



FROM CHILDHOOD BONDS TO ADULT BEHAVIORS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ELAHI'S THE IDLE STANCE OF TIPPLER PIGEON AND MIRZA'S A PLACE FOR US

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Abstract

Attachment theory is the study of how childhood relationships with caregivers can affect the behavior of an individual in adulthood (Gibson,2020). The purpose of this study is to analyze Elahi's "The Idle Stance of Tippler Pigeon" and Mirza's "A Place for Us" from the perspective of attachment theory. It aims to analyze the effects of childhood attachments on an individual's behavior later in life. Qualitative research paradigm is used for the current study. Using Thais Gibson's (2020) attachment theory, the study explores how an individual's actions and behaviors are shaped by their early relationships and connections with care givers. In Elahi's "The Idle Stance of Tippler Pigeon", the dismissive avoidant attachment style is applied to analyze Zohaib's relationships with his parents. This attachment style develops due to his parent's absence and mistreatment' which causes him significant pain and stress. In Mirza's "A Place for Us", the fearful avoidant attachment is used to examine Amar's relationship with his parents particularly with his father which stems from his abusive behavior during childhood. Past memories and imaginations often remind the characters of their wounded relationship with their parents. The research also discusses how the lack of love and understanding, affects an individual's psychological well-being. Finally, the study examines the long-term effects of attachment styles from childhood into adulthood and highlights how the characters' cope with their suffering through various strategies and different ways.

Key Words; psychoanalysis, emotional suffering, attachment styles, behavior, wounded relationship

Introduction

1.1 Attachment theory

Attachment theory is the study of how childhood relationships with caregivers can affect the behavior of an individual in adulthood (Gibson,2020).

According to Gibson (2020) there are various kinds of attachment styles like anxious, secure, avoidant, insecure etc. Attachment theory works on attachment styles. The type of attachment which the individual has with his parents puts a significant influence on his psychological life.

The individuals with dismissive avoidant type of attachment usually had parents who were not present for their children. This absence can be in any form like emotional, physical and intellectual. Fearful-avoidant attachment is the result of untrusting relationship between parents and children. This distrust between the child and caregiver is due to the lack of emotional support and understanding from the parents. This kind of attachment pattern makes an individual to feel as unworthy, being taken advantage of and unsafe.



In this study, Fearful-avoidant attachment style is incorporated in Mirza's "A Place for Us" and Dismissive avoidant attachment style is incorporated in Elahi's "The Idle Stance of the Tippler Pigeon". The effects of these attachment styles on the selected character's behavior are examined in this research.

1.2 Summary of the novels

1.2.1 Elahi's "The Idle Stance of the Tippler Pigeon"

"The Idle Stance of the Tippler Pigeon" is beautifully written by Safinah Danish Elahi. The novel threw light on the lives of three childhood friends -Nadia, Misha and Zohaib- and how their lives were transformed by tragic circumstances. The novel highlighted the strong emotional bond they share before an unfortunate incident separated them. Nadia later married and hoped for a happy life, but she had to face emotional struggle. She often reflected on the happier days she spent with Zohaib and Misha. Zohaib was the protagonist of the novel and the story revolved around him. Zohaib had a painful past that he did not want to revisit in his adulthood. During his childhood, he got devoid of his parent's affection and love. He was sent to London due to his sister, Misha's sudden death and his parents blamed him for the tragedy. His parents treated him harshly during that difficult period. Their behavior deeply hurt Zohaib and had a lasting impact on his emotional well-being.

1.2.2 Mirza's "A Place for Us"

A Place for Us is a psychological novel which discusses the lives of a family. Rafiq and Layla were the parents of three children Amar, Hadia and Huda who were living in America. The novel started with Amar coming back home after three years, on the event of Hadia's wedding as she called him. The family was facing a lot of problems in America. Parents wanted their children to be connected to their traditions and religious beliefs but they have different attitude especially Amar. Amar did not want to follow his father's beliefs and wanted to live his life according to his will. Due to this reason, there remained a gap between father and son. And there comes a time when Amar left his home due to his father's strict behavior.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions are designed for the present study

1. What are the causes which contributed to the characters' emotional sufferings and distress?
2. What strategies are being used by the characters to overcome their emotional sufferings?

