

IDEALIZED IMAGE: A STUDY OF KAZUO ISHIGURO'S THE UNCONSOLED

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INTRODUCTION

An individual can feel isolated and lonely while living within the society due to lack of intimate connection with others. Many sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists have explored the avenues of social identity of the individual and proposed the theories of personality. Society functions on the basis of human relationships and isolation can be defined as the lack of the connection between the individuals which can impact a person's mental state. Karen Horney proposed that the family, society, culture and environment affect an individual. If the emotional needs of an individual are not fulfilled by the society, then the person may face psychological turmoil which she terms as "basic anxiety". Karen Horney in her book *Our Inner Conflicts* describes that the child needs a positive reinforcement from his environment, and lack of it may negatively impact a child:

A wide range of adverse factors in the environment can produce this insecurity in a child: direct or indirect domination, indifference, erratic behavior, lack of respect for the child's individual needs, lack of real guidance, disparaging attitudes, too much admiration or the absence of it, lack of reliable warmth, having to take sides in parental disagreements, too much or too little responsibility, over-protection, isolation from other children, injustice, discrimination, unkept promises, hostile atmosphere, and so on and so on. (41).

The lack of care, sympathy, warmth during childhood results in the development of "basic anxiety". Horney further stipulates that to alleviate the "basic anxiety" the individual develops certain defence mechanisms. A person may "move toward", "move against" or "move away" from people to protect himself. According to Horney when a person "moves toward" then the person acquires a compliant personality, If, he "moves against" then he adopts an aggressive personality and when he "moves away" from people then he essentially embraces a detached personality. Here it is important to understand that the personality he acquires is not his "real" self but is an "ideal" self which he has acquired as a defense mechanism. The disparity between the "real" and "ideal" self, results in neurosis.

Kazuo Ishiguro in his novel *The Unconsoled* portrays the character of Ryder who is alienated from the society. The city presented in the novel is as intriguing as the celebrated pianist they have invited to perform in their city and to give a brief speech. Amit Chaudhuri describes *The Unconsoled* as "a strangely ahistorical book, ... it is a novel without any discernible cultural, social or historical determinants" (31). The people of the town are worried that they do not have a great musician in their city. They feel that they have failed as a society, so they have invited Ryder. The people of the city fail to understand that a great talent may be residing amidst them, but in their confined world, they are not ready to change their archaic notions. The artist according to them should not have wrong artistic values. The nature and characteristics of these "values" are not mentioned, these are just referred and assumed to be self-evident. Ishiguro's imagined city aligns with Horney's theory of societal influence on an individual's psyche. Ryder is confused as he feels that creative expression should not be confined and people should be open minded to accept all forms of artistic expressions.

Ryder is living in a self-created bubble of his imagination. His connection with people, even with his family is warped and superficial. Ryder is an epitome of the desire for power. He has created an "ideal" self for himself, in accordance to which he yearns to prove that he is the best pianist in the world. Ishiguro presents his character as an amnesiac musician, who arrives in an unnamed city for a concert. The protagonist's narration reveals his trance like state of mind, presenting a series of events augmenting his isolation and confusion about his life. Ryder's absence of self-awareness leads to complicated relationships with people around him. He does not recognise his wife and his son.

Ryder's psychology when studied in depth reveals the fine layers of his inability to accept his defeat in the actual real world. It is a representation of weakening of his powers as a man and a musician, as he delegates the responsibility to outside world. His delusional state of mind is a confirmation of the fact that he repudiates his real self. His overemphasis on details and endorsement of his being very punctual and a master of his field suggest that he is delusional. His over emphasis on his ability to control his emotions, giving preference to his professional

life, while ignoring his personal duties towards his wife and son, and his focus to create a public personality reflecting his success, are all peculiar characteristics which Karen Horney describes as a neurotic's quest for power.

