

Contemporary Bildungsroman: A Study of Psycho-Sociological Aspects of Father-son Relationship in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract

The Bildungsroman is a novelistic genre that refers to narratives that deal with the process of formation and development of its protagonist from childhood to adolescence. This genre originated in eighteenth century Germany and soon became very popular. Genres tend to evolve over time, besides they are not impervious to the social, political, economic and technological changes taking places all the time. The Bildungsroman has been evolving and adjusting itself to new historical, social and literary concerns and a significant shift seems to be taking place in the area of family dynamics, particularly in the case of immigrant Bildungsroman. Hosseini, an Afghan migrant author, considers *The Kite Runner* to be a father-son story. This paper argues that *The Kite Runner* presents a deviation from the canon in the form of changing father-son relationship. The special relationship between and father and son in the novel, together with their mutual influence on each other, adds a compelling dynamic that forms the core of *The Kite Runner*. The paper also examines issues such as identity reconstruction.

Keywords: Bildungsroman, father-son relationship, immigrants, identity reconstruction.

The Bildungsroman is a novelistic genre that refers to narratives that deal with the process of formation and development of its protagonist from childhood to adolescence. This genre originated in eighteenth century Germany and soon became very popular. Genres tend to evolve over time, besides they are not impervious to the social, political, economic and technological changes taking places all the time. Attention during the last quarter of the twentieth century Bildungsroman particularly has increasingly shifted towards post-colonial and minority writing, witnessing the emergence of a new sub-genre: the refugee and forced migration Bildungsroman. The Bildungsroman has been evolving and adjusting itself to new historical, social and literary concerns and a significant shift seems to be taking place in the area of family dynamics, particularly in the case of immigrant Bildungsroman.

The formation of identity is considered to be a lifelong process, and the specific need for social relations thus changes over time. As an infant, the primary social relation is with the parents and caregivers, but later it might be with classmates, friends, coworkers or a romantic partner. In other words, identification with other social beings is necessary in the process of forming an identity and this is where the need to belong begins. This need to belong has taken different forms over time. In traditional societies, social affiliations were characterized very differently than today; they were more often inherited rather than acquired. At this time, main affiliations were formed within the family and local community. But globalization and the new wave of

migration, post-colonial migration in particular, beginning from late twentieth century to present time, have added a totally new dimension to the notion of identity.

One of the most consequential relationships in the lives of human beings is with their families. The family is one of the most basic constructs of human relationships and has a major impact on the development of a person. The effect of familial relationships has been studied for many years in order to understand the family's significance. Parental relationships have been found to affect many different aspects of development including sexuality, gender identity and depression. In recent years, the distinct interactions between parent and child within the family have been of interest to help understand the unique contributions each individual parent has on the child. The relationship between a father and his children has been found to have a major impact on a child's development, especially on a male child's development.

An important difference between Western culture and Islam is the heavy collectivist nature of the religion. Basit (2007) states that "Family life is the basis and cornerstone of Islamic society and obedience and respect for the parents is constantly stressed in Islamic teachings". It is expected in Arab Muslim families that children will reorganize their needs and wants to fit the family's expectations (Henry, Stiles, Biran & Hinkle, 2008). Together, the strong collectivist nature of the religion and the foundation that seep into every aspect of a Muslim's life sets up a structure for entrenched conflict on a variety of issues between Western non-Muslims and moderate to strict Muslims.

The special relationship between and father and son in the *The Kite Runner*, together with their mutual influence on each other, adds a compelling dynamic that forms the core of the novel. Hosseini's admission that *The Kite Runner* is a father-son story, lends importance to the theme of father-son relationship in the narrative, and it assumes added significance due to the fact that it has been narrated with migration as its background with displacement, uprootedness, alienation playing a crucial role in adding new perspective on father-son relationship. The novel has enjoyed a phenomenal success ever since it came out in 2003 with 4 million copies sold in America alone. Currently, it is published in 40 countries and has been translated into other languages like Persian and Chinese. In 2007, it was adapted into a movie directed by Marc Forster.