1.4 Significance of the study

This study is significant in highlighting the emotional sufferings and challenges faced by the selected characters in the chosen novels. The in depth analysis of interpersonal attachments with the closed ones around the characters is significant in this regard. In the novel "A Place for Us" Amar's life is affected by the connections he has with his father. The study is significant in this regard that it highlights the effects of the parent's lack of love and understanding on the behavior of their children. It sheds light on the important aspect of an individual's psychological life related to his attachments. Similarly, in the novel *The Idle Stance of the Tippler pigeon* Zohaib's life is affected due to his childhood attachment. The psychoanalytic study of the selected characters provides an insight into the emotional distress of people and how they have used different strategies to overcome their suffering. The attention given to such people can help them to cope with their internal conflicts.



1. Literature Review

Rostam and Almaarroof (2024) in their article have explored different short stories using attachment theory. The article focuses that how behavior of an individual is shaped by the early attachments and connections. First story which is being analyzed by the researchers is Poe's "Ligeia" in which they have discussed how narrator's obsession with Ligeia caused him an avoidant and disorganized attachment with his wife. The narrator has strong attachment with Ligeia and he does not want to let her go from his imaginations even when she is dead and it affects his connection with his wife as he tries to avoid her. The second story which is being analyzed in this article is Joyce Carol Oates, "Where are you going? Where have you been?". It tells how caregivers behavior with their children affect them. In this story researchers have focused on how Connie's behavior is formed due to his ambivalent attachment with her mother and as a result Connie look for care from someone else which caused her downfall.

Marlina (2024) in the article have analyzed the Burnett's "The Secret Garden" by using framework of attachment theory. The researcher has used psychological approach to analyze Colin's character. The factors including unavailable father, the absence of caregiver's emotional presence and unsupportive behavior of caregiver are the reasons for creating avoidant attachment of Colin with his father. This attachment style makes the character emotionally weak person and having unhealthy relationships with others.

Rahmatullah and Gupta (2023) have analyzed Plath's works by using the framework of attachment theory. The novel "Bell Jar" is analyzed by the researchers using avoidant attachment style. This attachment style makes protagonist maintain distances from others and effects the personality so much that the protagonist avoids forming connections with others. The character struggles with isolation and loneliness and thinks that her isolation protects her from harm and disappointment which is caused by connecting with other people.

Jyotsna and Bali (2024) in their article have analyzed the story "Our Nana was a Nutcase" through the lens of attachment theory. Insecure and avoidant attachment patterns are being elaborated in the story. The tale is about four siblings who are living with their grandfather. The parents are busy in their work and leave the children with their grandfather. The relationship between children and parents is very significant as if the child does not get proper care during his childhood, he develops the feelings of anger and anxiety. Same is the case in this story in which separation of children from their parents develops the element of separation anxiety. Sometimes this anxiety becomes persistent and creates difficulty in forming connections with others.

2. Theoretical framework

In this study, two attachment styles are applied for the text analysis.

3.1 Dismissive-Avoidant attachment

Dismissive-avoidant usually have a neglectful childhood. They had parents who are completely unavailable in any form, emotionally and physically (Gibson,2020).

In adulthood these individuals usually feel peace when they are alone and does not feel comfortable around people. So they develop the behavior of emotional independence and they do not seek attention and love from others in their relations. As the behavior shown by dismissive avoidant is not healthy, so the first step is to find out the cause responsible for their behavior. It needs continuous and unwavering emotional support for understanding individuals with this attachment pattern. If it is given to them then they start developing a healthy behavior.

This type of attachment is prevailing in Elahi's "The idle Stance of the Tippler Pigeon".



3.2 Fearful-Avoidant attachment

This kind of attachment is the result of untrusting relationship between parents and children. This distrust between the child and caregiver is due to the lack of emotional support and understanding. This kind of attachment pattern makes an individual feel unworthy, being taken advantage of and unsafe. It also effects the behavior of an individual in adulthood. During childhood, the parents did not consistently provide emotional support to the child, although there were times when they were supportive. This combination of being supportive and unsupportive creates the feeling of distrust and confusion and the individual expects betrayal while also craving for love.

According to Gibson, (2020) the individual with fearful avoidant attachment is constantly in state of disorganization. They are being taught that striving for emotional support is painful and unsafe. It will cause emotional sufferings and distress in individual.

