

## CONFLICT BETWEEN SELF AND IDENTITY IN TAFIQ RAFAT'S FOOTHOLD

**Mehak Baig**

Ms., The University of Lahore, Pakistan

[mehakbaig@outlook.com](mailto:mehakbaig@outlook.com)

### Abstract

Taufiq Rafat, who is famous for being the foremost Pakistani poet, is also the first playwright in English for Pakistani Literature. His play, Foothold, is a story of Saleem who leaves his well settled, materialistic life in search of his true self. It explores the inner turmoil and struggles of Saleem in the journey of life, and creates a parallel between his companions of past and present.

This research will focus on Saleem's quest for the self and will explore the conflict of self and Identity by viewing it through the lens of Jung's concepts of self and identity. It aims to explore the journey undertaken by Saleem in order to find a totality to his personality and how this journey clashes with his social identities, and leads to his marginalization. Jung's concepts will allow tracing and resolving the complexities in Saleem's character which results from the conflict between the search for the self and conforming to the social identities.

Moreover, this study will delve into the other integral character of the play, The Station Master, who resolves Saleem's conflict through his interference. The Station Master is a part of the system, a complete contrast to Saleem but nonetheless acts as a guide to him. In the subtext, the research also highlights the society's treatment to a rebel or anybody who refuses to conform. It will draw a comparison to the parallel lives of the Station Master and Saleem to explain the true acquisition of self and identity.

**Keywords:** Self, identity, marginalization, society, conflict

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Taufiq Rafat is known as the foremost Pakistani poet who introduced the Pakistani idiom into the South Asian Literature. Taufiq Rafa eliminated the colonial burden associated with English writers of the South Asia. His sensitivity to his time and place resulted in his divergence from the work of his contemporaries. Rafat established English as a form of expression of the Pakistani sensibility. Subsequently, what he wrote had the essence and spirit of the Pakistani culture, but the language used for the mode of expression was English.

However, Taufiq Rafat has also contributed to Pakistani English Literature through his play Foothold. The play revolves around the saint and the poet Saleem and his angst. The play delves into the inner turmoil and struggle of Saleem in the journey of life. This research aims at exploring the conflict of discovering Self and

Identity that is projected in the play through the marginalized character of Saleem. It aims to explore the journey undertaken by Saleem in order to find a totality to his personality and how this journey clashes with his social identities. Moreover, this study will further delve into the way in which the conflict is resolved by interference of Station Master who acts as a guide to Saleem.

The research will be divided into three chapters: Introduction, Discussion and Analysis and Conclusion. It will trace out the conflicts of self and identity and present an analysis of the play under the lens of Jungian individuation.

## 2. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Taufiq Rafat's *Foothold* deals with the angst of the journey of life in accordance with Saleem who is a saint and a poet. It is through the character of Saleem that the conflict between self and identity is highlighted in the play as Rafat displays a marginalized character who is struggling because he can feel the angst of his existence and is in search of the self. However, he is confronted by the society and the identities that are given to him by the society. These are represented by his fiancé and mother. The flashbacks give an insight to the various identities and, at the same time, the conflict is established through them.

According to Jung, "The self is our life's goal, for it is the completest expression of that fateful combination we all call individuality" (Jung, 1998, p.422). Self in Jungian psychology is the important archetype that acts as the centre of the human personality as it integrates the conscious, unconscious and the ego. According to Jung, "the goal of psychic development is the self" (Jung, 1998, p.234). Moreover, the self is symbolic of unity and totality. On the other hand, identities are "the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles and social group memberships that define who one is" (Leary, 2012, p.69).

In *Foothold*, when Saleem accepts in the first flashback that "I am a misfit here. I must get out before it's too late" (Rafat p.28), Ali confronts him with, "Who is happy anyway? We all are misfits when you come to think of it. But there is nothing you can do that can change things one bit. Everyone needs a job" (Rafat p.28). Saleem recognizes that he does not belong to the system and he rebels against it. Subsequently, he embarks on the journey of individuation which will help him discover the self. For Jung,

Individuation means, parting company with the crowd...most human beings are content to stay safely with the majority, conforming to the conventions and beliefs shared by their family...But exceptional individuals are impelled by their inner nature to seek their own path (Jung, 1998, p.20).