The Kite Runner tells the story of Amir, a young boy from Kabul, whose closest friend is Hassan, son of a servant of the family Ali who comes from underprivileged, ethnic minority- the Hajaras . The story is set against a backdrop of tumultuous events, from the fall of monarchy in Afghanistan through the Soviet military intervention, the exodus of refugees to Pakistan and the United States, and the rise of the Taliban regime. The novel primarily focuses on three significant stages in Amir's life: his childhood in Kabul his and his father's first years as immigrants in 1980s California, and Amir's return to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

Amir's mother died during his birth and he has been brought by his aristocratic, flamboyant father whom he calls Baba. Baba comes across as a person who is torn between Amir and Hassan. Hassan is Baba's illegitimate son from Sanaubar, his childhood friend and servant Ali's wife. He never openly admits his love for Hassan but he feels guilty for not being able to adopt Hassan as his child. Later Rahim Khan, Baba's best friend and business partner, confides to

Amir that Baba built the orphanage, which at first glance appears to be a simple act of charity, to actually make up for his guilt and his lack of courage to acknowledge Hassan as his son. Baba is hesitant in expressing his emotions and this is the reason why Amir always complains of not being able to know his father completely. Towards the last days of his life his relation with Amir improves and the two come closer which allows Baba to die happily as he finds at least one of his sons with him.

Amir grows up in the middle of certain fears. His mother died in delivering him and his father has always held him responsible for his mother's death. As a result, his father never treats him with the respect he deserves. Baba does not come across as an ideal father in Amir's childhood. He shows a slight preference for his other son, Hassan, a fact that Amir finds difficult to understand. Amir believes that Baba is not very happy with him first because of his mother and then because he is not the kind of boy who will develop into a manly citizen that the nation of Afghanistan requires. To get into the good books of Baba he betrays his best companion when he watches Hassan raped by Assef and does nothing to help him. What is worse he deludes himself by fabricating a justification for not helping Hassan. His fear is the main reason but he tries to convince himself that he was trying to make a mark on Baba's mind:

“I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me. I was afraid of getting hurt. That's what I told myself as I turned my back to the alley, to Hassan. That's what I made myself believe. I actually *aspired* to cowardice, because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that Assef was right. Nothing is free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was it a fair price? The answer floated to my conscious mind before I could thwart it: He was just a Hazara wasn't he? (Hosseini, 68)

It's as much Amir's moral cowardice that he is not able to stand up for himself and accept Hassan as his friend as his father's that he is not able to accept Hassan as his son. “Our attitude toward the task of creative self-sculpture is largely determined by the emotional attitudes our parents, guardians, and teachers expressed toward us when we were young; whether we go at our task courageously or whether we cringe and hesitate” (W. Beran Wolfe, 63). His father's failure to own Hassan as his son causes much damage to their relationship. Amir suffers emotionally and feels insecure because of his father's frustration and guilt resulting from his failure to give Hassan his due. Baba's frustration is heightened by the fact that Hassan has all the qualities that he admires and expects in Amir, unfortunately, Amir has none. Baba never appreciates any task done by Amir because he is not ready to accept his son to remain buried in books and find him shuffling around the house. Amir is not encouraged by his father to remold himself, that is why he is not able to stand up for himself and always hesitates to do anything, a tendency where much evident even when he is a grown up adult living in California with his father. When he first hears of his father's terminal cancer, he feels lost and reacts like a child, “What about me, Baba? What am I supposed to do?” (Hosseini, 144). His father's response is predictable, “A look of disgust swept across his rain-soaked face. It was the same look he'd give me when, as a kid, I'd fall, scrape my knees, and cry. It was the crying that brought it out then, the crying that brought it

on now.” Baba cannot help pointing out to him, “You’re twenty-two years, Amir! A grown man! You- -.” (Hosseini, 144)

Baba redeems his sins. Early in the story, maybe due to a guilty state of mind, he hires the same nursing Hazara woman who fed Amir and Hassan, “Hassan and I fed from the same breasts.” (Hosseini, 10). Baba used to buy birthday gifts for Hassan, and Amir: —Baba never missed Hassan’s birthday.” (Hosseini, 44). On one occasion, in 1979, Baba brought an Indian plastic-surgeon to fix Hassan’s upper lip. Sometimes Baba showed direct kindness towards Hassan, Baba patted Hassan on the back. Even he put his arm around his shoulder.” (Hosseini, 14). Baba built an orphanage for homeless and poor children. Amir describes how his father worked hard during the construction of the building; as he wanted to repent for his sin of having an illegal relationship with Ali’s wife (Sanaubar).