This type of attachment is incorporated in Mirza's "A Place for Us" to analyze the attachment between Amar and his father.

3. Analysis

4.1 Elahi's the "Idle Stance of Tippler Pigeon"

In Elahi's the "Idle Stance of Tippler Pigeon" the life of Zohaib is the central focus of the study that how a childhood incident has changed his life. Due to that incident he was separated from his parents and at the most critical time of life, he got deprived of his parent's love and attention. Instead of giving care and emotional support at that time, his parents abandoned him. He developed the behavior of disconnection with others in his life.

Zohaib was living in London and his treatment for his stressed condition was continued. Dr. Whitaker was his doctor. He was giving him advice of going outside and being socialize. Going outside and being connected with others will help him reducing pain and stress. The doctor was asking him about his plans as he advised him.

"So, how are we doing this Friday? Big plans for the weekend...?"

"No, doctor; you know I don't go out that much—" (Elahi, 2023, p. 15)

As noted by Gibson (2020), individuals having dismissive avoidant attachment with his parents during childhood usually do not feel comfortable by socializing, instead they feel safe being alone. And when doctor asked about his parent's visit to him, he felt hesitant answering the question as his mother kept delaying her visit and his father's visa got expired. Zohaib was not feeling comfortable; he was in a lot of pain and stress and struggling to come out of this condition. His past was taunting him and not letting him come out of his stressed condition. After the tragic death of his sister Misha, he got stuck in "how it happened". The situation was blur to him as he could not absorb the incident which left everlasting impact on his mind.

As Zohaib developed stress, grief and anxiety in his personality, his doctor was of the view that getting married can be helpful for his stressed condition. After a long time, his mother and father contacted him and wanted him to come back to Pakistan but he had shown no interest. The doctor also inquired about his marriage, upon which he says what is the use of marriage if all it ends in break up. It left an impression in Zohaib mind that getting married and connected with other persons will ruin his life.

What's the point of marriage, if one day it's all going to fall apart, anyway?"

"You know very well that all marriages don't end up like that."

"Mama and Baba's did," I say quietly (Elahi,2023 P.17).



Zohaib also compared his life with Talha and considered him the most fortunate person as he got those parents who supported him on his choices and decisions. While getting admission in the university Talha's interest was in support science but he enrolled in another practical subject. On this decision his parents had supported him and on the other hand Zohaib was devoid of such support from his parents. Even his parents had no idea about his subject selection in the university. They got busy in their conflicts and showed no attention and care towards Zohaib. Parent's such behavior became the reason for developing dismissive avoidant attachment in Zohaib's personality.

"How supportive Aunty and Uncle have been of some of Talha's most unorthodox choices, but I wasn't complaining" (Elahi,2023 p.29).

It was very difficult for Zohaib to move on in his life. It was unbelievable for him, how his parents could not have thought about their son when he was just a child. They should have been polite and kind towards him at that time. He compared his life to those who have a good childhood and loving parents. By this comparison he thought about his life as a kind of hell in which memories were chasing him everywhere. He developed a behavior of dismissive avoidant attachment style and wanted to live alone, away from others.

My life feels like it is slipping away. I've felt lost for so long now, left by my own parents to fend for myself. Mama hid in her room and Baba in his work. Me? I was so young then. Now, I'm just a guy who still has no clue about life (Elahi,2023 p.65).

His father, Masood Hashim was regretting about the past incident which happened in their house. Nothing was helpful for him to forget about his behavior with his son. After so many years, things had changed. Zohaib had learnt the behavior of living himself and not depending on anyone for the emotional support. As noted by (Gibson,2020) the individual with this type of attachment usually becomes independent regarding his need of emotional support. In his old age, Zohaib's father needed his son close to him and wanted to make a good relation between them but it is very difficult for Zohaib as he is unable to forget what happened in the past. It is true that his son was doing the same as his father did with his son during his childhood.

"When I think about Zohaib, my gut tells me to keep him close to me. A father will always need his son and vice versa. But what did I do instead? When the going got tough, I let go of him" (Elahi, 2023 p.69).

One of the memories from his childhood was referring to the incident of his sister's sudden death when he begged his mother to love him. He remembered the day when he was requesting his mother not to leave him alone. He also remembered requesting his father to speak something. Everything got ruined because of his parent's behavior. His mother's scene of shutting the door of the room in front of him when he was begging to open it, was fitted in his mind. He had clear picture of his mother's behavior in his mind piercing his heart.

