shows how Parvez is also alienated from his own wife as well as his son. In fact, in the story, it is sad that Parvez can talk to Bettina about things he will never be able to discuss with his own wife. Even, they often see each other most nights (Kureishi, 1997:121) and when they are together in the car, Bettina always sits next to him instead of behind him. It represents the closeness of their relation. Parvez also does anything Bettina suggests in relation to his son.

His attitude to Bettina is contradictory to his attitude to his wife and son. He does not understand his wife and son. In fact, his wife is not mentioned in the story, except once. He seems to have the ruling power over his wife so that he can order her to cook pork sausages just because they are in England. He says that they must fit in with the local customs. The idea that he makes attempts at adjusting to the local culture and breaks the religious norms is an effort for him to experience the living culture and erase the past. His relation to his wife being bonded by religion as husband and wife is also strained and he prefers his liberal relation to Bettina. As the past is related to the religious norms, then they must be broken and buried. He also drinks alcohol and gambles (Kureishi, 1997:124) which are forbidden in Islamic teachings. Thus, Parvez tries to gain an identity in the new culture where he is now living by destroying old values. The reason for his searching for this identity lies in the feelings of inferiority in the face of the living culture. When one feels inferior, he will search for anything that can compensate for it. One will seek for more superior values, relations, friends, etc. to live by. In this case, he seems to succeed in doing so.

Yet, he cannot completely escape from the past. At least, he still mourns about it

when a reference to it is made. This is what is implied when his son, Ali criticizes the Western materialists who hate him. Ali said that he is too implicated in Western civilization and enjoys the liberation it offers. That is, according to Ali, his problem. When he asks Ali about the solution, Ali offers *jihad* because it will be rewarded with paradise. His eyes are filled with tears because of that. His attempts to identify himself with the culture under which he is living at the moment is not completely successful. That is why then he begins to realise his bond to the past which is not completely uprooted. His realization is so deep that this impacts his acts. He feels that something powerful knocks him psychologically so that he "couldn't see straight," (Kureishi, 1997:127). Then, he "knocked the side of the car against a lorry", 'stumbled and fell in the road, scraping his hands and ripping his trousers." (Kureishi, 1997:127).

However, another blow happens to him when Ali quits his study because Ali thinks that in the world of accountants, it is usual to meet women, drink alcohol and practise usury. He insists that he will work in prison to help poor Muslims who are struggling for their purity against corruption. Ali then asks him why he does not grow beard or moustache. All these events strike him completely. He feels that he has lost his son. The implication of this statement is that Parvez has actually desire to impost a certain way of life on Ali. For him, material affluence is the sole purpose of life. However, instead of being obeyed, he gets rebellion and resistance from his son. He, therefore, becomes very furious. As a reaction, he initially wants to send his son away from him, but is prevented from doing so by Bettina.

Parvez then still tries to compromise with Ali by being thoughtful. He hopes that he gets back the same thing from Ali. Yet, Ali still despises him. The final blow that he cannot bear is when Ali treats Bettina miserably. Ali thinks that it is not appropriate for a woman who is not a man's wife to sit beside him and lies her hand around his shoulder. This makes him scold Bettina when she does so. Bettina, being reprimanded,

leaves the cab. This causes an uncontrolled anger on Parvez so that he finally kicks his son repeatedly.

The developments of Parvez's attitude towards his son can be best described as an authoritarian tendency. The first characteristic is expressed in rationalisations, such as "I know what is best for you, and in your own interest you should follow me without opposition" (Fromm, 1941:144). This is shown by Parvez's careful imposition of his desire on his son's way of life. The father-and-son relation based on this desire reveals his dependence on his son. Then, he develops the second characteristic, which is a demand for either emotional or intellectual qualities from the person to whom he has already sacrificed things. The characteristic is described in an attitude, "I have done so much for you, and now I am entitled to take from you what I want" (Fromm, 1941:144.). The attitude is related to Parvez's dreams as immigrants. He provides everything that his son needs in the hope that his son will get a good job, gets married and has a family. Even, he has made attempts to draw his son's attention, such as, by being willing to pray (Kureishi, 1997:127), growing beard (Kureishi, 1997:128). The reason for his doing so is the reward from his son. In this way, he practices a sort of 'exchange' between his obedience to religious norms and his son's attention. His violent act towards his son, which are the third characteristic of sadism is when he kicks his son over because his son has offended Bettina. This act does not seem to be separated from the previous events where he has mostly been confused, disappointed, and angered by Ali. He finally cannot hold his awful fury and makes his son suffer physically. There has been an accumulation of negative feelings.