Love and self reliance in the early years, two highly related subjects profoundly affect the whole life. Children need love that they recognize as such, tender care and affection. It awakens them to their existence as individual of human race and gives them special recognition – a pleasant feeling at any age. The hunger for love is not lessened by perfunctory expression of it. The more personal the care of the child, the greater is the satisfaction. In Amir’s life such personal care from his father is missing which entirely affects his entire life. The child’s sense of security or being precious comes mainly from receiving affection. The reason that Amir is so desperate to win the kite tournament is because he feels it is his only way to receive his father’s love. He seeks throughout his childhood to do things that will make his father love him.

For a male, finding his masculine gender identity depends very much on the guidance of the father. On the other hand, the son has a responsibility to hold his father up to a high standard, look towards his father for lessons and examples and protect the family when the father is not around to do so (Comer, 2009). As a son, he is subjected to the authority of his father. The father has a right to discipline him when he behaves in an inappropriate way. At the same time, the son has the right to the father’s attentions and love as well. Together, they need to strike a balance of these two characteristics of their relationship and complement each other.

The most important aspect of raising children is making sure that they are and stay “good” Muslims. Children are taught from an early age that their actions are a reflection upon the family as a whole, and shame and honor are greatly stressed (Mourad, 2010, Haboush 2007). Parents most often use shaming and comparison with others as ways of discipline, and stress conformity to social norms as a reason to modify behavior (Nydell, 1987). Barakat (1993) states that because children are taught that family is the most important commitment they have, they often feel “guilt feelings” if they somehow disappoint their parents.

In *The Kite Runner* the bond between the father and the son changes throughout the novel. It starts with the son’s desperate attempts to seek the father’s love. However, once they come to America and the son grows up, Amir slowly understands that the relationship with his father is not based on love, but more of a power-relationship. Baba’s fault has been that he wants his son, Amir, to behave exactly as he wants him to. He wants him to be athletic and if Amir is not that, he should at least have interest in games and be a spectator if not a player. Hassan better seems to

fulfill that requirement. Baba, however, does begin to like Amir a little more after he wins the kite-flying tournament; this makes him appear a better fit for a male dominated world. The indifference of Baba towards Amir greatly affects his personality and his relationship with Baba becomes the basic source of Amir's tension. Amir begins to feel that at times, it seems like Baba prefers Hassan and says, "And besides, one time at Ghargha Lake, Hassan and I were skimming stones and Hassan made his stone skip eight times. The most I managed was five. Baba was there, watching, and he patted Hassan on the back. Even put his arm around his shoulder" (Hosseini, 12) Amir's interest in writing or in reading books is not something a typical Afghan male would appreciate; definitely not Baba. His friend Rahim Khan tries to point out to Baba that he ought not to force his children in a particular direction: "Rahim Khan laughed. "Children aren't coloring books. You don't get to fill them with your favorite colors"(19). Rahim Khan even calls him "self-centered" (19); he was the only one who could dare to do that to Baba on his face.

The common fears that constrict Amir's life are the fear of disappointing his father. Amir, not being the physical specimen of what his father was when he was young, cannot live up to his father's expectations. He fears that his love of reading and writing over sports really disappoints his father. The psychological strain of a father and son relationship comes from not only the evolving stages as the father and son both grow older, but it also comes from the different expectations that the father and son have of themselves. One of the responsibilities of the father is to help his son establish a masculine identity. Freud (1921, p. 34) first observed that the father plays an important role in the establishment of his son's gender identity. Pease (2000, p. 56) claims that there is a connection between the father's physical and emotional deficiency in the life of their sons with his personal and social behavior. Steve Biddulph is also convinced that sons need fathers to be their role models. In his words, "to become a good man, you have to know good men" (qtd. in Jardine, 2010). Therefore, both the gender identity and the personality of the son are compromised if the father is not a good role model.