I remember banging on Mama's door afterwards, banging and banging. Asking her to open the door, just for a minute. A second. Everything else becomes a blur afterwards (Elahi, 2023 p.126). Zohaib knew that he had hated his mother for a long time. he admitted it that he did not have soft corner for his mother as she treated him very badly. She did not bother to listen to him. She punished his son by exiling him away from her and his father. He was pleading in front of her to listen to him. Zohaib thought her mother was responsible for his emotional sufferings, grief and pain.



To be honest, I hated Mama for a long time. The way she treated me after Misha's death (Elahi, 2023 p.126)

In Zohaib's mind his father's only fault was that he did not act wisely at the time of incident. He remained silent. After a long time, Zohaib was trying to change his behavior and his thoughts about his parents. As noted by (Gibson,2020) consistent emotional support and care help the individuals to change their behavior who are feeling stressed. Now Zohaib's behavior have changed a lot after his treatment with dr. Whitaker and also due to his friend Talha's support with him. Zohaib's parents were also trying their best to change the circumstances. But it is time taking process to completely change the behavior of an individual with dismissive avoidant attachment pattern. Zohaib started changing his behavior by realizing that his sister had gone but his parents were alive who already have admitted their mistakes. Therefore, he should not do the same with his parents as they had done with him during his childhood.

I wish Baba had let me stay back with him. I was a child; I needed my parents. My release from the unhealthy coping strategies I built for myself has given me pause to reconsider my parents and their reactions. Misha is no more, but my parents remain—I could at least try to rekindle that relationship (Elahi, 2023 p.127)

4.2 Mirza's "A Place for Us"

The attachment between Amar and his father is the kind of fearful avoidant attachment. He did not have a strong bonding with his father. His father always got furious on him. He imposed his values on his son without considering what his son truly wanted. It was very difficult for Amar to understand his father's perception about him. Due to the lack of understanding and love, there came a time when Amar left his home and his parents. Amar was recalling his past when his father arranged parties most often in his house. Amar hated these kind of parties as his father noticed him how he was behaving. During the party his father's constant gaze irritated him. He developed anxious and disorganized feelings in his personality. This thing also affected his adulthood behavior that even after three years away from home, he remained emotionally conflicted and hesitant to meet his father. The parties, in particular remained a source of painful memories because these symbolized his father's constant criticism which left him feeling frustrated and emotionally neglected.

EVERY WEEKEND THERE are countless functions and family-friend parties, and Amar hates almost everything about them. The ceaseless small talk. The constant gaze of his father following him, making sure he is treating elders with respect, that he is not fighting with or being vaguely rude to the other boys his age (Mirza, 2018 p. 42)

Amar was comparing his life with his friend Mark who got new shoes from his father. His friend had also permission of going to his friend's home. His friend was allowed to eat food in front of the TV. But Amar was not allowed to do things according to his wish. He could not express his desires in front of his father. In the house, Amar had one person with whom he could talk openly and that person was his sister Hadia. According to Amar, his father's behavior was unfair and unjust towards him. While speaking to his father, he mentioned that Mark's parents permitted him to go to his friends' houses and make his own decisions. Upon hearing this, Amar's father responded that Mark was a spoiled child. On the other hand, Amar was following the values and expectations his father set for him. He was killing his wishes and dreams to make his father happy. When Amar asked about going to his friend's home, his father replied that having friends is only waste of time. He also mentioned that he was only allowed to meet his friends at school.



“There is no such thing as friends, only family, and only family will never desert you.” (Mirza, 2018 p. 70)

Amar had different interests in his life but his father wanted him to work hard and became a doctor as he desired for his daughters. Hadia was working hard and performing very well in the school. His father had no complain from his daughter. But he received complaints most often from the side of his son. As noted by (Gibson, 2020) an individual with fearful avoidant attachment usually has to kill his dreams and wishes if he wanted to be loved by his caregivers. Same was the case with Amar, he once shared with his sister that he wanted to be a poet but he could not mention this in front of his father. Amar’s sister told her mother that Amar wanted to be poet. Hadia wanted her parents to understand Amar’s aspirations and support the path he wished to pursue in life. Therefore, she said it aloud when his parents were sitting together that, Amar wanted to be a poet. Upon hearing this, his father put an angry look on Amar and criticized him as he did not know any difference between profession and hobby.