Ryder's character is complex and fascinating which can be understood with the help of Horney's theory. Ryder's wish to be seen as a dominating and powerful man is born out of anxiety and feeling of inferiority which he tries to hide under his braggadocio. Karen Horney writes in *The Neurotic Personality of Our Times*, "The striving for power serves in the first place as a protection against helplessness, which ... is one of the basic elements in anxiety. ... In the second place, the neurotic striving for power serves as a protection against the danger of feeling or being regarded as insignificant" (166). Ryder has created an imaginary self that represents "ideal" self, according to his understanding he is a worthy and strong person and can cope with any difficult situation. His "ideal" self gives rise to a neurotic pride. Horney's words confirm this notion of the development of a false "self" as she writes, "This ideal becomes linked with pride, and as a consequence the neurotic considers weakness not only as a danger but also as a disgrace. He classifies people as either 'strong' or 'weak', admiring the former and despising the latter" (Neurotic 167). The neurotic in this situation focuses on self-control because he wants to remain aloof from any kind of emotional weakness. His "ideal" self is based on the assumption of his being all powerful and unaffected by the circumstances. His failure to adhere to his feigned identity may hinder him to achieve his goal of obtaining power.

Ryder does not strive for power as a normal person, but he struggles to escape from his basic anxiety. He "moves away" from people as he tries to hide from his inner conflicts. A person who moves away from others uses detachment as a defence mechanism to escape from his troubles. Ryder is afraid of any emotional attachment with people as he is afraid of getting hurt again. His alienation, his disengagement is a compulsive drive that shows Ryder's disintegrated neurotic personality.

Ryder's problematic relationship with his own father is reflected in parent-child relationship of Gustav and Sophie. His own relationship with his own son Boris also presents a parallel to his own relation with his father and projects his hidden need of love and acceptance from the family. Commenting on Ryder's anxiety Adelman writes, "Far from coinciding with his idealized self, the self applauded by the public, he is profoundly split, doubled, with the private self living in the perpetual anxiety of the public man's being found out and disgraced" (178).

Ryder's narration does not tell the reader about his relation with Sophie in a concrete way. Sophie first appears as stranger about whom Ryder wonders, "She began to give me more details about the house. I remained silent, but only partly because of my uncertainty as to how I should respond. For the fact was, as we had been sitting together, Sophie's face had come to seem steadily more familiar to me, until now I thought I could even remember vaguely some earlier discussions about buying just such a house in the woods" (Unconsoled 34). Strangers do not talk to each other about buying a property, so the reader gets the impression that Ryder and Sophie know each other and slowly the realization dawns that she may be his wife. This strange behaviour on the part of Ryder can be understood in terms of Horney's theory. Here Ryder displays the trend of "moving away from people" personality, his lapse of memory may be considered an escape mechanism of a troubled personality. He wants to stay away from Sophie and tries to maintain an aloofness from her problems. In *Our Inner Conflicts* Horney writes, "Certain of the highly detached person's peculiarities are so characteristic of him that psychiatrists are inclined to think of them as belonging exclusively to the detached type. The most obvious of these is a general estrangement from people" (73). Ryder may be termed as peculiar as a normal person, devoid of any conflicts and anxiety will not forget his own wife.

Gustav and Sophie do not speak to each other directly, Gustav wants Ryder to talk to Sophie, Ryder again shows his unwillingness to become entangled in the father-daughter relationship. He considers himself to be an outsider, "Suddenly I felt very weary and wished the whole affair to be taken off my hands. I don't know, I don't know," I said. 'As I keep saying, these family matters... I'm merely an outsider. How can I judge?' (Unconsoled 86). The discomfort shown by Ryder indicates towards a troubled husband-wife relationship too. Sophie has to face the death of her father and asks for his moral support. Ryder remains away from any emotion; he shows apathy towards Sophie. The detachment shown by Ryder is actually directed towards self. He has lost "touch with himself" and "can work and function like live persons, but there is no life" in him (Conflicts 74). "Another characteristic that is often regarded as peculiar to detachment is estrangement from the self, that is, a numbness to emotional experience, an uncertainty as to what one is, what one loves, hates, desires, hopes, fears, resents, believes" writes Horney (Conflicts 74). Ryder's unwillingness to help Sophie is noticeable in following words: 'I'm sorry, but you clearly don't understand. I've got a lot to do now. There's going to be an electronic Scoreboard, everything. There's an awful lot depending on me.' I said this, all the time trying to free my arm from her grip.

'But Boris. He needs you here. We both need you here.' (Unconsoled 475)

He is unable to bond with his wife as he seeks to be "free", the independence he needs is a kind of escape route. He is running away from people and his further statement about his parent shows his keen sense of anxiety due to his unhappy childhood which involves abandonment by his father:

'Look, you obviously have no idea! My parents, don't you see? My parents will be arriving at any moment! There's a thousand things I have to do! You've no idea, you've clearly no idea at all!' I finally wrenched myself free. 'Look,

'I'll come back,' I called in a conciliatory tone over my shoulder as I hurried away. 'I'll come back as soon as I can.' (Unconsole 475)

Ryder chases the opportunity to prove to his parents that he is not a failure, he wants to show to them that in spite of his previous failings, he has achieved success. The passionate way in which he is preparing to flaunt his worth to his parents is an indication of the conflicts he has suffered over the years.