Hisham Sharabi in his book *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (1988) notes how the individual is denied an identity and personality because of the power-dynamic relationship within a father-dominated family. For example, the child must become obedient and answer to those above him such as the father or an uncle. The child is always compared to others to emphasize his failure, which leads to low self-esteem and a negative self-image and, in worst cases, it can go as far as self-punishment (41). Systems of "domination-subordination" and "superiority-inferiority" exist within family structures (a father and his son) and between the male and the female. Amir is always found short of his father's expectation and though a comparison between him and Hassan is never explicitly made, it is always there, hanging in air between the father and the son, making the relationship tense.

One of the characterizations of a neo-patriarchal family is the relationship between the father and the son which is mostly based on fear of and respect for the father. Even though the main character of the novel is Amir, most of its focus is on the father, Baba. Baba is the man that Amir fears and loves at the same time, which is very common in the neo-patriarchal family: "What is it, Amir? Baba said, - - - . His glare made my throat feel dry. I cleared it and told him I'd written

a story” (Hosseini, 29). This exchange between the father and the son describes how the son fears his father but at the same time, the feelings of love and hate exist: “Most days I worshipped Baba with an intensity approaching the religious. But right then, I wished I could open my veins and drain his cursed blood from my body” (Hosseini, 30). The son’s self-esteem is very low in the presence of his father and while there is love for the father, there is also hatred, which often develops into a sense of guilt. This kind of self-punishment can be seen in when Amir compares his father with another male role model: “I sat on my bed and wished Rahim Khan had been my father. Then I thought of Baba and his great big chest and how good it felt when he held me against it - - -. I was overcome with such sudden guilt that I bolted to the bathroom and vomited in the sink” (Hosseini, 30).

This kind of power-dynamic relationship between the father and his son lies in the fear of bringing disrepute to the family name. The son is constantly making an effort to make his father proud of him because if he does not succeed and violates his father’s will, he no longer has a right to utter anything and becomes a nonentity. This will lead to the son’s effort to earn his father’s forgiveness, but only by submitting to the will of his father (Sharabi, 47). Amir sees his father as his role model, someone whom he tries to make proud all the time. However, Amir feels that he is a disappointment to him.

Without the sense of guilt that Baba and Amir felt, they would not have been determined to achieve what they did in their lives. Baba would not have tried his best, attempting to hide his mortal sin under the extravagance of his good deeds, and Amir would not have gone back to Afghanistan to save a young boy whom he has never seen. Without guilt, there would have been no reason for these two men to go against all odds to help others less fortunate than themselves, and to put their lives on the line for the well-being of others. Rahim Khan tells Amir, “And this is what I want you to understand, that good, real good, was born out of your father’s remorse. Sometimes I think that everything he did, feeding the poor on the streets, building the orphanage, giving money to friends in need, it was all his way of redeeming himself. And that I believe is what true redemption is, Amir Jan, when guilt leads to good.” (Hosseini, 263).

Amir has seen both cultures and his narration acquires a unique multicultural vision. The novel’s universe is seen through this double vision of one who has seen and known both culture. Baba has brought up the boys, Amir and Hassan, on a policy of “broaden your minds and attitudes.” This would lead to Amir’s ability to accept America wholeheartedly as is required in a multicultural setup. Amir’s attitude is pretty secular another for a happy multicultural co-existence. This is a quality he has received from his father. Baba mocks the story behind Eid, just like he mocks everything religious on the inside (Hosseini, 67).

