



A Study of Karen Horney's Neurotic Crisis in Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend* (2017)

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Abstract

This research paper tends to explore the anxiety caused by the absence of love and affection, which generates complexes in the personality of the sufferers. *The Golden Legend* by Nadeem Aslam is a satisfactory illustration of the neurotic crisis, presented by Karen Horney. This paper highlights the calamity of “basic anxiety” (Horney) caused by interpersonal and mutual relationships. It leads a person to develop the yearning for compliance, withdrawal or aggression (Horney), as all the characters in the novel develop their personality with the urging desire for stability, while the trauma is instilled in their minds by the dominant societal factors. It is an exorbitant novel about the mental trauma executed on the minds of the margins of society by the intolerant and aggressive attitude of the majority class. This novel revolves around the character of Nargis, who after her husband's death is in search of stability and tries to find solace in the people around her but the society and norms cause neurosis in her personality. The neurosis disturbs the basic health and energy of the mind, which leads to the alienation process. The same crisis is with the other characters of the novel, as Imran, Helen, Lily and Ayesha are going through the same struggle to fit in society but the strict beliefs do not allow them to have their basic right of love and affection. This deprivation creates mental illness, which develops the traumatic situation. This paper views the novel through the character's yearning for company, love and kindness. The gap is created in the formation of healthy relationships due to fixed societal prejudice and anger against the marginalized class, causing evil in the society "Basic Evil" (Horney). This gap widens when these people start hiding themselves under the veil of aggressive and compliant attitude. So this paper analyses the fear in the hearts of the people due to societal build boundaries.

Keywords: Aggression, Basic Anxiety, Compliance, Neurosis, Withdrawal.

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Introduction

The Golden Legend by Nadeem Aslam can be seen as a convincing manifestation of the theory of Neurosis by Karen Horney. In her book, *Neurosis and Human Growth, the Struggle towards Self Realization*, Horney states this fact, “the kinds of disturbance in human relations depend upon the kind of prevailing externalization. They may render him too critical and harsh of others or too apprehensive, too defiant, or too compliant” (Horney, 1950, p. 81). The attitude and behaviour of any person are dependent on the external societal forces and the behaviour of the people in the surroundings. So, this paper aims to highlight the deteriorated personality of the characters in the novel. It investigates the traumatic situation of the characters, which creates frustration in the personality of any being and leads to the trait of compliance, aggression and withdrawal. It is the exploration of the neurosis in the personality of the characters and demonstrates the developing reactions against the formed society rules due to “basic evil”. Here in this novel, this idea goes with the character of Nargis, who disguises herself as a Muslim for survival in the Muslim dominant country. Lily, also a Christian cannot have the fulfilment of the desire to marry Ayesha, due to the certain fixed criteria given by the orthodox societal community. Helen, being a Christian is unable to have her stable identity in the fixed society. Imran, a Kashmiri immigrant leaves his native land due to the brutalities inflicted upon them. Despite his being a Muslim he is looked down upon by the Kashmiri cruel some tyrants.. These superficial circles conduct the confusion in the mind which leads to the trauma, named Neurosis. This makes the individual suffer and puts them in a constant search for love and affection as it is the basic need for survival. This paper illustrates this fact from the neurotic perspective of Horney through which it reaches the confused state of the character's mind. The excruciating state of mind lets them suffer the inner turmoil in their hearts and the surroundings around them do not allow them to have safe and healthy air to breathe. For survival, they have to adapt to the circumstances and should follow the basic false and so-called rules of the society around them. The character of Seraphina is the obvious demonstration of this heightened breakdown of mental stability, which compels her to commit suicide after the rape done to her due to her religious identity as a Christian. So all the characters are fighting for their basic right of survival, to have stability in their lives, through their search for love. This is how basic anxiety and evil spread and get its root in society, accompanying the traumatic situation.

Research Questions

1. How does the “basic evil” create trauma in the lives of the margins in *the Golden Legend* (2017)?
2. Why is Nargis unable to cope with society with his real identity as a Christian?
3. What are the suppressed means developed by society which compels Seraphina to commit suicide?