Through the character of Saleem, Taufiq Rafat presents a character that has the courage to listen to his inner voice and revolt against the majority. As a representative of the Jung's exceptional individuals, Saleem belongs to the group of people who are "successful in worldly terms; but who in the mid period of their lives, found that the world has become stale and unprofitable. Such people were seeking a meaning to their lives..." (Jung, 1998, p. 21). Likewise, Saleem was headed towards worldly success with the new job, but he admits, that he is not happy with the circumstances when he says, "its here, inside me. And it hurts" (Rafat 33). Subsequently, he decides to seek his own path as he was "worn out with trying to compromise" and live the life of conformity (Rafat, p.36).

Saleem begins a journey as a struggle to make himself better; he indulges in the quest to discover his self. Ali remarks to Saleem, "You are afraid to know yourself" but it is the desire to know himself that forces Saleem away from the normal life (Rafat p.39). This contradiction makes Saleem a human being and it is his aim to overcome this contradiction to become a better person. In doing so he intends to acquire an individuated self through which he will emerge as a differentiated person who will have an integrated personality. Saleem searches for this answer by seeking his own path in life, in which he said he was in search of "faith" (Rafat p.30).

However, this effort to discover his own self conflicts with his identities. The society expects him to conform to the norms and play out the societal roles but, Saleem refuses to conform to those roles. He himself acknowledges that it was not the "madness of youth" that drove him away, it was the "refusal to conform" (Rafat p. 96) to the identities that hindered the self from becoming the centre of his personality. Moreover, "Together, identities make up one's self concept – variously described as what comes to mind when one think of oneself" (Leary 2012, p.69), but for Jung, self does not merely means the conscious understanding of oneself, but it acts as the center for the conscious, unconscious and the ego. Subsequently, the self concept and Jung's self part ways as they belong to social and psychological, two different modes of

interpreting and understanding a human being.

Identities are defined by the society and so in Foothold, Saleem's social identities conflict with the quest to discover his self. Ali says to Saleem when he announces his plan to embark on his own spiritual journey, "You are tied with too many strings here to break away like this. Don't think of just yourself. Consider what it will mean to the others" (Rafat, p.36). These strings are the social roles that Saleem had to conform to according to the society. However, he refuses to do so as a result, his desire to discover his Self conflicts with his identities.

Identity means "the sense of who or what one is" (Mc Kim, 1996, p.136). However, this sense conflicts with the Jungian Self as Identity is a socially defined image of oneself while self is the totality acquired in the personality by creating an association between conscious, unconscious and ego. According to Goffman and Peter Berger, identity is "socially bestowed, socially sustained and socially transformed" (Scott, 2009, p.331). On the other hand, Jung sees self as "a unifying principal within the human psyche occupies the central position of authority in relation to psychological life, and, therefore, the destiny of the individual" (Samuels, 1986, p.135). In Saleem's case, he considers himself a misfit in the society and is unable to conform to the identity that is given to him by the society as a fiancé or son. At the same time, he makes an effort in his life as the "self demands to be recognized, integrated, and realized" (Samuels, 1986, p.135).

Nasreen is Saleem's fiancé and when he resigns from his job, she is devastated as it threatened the "lovely future" (Rafat p.34), they had for themselves. She constantly asks him to give up the plan of leaving and makes an effort to make him realize what he gave up. The social identity of Saleem as a fiancé requires for him to accept the job and pay heed to his responsibility as Nasreen's fiancé. Nasreen questions Saleem, "How could you do this to me?" (Rafat p. 35), and during the serious dialogue, the conflict between Saleem's desire to embark on the journey of discovering his self and his social identity as a fiancé is highlighted. Jungian Self is an entity that denotes totality of the personality. However, this is a part of the personal psyche of the human beings. On the other hand, identity is defined by the others, or more appropriately the society.

Moreover, Fatima, Saleem's mother, also questions his decision. She makes an effort to stop him by making him realize his duty as a son. This identity of Saleem, also, conflicts with his struggle to discover his Self and possess an integrated personality. His identity marker, his mother, says, "Children have a duty towards their parents. It is obedience" (Rafat p.70). She calls him "irresponsible" (Rafat p.67), as he fails to conform to the role of son. This is a result of the conflict between his social role as a son and his efforts to acquire an integrated self where he would understand himself. As the society does not support his path of discovering himself, so he faces marginalization in society. His refusal to conform to his social identities leads to his establishment as a marginalized character in the play. Saleem represents the saints and the poets who refuse to give in to their social identities and as a result they become outcasts in the society. As on one hand, self is the integrated personality of a person, but on the other hand, identity represents the personality that society defines for the human beings.