After migrating to America, Baba begins to incline more towards Amir as he is the only person who sympathizes with him entirely, loves him and cares for him in a country where Baba is learning to adjust. When Amir passes his high school exams and is ready to join university next year, his father is very happy and they celebrate his birthday. Baba says, “I wish Hassan had been with us today” (Hosseini, p.133). Amir’s father is still suffering; he is torn between his love for Amir and Hassan. Amir lived in his father’s house and enjoyed a luxurious life. But Hassan,

on the other hand, lived in the shed with poor Ali. What is more, Hassan served as a servant for Amir, preparing his food, clearing his shoes and ironing his clothes for him. That is why Amir's father was always tough on Amir and kind towards Hassan.

One day, after his father's death Amir receives a call from his father's best friend Rahim Khan who asks him go and see him in Peshawar, 'Come. There is a way to be good again,' (Hosseini, 177). He meets Rahim Khan and finds out that Hassan was his half-brother and that Hassan's son Sohrab is now left alone with no one to care for him. Amir also realizes that he is more like his father than he had previously thought. Each had betrayed the person who was most loyal to him. Rahim was asking Amir to find Hassan's son to make up not only for Amir's own sins but his father's as well. Amir thinks of how different Hassan and Ali's lives could have been if Amir had not betrayed them. Maybe Baba would have brought them to the United States; they would still be alive. Amir heads back to Rahim's apartment and thinks how his father had not lied about one thing, that someone else always did Amir's fighting for him. Back at the apartment, Amir tells Rahim he will go to Kabul.

The relationship between a father and son is not a linear relationship. But rather, it is a relationship that changes and alters as the child grows older and matures in thinking and emotion. Dr. D. C. Williams in his essay "The life cycle of father-son relationships" (2010) claims that father-son relationship move in stages. He has used the acronym 'IDEAL' to link these evolving stages. It stands for Idolizing, Discord, Evolving, Accepting and Legacy. The first stage in a father-son relationship is 'Idolize'. In this stage, the son idolizes the father and thinks that his father is capable of everything. The son wants to imitate the image of his father, from the way he walks, talks or even dresses. At this stage, the son is much occupied with trying to please his father.

Dr. Williams' proposition provides valuable insights into the way the relationship between Amir and his father shapes and evolves throughout the narrative. Amir, the novel's narrator, struggles to fulfill his father's exacting standards. Hosseini utilizes the father-son relationship to explore the qualities traditionally ascribed to Afghan men: physical prowess and courage, the ability to judge between right and wrong, and the willingness to risk their lives to save others from injustice. All of his life Amir tries to get Baba's attention and to please him. The narrator describes Baba as an independent, proud, determined and sometimes emotionally detached person. In the final act of benevolence before leaving Afghanistan, Baba risks his life to save the honour of an Afghan woman whom a Russian soldier wants to rape in exchange for allowing them to pass the Afghan-Pakistani borders. Baba interferes telling Karim to ask the Russian soldier to stop but the soldier replies that — "This is war. There is no shame in war." (Hosseini, p. 115) The soldier pulls the trigger and threatens to kill Baba but a senior officer intervenes and saves Baba. In being a role model to his son, a father who is not well equipped to bring up his son may cause other emotional turmoil to him. In his book *Recreating Men* (2000), Pease addresses a few issues in the relationship of father and son that may influence the son in his identity shaping during his growing up years. Among them, he includes patriarchal expectations of father-son relationships, violence and fear in father-son relationships and oppression in father-son relationships. When the son experiences any of the above mentioned conditions in his relationship with his father, their relationship has a high tendency of being very strained. In a bid to make his son a better man, the father actually creates negative emotions like fear, anger and

maybe even resentment in the son. This further affects the morality of the son and his search for his identity as a man.

Due to his father's attitude and indifference, Amir is so afraid of his father that he many times wishes Rahim Khan were his father and wishes to open his veins and drain all his father's blood from his body. Amir throughout his childhood makes efforts to win his father's love and affection which becomes for him a personal battle. During this fight, he becomes selfish, someone who every time thinks about the ways of gaining his father's love. His father's behaviour greatly affects his emotional development, which results in making it difficult for him to make out the difference between right and wrong. The desire to win his father's approval becomes so strong for him that he betrays his most loyal friend, Hassan, which ultimately changes his entire life and after that, he begins to develop a kind of guilt for having deceived his friend. Haunted by the guilt, Amir never finds peace and he does not know how to make amends for it until the day he receives the call from Rahim Khan.