Literature Review

In this particular section of the paper, I will look over certain work done on this novel and will make its connection with the theory of personality of Karen Horney. The fractured and divided society is depicted in the novel which causes discrimination and degradation of any person. In a review, of *The Golden Legend* by Nadeem Aslam, Eric Karl Anderson (2017) says, "As fractious as the society in this novel, Aslam artfully portrays remarkable touches of humanity". The majority class keep on exploiting the basic rights of the people on the margins but they find some solace and affection within themselves, but there remains the element of distorted self structure and disfigured relation with the society and the people. In the article, *Fractured Territories, Determining the Contemporary Pakistani Novel in English*, Paul Veyret (2018) investigates that the society in *the Golden Legend* is hostile towards people of diverse and multiple spiritual and religious faiths. The novel, "The Eponymous Golden Legend, whose pages are torn to shreds" (Aslam), is symbolic as it highlights the brutalities of the social surroundings as the book is the “compendium of Islamic lore and testimony to its humanism and open this broad thinking and open-mindedness” (Veyret, 2018).

Nadeem Aslam in this novel portrays the section of society that is avoided and is being put on the margins. Rafia Zakaria (2017), in an interview with Nadeem Aslam, writes in an article that Aslam admits that “I am on the margins and I like to be on the margins” (Zakaria, 2017). This makes the minority class suffer and face certain biased and prejudiced attitudes, which engrossed in them the sense of alienation and this causes mental illness that ushers them to be away from society. In another research paper, *Spatial Politics in Nadeem Aslam’s The Wasted Virgil and the Blind Man’s Garden*, Gulsevin Guleryuz Kara (2018) acclaims that Aslam is fully aware of the marginalisation and the othering of certain groups in society. He shows his concerns “for the religious tolerance and blasphemous law in Pakistan” (Kara, 2018, p. 122). By the portrayal of the society in which anyone can be called

blasphemous if that person speaks about any religious doctrine or even any self-made religious institution, then that person is going to face brutal consequences. As in this novel, "everyone experiences his identity and his sense of worthiness chiefly from the reaction of other people to what he does" (Cantril, 1961, p. 16) in *Human Nature and Political System*.

The characters in the novel are in a continuous struggle to live and adapt to the circumstances but the increased societal influences create a sense of inferiority in their minds. Francine Prose reviews the novel in *Fleeting a Fictional World of Despots and Drones*, he illustrates the fact that "the characters must struggle to survive in a society ruled by ambivalence, sectarianism and intolerance presided over by fanatical despots" (Prose, 2017). Nargis, Helen and Lily are fighting with the fixed norms and with the mental crisis of their mind. In an article titled, *Violence and Melancholy*, Umber Khairi (2017), puts his point on the pinnacle by raising his argument that, "main characters strive to hold on to the belief in the human spirit, in truth, in beauty, in love" and it develops the sense of mental illness which obliges the suffered characters in the novel to attain the sense of utopian hope along with the tyranny all around as he goes forward by saying that this novel is "the lonely struggle of individuals against the forces of bigotry and hatred, the attempt to find beauty and love in an increasingly violent and militant society" (Khairi, 2017). This search for vision and deep insight into the attainment of happiness in the despotic society erect in their hearts the alienated self from the society with the amalgamated mixture of belligerence and compliance. In another review, *The Golden Legend* by Nadeem Aslam, Saadia Farooqi puts light on the same idea that "despite the dark subject matter, the characters themselves have dredges of hope and look forward" and "they see the good around them and this allows them to move forward even when circumstances seem extremely dire" (Farooqi). This is the sense of affection and love that the characters find within themselves despite all the exterior interference in their mental relaxation. Mushtaq Bilal (2017) in *The Golden Legend* by Nadeem Aslam: Follows an Imperiled Widow in Pakistan, claims that it is "about the hopes and fears, the dreams and desires of characters", and these desires and dreams are handled by the society and it leaves the permanent marks on the personality, causing neurosis.