“Amar wants to be a poet.” Stretching out the word, smiling. Rafiq had not torn his gaze from Amar. The look on Rafiq’s face soured (Mirza, 2018 p.153).

As noted by (Gibson 2020) individuals with fearful avoidant attachment usually mistrust the people with this perception that they will be betrayed. This had happened between the relationship of Amar and Amira whom he liked very much. He trusted her a lot. And also felt happy in her company. But one day she came and said to him that her mother had found about their relationship so they should keep distance for some days. She suggested that they should not meet for some days. But instead of understanding her situation, he responded in a very strange way. Amar thought that Amira was lying, intended to betray him, and wanted to escape from their relationship. He believed her and shared everything with her, now she had come and said her family was more important and valuable to her. Amar misunderstood Amira and took her suggestion in wrong way. Amar’s this behavior was because of his father’s attitude towards him. He never believed in himself and thought that he could not achieve anything worthwhile in his life. He began to think that Amira did not trust him, as his father had never trusted him.

“Were you waiting for them to find out so you’d have an excuse to leave me?” he finally asks.

“It’s been three years since you came to my door—what has changed? You don’t know how angry Mumma was. How disgusted with me.” (Mirza, 2018 p.179)

When Amar came to Hadia’s wedding, he thought that everything would be fine and that his relationship with his parents would improve, as a long time had passed. But what shocked Amar the most was how his parents betrayed him three years earlier. At the wedding event, he came to know that his sister was doing love marriage and his parents had no objection. On the other hand, when Amar fell in love with a girl, his parents considered it a serious issue that would hinder their son’s progress. They could have talked to him about his love affair, but their inability to understand their son ended up hurting his feelings. His parents had secretly ruined his relationship with Amira and made it appear as though it was Amira’s and her parent’s fault. Their intention was to turn Amar against her. His trust in his parents was completely broken. He held them responsible for ruining his life. He seemed unable to control his emotions. Life had become miserable for him because of his parent’s lack of emotional support and understanding.

Let go of me. You are all liars, backbiters, and you make me feel like I am the liar? You tell me that to go behind the back of the stranger is to eat his flesh? What about me?” He jabbed his finger to his chest. “I am your son. I am your son and you went behind my back. And you lied to me.



And you tell me again and again that I am the one who has lied to you? I am the one who has betrayed you?" (Mirza, 2018 p.282)

The analysis revealed that inadequate parental care, lack of emotional support and lack of understanding during childhood can contribute the development of unhealthy behaviors. As the character of Zohaib developed dismissive avoidant attachment style in Elahi's "The Idle Stance of the Tippler Pigeon" and Amar developed fearful avoidant attachment in the novel "A Place for Us" by Fatima Farheen Mirza.

4. Conclusion

This study emphasized how a person's emotional growth and psychological health could be greatly impacted by improper parent-child attachments. It became clear from the examination of Zohaib's life in "The Idle Stance of the Tippler Pigeon" and Amar's life in "A Place for Us" that feeling of loneliness, emotional pain, and identity crisis could result from a lack of parental care and emotional support during childhood. Despite having different parental situations, both individuals' personality, relationships, and life decisions are shaped by their damaged bonds.

The study was carried out through the prism of attachment theory, which provided a helpful framework for understanding the long-term effects of early childhood attachments. Amar displayed a Fearful-Avoidant attachment style as a result of emotional distance, parental control, and a lack of trust, while Zohaib's behavior revealed a Dismissive-Avoidant attachment style that had been developed through parental absence and emotional abuse. The application of attachment theory explained their emotional reactions, coping strategies, and interpersonal interactions throughout their life.

The study also showed that pleasant life events and supportive relationships could lead to emotional healing. Through his friend Talha's unwavering support and his ultimate recognition of his parents' errors, Zohaib gradually achieved emotional stability. Similarly, Amar found peace and self-acceptance by distancing himself from the circumstances that had caused his emotional distress and by choosing a different path in life. The research highlighted the importance of healthy parental bonds, emotional support, understanding and trust in promoting positive emotional growth and psychological well-being.

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