Ryder has lost the connection with his parents, his estrangement from them may be due to lack of cordial atmosphere in the family. There are clues in the narrative about the possibility of acrimonious and bitter treatment from his parents. The trauma he suffered during his childhood made him aloof and distant and the childhood experiences affect his own relation with Boris. The childhood has a deep impact on his mind is observable in the following statement:

...one afternoon when I had been lost within my world of plastic soldiers and a furious row had broken out downstairs. The ferocity of the voices had been such that, even as a child of six or seven, I had realised this to be no ordinary row. But I had told myself it was nothing and, resting my cheek back down on the green mat, had continued with my battle plans. (Unconsole 16)

Ryder feels defenceless as a child and is not able to change the situation. On maturity the same conflicts turn into an anger and further encounters through him into a state of frenzy. Horney has established that the people around him set standards of behaviour and those social expectations and cultural environment affect the individual. If he is not competent enough to fulfil the demands made by the society then anger makes him abhor his self:

No matter how insurmountable the odds were against him in childhood, he, the omnipotent, should have been able to overcome them. Even if he realizes intellectually how great his neurotic entanglements are, he nonetheless feels an impotent rage at having been unable to dispel them. This rage reaches a climax when he is confronted with conflicting drives and realizes that even he is powerless to attain contradictory goals. This is one of the reasons why the sudden recognition of a conflict may throw him into a state of acute panic. (Conflicts 120) The strain to establish acceptable bonds with people becomes unbearable and the person resorts to aloofness and detachment. The detachment is always linked to a sentiment of eminence and superiority. The isolated individual convinces himself that he has achieved some significance which leads to idealized image of himself. The individual's need of recognition becomes prominent but he does not want to corroborate his claimed greatness with proofs as Horney writes:

The need for superiority in the case of the detached person has certain specific features. Abhorring competitive struggle, he does not want to excel realistically through consistent effort. He feels rather that the treasures within him should be recognized without any effort on his part; his hidden greatness should be felt without his having to make a move. (Conflicts 80)

Ryder feels inadequate as he cannot establish affectionate and cordial relations with his parents, his wife Sophie and his son Boris; he covers up the lack by creating a grandiose image of himself as a musician. He narrates various incidents thereby creating an impression that society values his contribution and recognises him as a great musical talent. He convinces others that people need him in following words, "Look, I had been saying to her, my voice still calm, 'the fact is, people need me. I arrive in a place and more often than not find terrible problems. Deep-seated, seemingly intractable problems, and people are so grateful I've come'" (Unconsole 37). He almost considers himself a saviour of the people who have reposed their faith in him. Ryder invokes his idealized self as he proclaims his position as an authority figure:

Before long we came upon a group of several men huddled together. It took me a moment to ascertain that a game of cards was in progress, some participants leaning forward from the row behind, while others leaned back from the row in front. They looked up as we approached, and when Pedersen announced me they all rose to a half-standing position. They seated themselves again only when I was comfortably installed in their midst, and I found myself shaking numerous hands proffered out of darkness. (Unconsole 103)

The idealized image of Ryder has a fixed value, he worships this idea of self and does not strive to be that ideal musician: on the contrary he just wants others to accept him as indispensable and superior person. Ryder's keenness to impress his parents through his recital and speech betrays his anxiety. He feels unaccepted and unloved by his parents due to which he panics, when he hears about the news of their arrival. Everything is directed towards a single goal; to not disappoint his parents. His anxiety confirms the source of his trauma and he feels, "an icy panic that was almost tangible" (Unconsole 328) and blames himself again when he lets his emotions hinder his performance on the stage.

There are evidently forces that are affecting Ryder and stopping him to achieve solace. These forces distort the character's perception of self and keep him isolated from people. The isolation keeps the character aloof and imprisoned as he struggles against the negative powers to preserve himself. The character's inhibitions are a defence mechanism as he fails to make meaningful connections with others due to fear, doubt and shame arisen out of traumatic neglect and disturbances he faced during his life.

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