The Golden Legend (2017) is about the horrific trauma executed on the minds of the marginalized and vulnerable people of society. In an article published in 2023, titled, *Tyrannizing Diversity: Feminist Politics and Sectarian Strife in Aslam's The Golden Legend*, Samera Arshad and

Ayesha Akram pinpoints the violence depicted in the Pakistani background as it “delves into the issue of sectarian strife in Pakistani society. While Muslims comprise the majority in the Islamic state, individuals of varying races, ethnicities, religions, and social classes live as minorities in the country, with a deep-seated intolerance for those of differing sects, religions, or ethnicities” (Arshad and Akram, 2023, p. 49). This is how the intense neurotic disorder places its deep roots in the marginalized class of society.

Nadeem Aslam provides a very realistic vision. He highlights the grim areas of the society which is least discovered. As, in an article, named, *The Golden Legend Review – Beauty and Pain in Pakistan*, Lara Feigel describes her reviews of Aslam's *The Golden Legend* and proceeds with the idea of dreamland presented in the novel. Nagis, Helen and Imran try to have their best by confining themselves in the ideal land as she says, “the trio retreat from the world, able to forget their religious and national differences. But they know they will be discovered and undergo more suffering” (Feigel, 2016). So the fear and dominant society affect their plans and lives. They try to keep themselves away from the built doctrines of the society around them. But despite their effort, they are unable to avoid it. So these become the factors behind their loss or trauma.

Research Methodology

The current study follows a qualitative research methodology. Primary source is Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend* (2017). Theoretical Framework is the theory of neurotic crisis by Karan Horney in the book *Self Analysis* (1942). The concept of neurosis is the fundamental idea about the development of basic anxiety in any individual. Horney states that the anxiety in any being is not because of some psychological issue but because of the disturbance in social interactions and interpersonal relations. Horney argues that neurosis happens due to the basic feeling of insecurity. The sense of isolation does not allow healthy development of the personality of any individual. It generates the unhealthy psychological distress, which helps in the maturation of the idealized self. Horney demonstrates this idea that the idealised self is an attempt by an individual to come out of the neurotic crisis.

Neurotic crisis is the cause of the isolated self. This research uses the idea of neurosis from the prospective of the individual's needs. The neurotic person faces many problems and turbulences in maintaining their personality. The theory of neurosis crisis helps in understanding the evolution of the basic anxiety in the character development. This paper

examines the novel *the Golden Legend* through the theoretical structure presented by Horney. The evil of basic anxiety causes three basic traits in any person. First is the state of compliance. It is the act of moving towards people. The neurotic person is always in the need of affection and love to maintain the suppressed state of anxiety. They want the appreciation of their works from the people around them. The desire to be loved and have affection helps them a lot in maintaining their inner basic evil. On the other hand, they fear the rejection, which intensifies the level of anxiety. The lack of love and appreciation intensifies the neurosis.

Secondly neurotic crisis develop the state of aggression in the people of this sort. Unknowingly, the neurotic person starts feeling anger and hatred for the people around them. The neurotic person starts going against the people. The state of anger lets them have less understanding of the societal factors around. The hatred makes its fixed place in their hearts which bring the heightened state of anxiety. The basic evil flourishes in the lap of aggression as it does not allow having solace and love.

The third and the last state is the detachment or withdrawal. Neurosis brings this state in the personality of neurotic person. The hidden force of basic anxiety let them isolate themselves from the people around them. Basic evil generates the characteristics of aggression in the neurotic person. The harsh societal factors cause them to move away from people. The degrading attitude and the show of less interest become the source of aggression. Unknowingly, they start moving away from the people around them. This put them in isolation. Loneliness increases the aggression and they are unable to merge themselves with the people around them. In this way, neurosis gains its strength.

So, Karen Horney's book *Self-analysis* provides the true picture of the person who is suffering from the state of anxiety. The basic evil of anxiety develops in them the three states of compliance, aggression and withdrawal. This research uses this prospective of Horney to illustrate the hidden fact of anxiety in the characters of *the Golden legend* by Nadeem Aslam.