## **2. Ali**

Ali's behaviour is interesting to notice because he does what he thinks is right. From the start, his behaviour towards his father is not a warm one. This is probably caused by his father's ignorance towards his real activities and personal development. In fact, there is not any narration in the story

telling that he and his father shows any harmonious relation. His behaviour changes as soon as he studies Islamic teachings. The change is not known by his father. It seems, however, there is a problem in his practising the teachings.

He changes his behaviour all of sudden. This may be understood if he lets his parents know about what is going on. However, he seems to be alienated from his father so that his communication with him is useless. It is worse since, after he studies the religious teachings, he becomes critical against his father. Here a typical Oedipal relation starts to appear. Under this theory, there is a stage in any individual during their development to experience the liberation of an individual from the authority of their parents. If this stage is not passed successfully, then a neurotic will be produced. Initially, the "child gets to know other parents and compares them with his/her own, and so acquires the right to doubt the incomparable and unique quality which he had attributed to them. Small events in the child's life which make him feel dissatisfied afford him provocation for beginning to criticise his parents, and for using, in order to support his critical attitude, the knowledge which he has acquired that other parents are in some respects preferable to them" (Freud, 1959:237). The problem with Ali in relation to his critical attitude, however, is far stronger than gaining knowledge about other parents.

Ali seems to seek the father figure in a God in Islam. He finds the perfect ideal of father in it. This is because he initially idealises his own father. However, he changes to turn to God as a father-substitute because he is not given attention by his father. In this God, he learns about things that are allowed and prohibited. When he sees that his own father who has not paid any attention to him breaks the Divine rules of God as a father-substitute (Freud, 1961:85), he defended his God against his own father. In this situation, his interpretation of religious teaching is based on oppositional principle, black-and-white model. In relation to this problem, there are only two possible sides in Islamic teachings, that is between good

represented by God and evil as depicted by Satan. Ali chooses God to fight against Satan. Thus, he becomes so obsessive in criticising his father since his father, he considers, is a substitute of Devil. However, there is a conflict within Ali in doing so because, on the one hand, he longs for a father who cares about him and leads a religious life and, on the other, he hates his father's breaking the religious norms. There is a contradiction between the things that he thinks his father should do and those that his father is doing. This creates an ambivalent attitude on his father.

Freud's study on a seventeenth century painter named Christoph Haizman posed a similar tendency. The painter felt that he had signed a pact with Devil "in order to be freed from a state of depression" (Freud, 1961:81). He also produced two different paintings which showed the Devil, first of which was described as "an honest elderly citizen with a brown beard, dressed in a red cloak and leaning with his right hand on a stick, with a black dog beside him" (Freud, 1961:85). Then, the second appearance was more frightening as the Devil was painted as a person with "horns, eagle's claws and bat's wings" (Freud, 1961:85) which showed up "in the chapel as a flying dragon" (Freud, 1961:85). As Freud analysed the case further, he came to some conclusions. The Devil was actually a substitute for the painter's father. While the painter's image of his father during his childhood is like a God, he found out that this image became less and less divine as he grew older. Under such a circumstance, he was torn between the image of father as he preserved during his childhood and the one that he understood as he became grown up. The development of feelings with regard to the father also occurred. While he held an admiration for his father in the past, he began to be critical of him in his later phases of his life. This is what Freud described as "unresolved conflict between, on the one hand, a longing for the father and, on the other, a fear of him and a son's defiance of him" (Freud, 1961: 85). The ambivalent relation between son and father was, according to Freud, compar-

able to "the relations of mankind to its Deity" (Freud, 1961:85)

This sort of contradiction pushes Ali so that he becomes so insistent that his father stop doing anything forbidden by the religious teachings all at once. As a matter of fact, references to Qur-an regarding prohibitions on some acts are found. Prohibitions on drinking and gambling, for instance, can be referred to as in Surah Al Baqarah, verse 219, in which the people during the Prophet Muhammad's life asked him concerning alcoholic drink and gambling. Then God commanded him to answer, "In them is a great sin, and (some) benefits for men, but the sin of them is greater than their benefit" (Khan and Al-Hilahi, 2001:60). However, Ali cannot stop his father doing those things. Ali is castrated. Besides, the imposition of a rule in Islam cannot be made all of sudden. Under the Islamic education principle, there should be steps in initiating new knowledge whether they are prohibitions or compulsory actions. Ali's method in this story does not follow gradual steps for the change. Even, the verse above shows the wisdom underlying the prohibition which should be stated in telling people why particular actions are not permitted to be done. Ali is too sudden in contradicting his father.