Here, Station Master's character is of great significance. Saleem says in the play that he is the "one from whom confidence departed like an unpaid mistress before he even met" (Rafat p.17), the disciples. It is Station Master who acts as a guide for Saleem and helps him to resolve the conflicts between his Self and the identity. In doing so Station Master and Old Man, both, establish themselves as the archetype of "Wise Old Man". According to Jung, the integrated Self and the process of individuation, often involve the archetype Wise Old Man. In order for individuation to occur, a person has to confront and integrate the Self. However, at times, the archetype of Wise Old Man surfaces which can be denoted as the Higher Self (Symer 2013, p.96). The Wise Old Man is the "personification of the intuitive wisdom of the unconscious" and he "guides the conscious personality" (Progoff,1999, p.236). Furthermore, this archetype represents "a force that comes from within, a magical strength that guides and fortifies one in one's inner struggles" (Hoppcke, 1999, p.117).

Station Master acts as a guide for Saleem. In doing so, Station Master helps Saleem in discovering himself. He directs Saleem back to his home, by making him realize that the conflict of his Self and Identity was resulting in the marginalization as Saleem was losing touch with the ordinary things. Station Master says,

Our human eyes can only light

the few yards of track before us.

If we strain for vision beyond sight

we lose the blessing of sight.

Dabbling in subtleties of sound

we lose the art of common speech.

Hoping to soar above all feeling

we lose our chance of natural love (Rafat, p.116).

Subsequently, Station Master appears as the integrated personality in the play who has consciously resolved the conflict between the Self and social identity and as a guide he informs Saleem, "I am your future which you can see but will not accept" (Rafat p.111).

Consequently, Station Master steers Saleem into the direction of attaining a Self and yet , at the same time, conforming to the identities, creating a harmony between the two. He teaches Saleem a more realistic and practical way of dealing with his angst. Nonetheless, when he came back to his friends and family, Saleem admits to Mustafa, that he was still in an effort "to know" (Rafat p.106), himself and even though he leaves his path to come back and live a normal life, he continues his phases of "growing up" (Rafat p. 107). He does not give up the struggle to discover himself and it is shown through his interaction with the Old Man regarding his father's cowardice. Here, again, Old Man , also display qualities of Wise Old Man. He is intuitive and answers to the questions that were harboring in the unconscious of Saleem and this connection between the conscious and the unconscious of Saleem's psyche shows that Saleem continues the struggle to discover Jungian Self but at the same time, he has decided to come to terms with his identities and resolve the conflict and so he began "the other journey" (Rafat p.119).

This other journey is symbolic of his journey back to civilization and at the same time, away from marginalization. The marginalization was merely a product of Saleem's inability to keep a balance between the Self and Identity, the self that could provide him with an integrated personality but had yet to be acquired by him, and identity that defined who he was according to the societal roles and expectations associated with those roles. The process which was leading Saleem to individuate himself was clashing with his social identities and so, for the six years that he was away, he represented the marginalized.

Consequently, the play reflects on Saleem's journey of discovering himself which results in his marginalization as he focus on his inner world and not the outer world. Nonetheless, the play , also, portrays Saleem's journey of establishing a harmonious relationship between the inward urge to discover himself, and the outward requirement of succumbing to his identity in society. It is through the later journey, that Saleem over comes his status as that of a marginalized character in society.

### 3. CONCLUSION

In Taufiq Rafat's play, Foothold, Saleem's character, depicts the conflict between an individual's journey of discovering the Jungian self, and his social identities. Saleem chose the journey over his social identities but this lead to his marginalization. He became an out cast in the society. The journey took him away from the society as he refuses to conform to the societal roles. The conflict arises from his desire to achieve the totality of personality for which he wanted to wander alone. This act meant he refused to face the social responsibilities that were a result of the social identities. Saleem refused to play out his societal roles, and so a clash is displayed in the play , as Saleem's quest for discovering his self, leads him towards abandoning his social identity.

However, the conflict is resolved when Station Master takes up the role of the Jungian archetype of Wise Old Man. He acts like preacher who helps Saleem , 1st Disciple and 2nd Disciple in fighting with their inner turmoil. Station Master acts as a source of guidance for them, and explains to them that running away from life is not a solution. In order to undertake the journey of acquiring the integrated personality, spiritualism should not be taken as a form of escape. The process of helping Saleem resolve the conflict is completed by

Old Man who provides Saleem with another insight to his personality by revealing that Saleem's father was a coward.

Subsequently, the play displays the rise of the conflict when Saleem gives up his identities in order to pursue his journey of discovering the Jungian self. This results in his marginalization. However, the conflict is also resolved when Station Master guides Saleem and he entered back into the society. He overcame the marginalization, and yet the quest to know himself continued and a harmony was established between Saleem's quest for becoming an individuated being and his identities.

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