Textual Analysis and Discussion

Karen Horney in her book, *Self Analysis*, introduces the basic Neurotic crisis, which leads an individual to basic mental trauma and creates "the basic anxiety or evil" (Horney, 1942), and this infuriates the sense of affection and love. It amplifies the urge for compliant surroundings and

infuriates the hidden panic inside the depths of the heart. She claims in *Self Analysis*, that “a neurotic person has become estranged from large parts of this world and has an impelling interest not to see parts of it” (Horney, 1942, p. 26). The neurotic person confines his personality unknowingly within the constraints of society and tries to remain in his self to avoid the disability caused by his personality due to circumstances and the prejudiced attitude of the people. The sense of alienation generates itself in the personality of the neurotic person, which provides him discomfort because of being lonely and comfort due to the distance from the built perceptible about him. These characteristics can be seen in the character of Nargis, as she tries to live in the society and at the same time she moves away from it. She disguises herself as Muslim, from Margaret to Nargis, and even hides this fact from her husband, as "she contained another self ghost" (Aslam, 2017, p. 61). Society compels her to even change her identity as there is little acceptance for margins. So to live with honour she chooses the difficult path to attain love and honour from the majority. When her husband is killed, she is forced to forgive the American immigrant. Due to her dual identity, she remains quiet as she knows that the protest will bring up her Christian identity and will let her suffer alone without her husband. Then, she confines herself within herself and moves towards people like she finds affection with Helen and Imran. The story goes with thoughts of Nargis, as she is engrossed in her thoughts, which reflects the Neurotic crisis of her mind which permits her to adopt the majority religion.

To have not succeeded in the world was required to be a source of Shame for a person. And yet she suspected that failure in worldly terms was the condition of the majority of the people in the world. To have been rejected, to have lacked courage, to have tried but failed. She was not religious but she was sympathetic to the idea that religion might offer a consolation to those who had been humiliated by life. (Aslam, 2017, p. 57)

This paper examines the disorder of neurosis in the personality of the characters. There is some evidence of Horney's sense of aggression caused by neurosis when Nargis ponders over the idea of the lives of Helen and Imran, “a feeling of contempt rose in her for the lands in which they were born, these places ruled by the wicked who did not recognize and honour their youth and brightness and purity and abilities” (Aslam, 2017, p. 187). This lack of acknowledgement from society enlarges the silent and unknown hostility in the hearts of the sufferers, which creates aggression in their personalities as according to Horney,

it's the effect of neurotic depression. It stimulates the hatred and anger towards the conventional norms and traditions.

The society presented in the novel views its inhabitants from the perspective of a minority or majority group. The evils of society are being shown to the people on the margins. They are bound to have the consequences of not belonging to the majority class. The sister of Nargis, Seraphina, is the clear manifestation of the imposed societal cruelty. She becomes the victim of a Neurotic crisis. Due to some disturbance in the jewellery shop, the employees were called, and all were set free except her as she is Christian. She is being tortured and raped by the policemen. This causes a sense of withdrawal in herself. Despite fighting for four years with this Neurotic trauma, she commits suicide. "Seraphina was twenty-three years old when she died. She was utterly withdrawn and remote during that period, speaking only when spoken to, sometimes not even then" (Aslam, 2017, p. 272). She draws herself out of the societal prejudiced zone and places herself within the circle of isolation, which does not heal her trauma and causes her death.

The Christian minority is looked down upon in Pakistani societal circumstances presented in the novel as Nadeem Aslam provides a mirror to it. Helen, the daughter of Lily, keeps herself busy with her books because of the attitude of the people towards her, "having been maltreatment for not being a Muslim, Masud would tell her to keep her mind on her education as much as humanly possible" (Aslam, 2017, p. 45). She is also the victim of the basic evil, of withdrawal, and finds solace in her activities. But society keeps them from realizing their sense of being inferior. The child comes to her and hits her to check the colour of her blood as the society makes that child predict uncertainties about the Christians, he says, "Christians have black blood" (Aslam, 2017, p. 26), he further goes on, "I am a Muslim, I cannot accept a drink from your hand, you should know that shouldn't you?" (Aslam, 2017, p. 24). This declares the set of boundaries in front of the minority group and they know if they will try to cross those boundaries, its result would be disastrous for them. And behind those boundaries, they are leading a satisfactory traumatic life.