Gradually, however, what is seen is a stronger conflict where, due to Ali's notion that his father is Devil, Ali despises his father on the one hand, and his father asks him for understanding, on the other. Thus, even when his father has grown a beard (Kureishi, 1997: 128) and tried to take to him, he always ignores him. Ali is so obsessed with the idea of Devil as a father-substitute that he does not care about him.

Interestingly, Ali's desire to fight against this Satan brings a fatal consequence. This happens when, in the cab, he sees Bettina sits beside his father and he sits behind them. Bettina lay her hand on Parvez's shoulder. It makes him annoyed and he scolds her. He considers her to be also part of the Devil he must fight against. There is a misunderstanding in this situation. On Ali's part, he is still under the obsession of attacking what he considers immoral.

According to the teachings he learns, it is forbidden for a woman who is not a man's wife to touch the man. On the other hand, Bettina thinks that it is appropriate to do so, for in her understanding about English culture, the touch means something friendly. Ali should have told Bettina that politely. However, his hatred against his father pushes him to an extreme attitude, that is, he wants to go out of the care because of his father attitude towards Bettina. His action offends her and also eventually his father.

A note should be made about the narration at the end of the story. When his father kicks him repeatedly, he asks him rhetorically "Who is fanatic then?". There is a possibility that he wants to torture his father as a revenge, but he still does not want to use physical violence. In other words, he wants to win the God-Devil fight without having to make physical contact with his father. Thus, when he is kicked, he thinks that it is unfair because he never does anything physically harmful to his father. If his father thinks that he is a fanatic because of his criticism against him, then his father proves to be a fanatic who conducts physical attacks on him. He seems to imply that it is his father who is "fanatic" and cannot understand his belief. Surprisingly, "fanatic" is used here not to denote a fundamental critical Muslim, but to a Westernised authoritarian attacker. Thus, "fanatic" is given a new meaning to anybody who supposedly does not tolerate other people's ways of life and carries out violent actions regardless of their religious belief or the norms he holds for punishing the other people.

## CONCLUSION

Both Parvez and Ali are in situations where new identities are searched and formulated. Parvez is pulled between his past and present. His past is religious life in Pakistan and his present is a more liberal life in England. His wife who is ordered to cook pork represents the past while Bettina, the prostitute, is his present. His attempts to obliterate the traces of past is seemingly successful by breaking religious laws and

betraying his marriage. Yet, there is a part of him that is still attached a bit to the past. However, his dream about successful immigrant is the dearest thing in his life. He finally defends his dreams against his son's rebellion in a furious way.

Meanwhile, Ali is also torn between the daily Western culture that he experiences and the Muslim values that he recently understands; both of which are in contradiction. The problem with Ali in embracing and practising Islamic teachings is that he learns the religious norms, yet he has unsolved problems with his father. So, when he feels that there are some religious prohibitions are violated by his father, he becomes so obsessive that he demonises his father and despises him. He considers his father the Devil who resists God's regulations and does not deserve any attention. On the other hand, he has no power to defeat his father. He has been plunged into a kind of interpretation on religious teachings that everything against religious norms should be fought against instead of being changed in a gradual fashion. In other words, he deviates even from the religious principle in his method of making his father understand about his new religious belief. He mistakenly represents Islam and deserves to be called "fundamentalist". Then, however, he is still insistent that he is the right one and he cannot understand his father's knocking him over.

What is conveyed through the story is that, when Oedipal conflict between a father and his son takes place, there is a chance for the son to win. However, the son will experience an ambivalent attitude towards his father under such a circumstance because, on the one hand, he wants to rival his father in his understanding about life, he is not capable of carrying the role since he realizes his own weakness under familial relationship, on the other. So, when the son goes out of control, the father will do anything to punish him, even with violent acts.

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