The whole story revolves around the character's sense of alienation from society and their affiliation among themselves, "ordinary people wished to be left alone, and wished to leave others alone, finding pockets of love and comfort within the strict laws that govern them" (Aslam, 2017, p. 138). Imran, forced by the gruesome atmosphere of Kashmir moves here in Zamana. He is also the victim of withdrawal and has dispatched himself from his native land. He comes to Nargis and tells her that he

was the one who donates his blood for her husband, so in this way, by withdrawing himself, he also tries to have compliance, illustrating the inward desire for love and affection rather than sex. To have love and fondness is the desire of every human being on this earth, as this leads to the search for compliance according to Horney. Lily, the father of Helen, goes through different discrimination in society, and this causes aggression in his attitude. Horney says that this sense of anger, makes the individual go against the people or society. He utters these words highlighting his neurotic aggression as he remembers "humiliation he had to endure in the hands of Muslims, he had often felt that if Pakistan were a person he would kill it. Tired of being a non-citizen-a half citizen at best" (Aslam, 2017, p. 70). The marginalized people are unable to act upon their inward desires so it sparks off the emotion of anger within their personalities. The love between Lily and Ayesha is also impacted by the societal basic given codes. But this love fulfills their need for affection and solace, "getting closer and closer to the thing that made a human being live" (Aslam, 2017, p. 72). Ayesha, a widow, is not allowed to marry and she wants to be with a Christian, which is highly forbidden. This burden on Ayesha even takes the life of Lily. The society does not allow them to marry but they get the best of the love of the souls. Their platonic love allows them to combat the neurotic trauma providing them with a sense of compliance.

The Golden Legend picturizes society from the true societal Pakistani context. Aslam defamiliarizes the concept of equality and the attitude of softness with the minority class. The manipulated distinguished identity creates an inward feeling of isolation in the individuals and makes them depart from society or in search of love and affection from people like them, but the trauma runs in the mind and leaves its side effects in the attitude of people which leads them to have a sense of withdrawal, compliance or aggression. The book *They Might Know Each Other* (Aslam), mentioned in the novel is the representative of the torture of society, and the threading of it by a golden thread is the hope for survival, as the characters, despite neurotic trauma develop in themselves a sense of affection and love, but sometimes it exceeds as Seraphina, who commits suicide. The manuscript goes like this,

In the damaged book there was a story about a boy abandoned on an uninhabited island, who was reared by gazelles. Growing up alone, he was not the child of the wilderness but rather a soul chosen for perfection. Free from the temptation of the world and the flesh, he attained wisdom through what was inborn. Through observation and thought. (Aslam, 2017, p. 244)

The very title of the book *They Might Know Each Other* (Aslam) is very representative of the invisible gap between the individual and society. Outwardly every citizen seems to be the honoured one of the society but every individual faces the hidden drawbacks of it due to the certain fixed status of in the society. Society determines every individual according to the basic tenants of its, without any flexibility. It develops neurotic trauma in the personalities of the citizens of every society, and they try to cover it by taking the support of love and affection from the ones who show affection for them.

Nargis has saved herself from the brutalities of the world, but the disguise and the lie for survival create the traumatic mind and the realization of the facts of this world as she utters the words which are the reflection of the true vision, "It is true for the first time in history all people on the earth have common present" (Aslam, 2017, p. 361). This is a clear indication that every human being especially the marginalized ones has the face the specific evil of society which they have to pay back with neurosis and mental disturbance and it produces either aggression or withdrawal and often both. The only basic emotional need of human beings on earth is love Karan Horney puts forward the idea that compliance and the need of company is the compulsory demand of every human. And Nadeem Aslam brings forth the healing effect through the characters yearning for love that remains in their soul forever as "the soul is the pocket, in which you carry the names of those you love" (Aslam, 2017, p. 236)

Conclusion

Karen Horney provides the theory of personality and predicts that neurosis plays a vital role in the development of the character. The anxiety created by society takes the individual to go towards, away or again the people around them. These personality traits are developed because of the neurotic trauma and depression, which optimizes the psyche of any individual, and *the Golden Legend*, is the best exemplification of this neurotic crisis faced by the characters in the novel, which manifests their path towards certain criteria in their lives.

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