Next, the son would move into the 'Discord' stage, the stage where conflict sets in. The father and son may encounter differences in their expectations, values and directions with each other. This stage may carry well into the son's early twenties where sons start to have a hint of a rebellious streak in them that comes with that age. Baba doesn't like Amir's interest in poetry, reading, and writing. He doesn't like his lack of courage. When Baba builds the orphanage, Amir thinks those children are getting all of Baba's attention, so he tells Baba that he has cancer but Baba merely shrugs it off as Amir's attention seeking tactic. He does get Baba's approval when he wins the kite-fighting contest, but because of his cowardice in not doing anything to rescue or help Hassan and the resulting sense of guilt for having betrayed his best friend, it proves to be a pyrrhic victory for him, failing to give him unalloyed happiness.

After the 'Discord' stage, the relationship moves into the 'Evolving' stage. In this stage, the son makes a conscious effort to be different from the father. The effort may be so strong that it may seem like a competition. But competition can be viewed as one of the highest forms of flattery that a son can pay to his father. But in the case of Amir the competition takes a different form altogether. After Baba recognizes his son falling far short of Afghan standard of masculinity, he gets so infuriated with Amir that he tells Rahim Khan, "If I hadn't seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with my own eyes, I'd never believe he is my son"(Hosseini, 20). When Amir hears these words of his father, he begins to believe that his father really hates him.

Beran observes, "The hated child, who never experiences the warmth of father's love, remains an enemy of the society which he never understood. We find him in later life, a criminal, a pervert, a trouble-maker, and always an isolated outcast" (66). This stands true in the case of Amir - having been deprived of the true affection from his father in his childhood; he becomes a trouble-maker for Hassan, his most loyal friend. Hassan becomes the butt upon whom he can inflict his vengeance. He ensures that Hassan gets thrown out not only from his life but also his father's. He frames both Hassan and his father for theft. Wendell White says, "Children find satisfaction in the realization of having a place in the home. Identification of themselves with the family name or their use of the pronouns "we" and "our" furthers their feeling of belonging. Yet the child's sense of security, or of being precious, comes mainly from receiving affection. Tenderness also gives meaning to belongingness." (Psychology in Living, 95). With Hassan

around, Amir does not think, he will get the kind of affection and tenderness from his father that he alone is entitled to. He finds Hassan standing between him and his happiness.

As the son matures, the relationship moves up to the next level—‘Acceptance’. This is the level where the sons begin to “forgive, recognize their father’s strengths and admire their qualities” (Williams, 2010, para.5). They begin to accept each other’s differences at this point and often become friends, with common experiences and opinions. Lastly, in the age of their 50s, sons become a ‘Legacy’ of their father’s influence, either for better, or for worse. The admiration and respect of sons for their fathers remind the sons of what a difficult job being a father must have been. The ‘IDEAL’ stages are actually a cycle of how a father-son relationship is. As sons grow up to be fathers, their own sons would go through these stages with them. Lastly, in the age of their 50s, sons become a ‘Legacy’ of their father’s influence, either for better, or for worse. The admiration and respect of sons for their fathers remind the sons of what a difficult job being a father must have been. The ‘IDEAL’ stages are actually a cycle of how a father-son relationship is. As sons grow up to be fathers, their own sons would go through these stages with them. In Amir’s case, he has found a son in Sohrab and he looks pretty determined to make up for what he has missed. Baba’s adultery takes nothing away from the sterling qualities of head and heart that Amir so much admires and is sure to hand them down to the young Sohrab.

In *The Kite Runner* the relationship between the protagonist Amir and his father gradually becomes more relaxed and while the father approves of his son’s achievements, the son too gets closer to his father and the story of the father-son relationship ends on a happy note. Although as with many Bildungsromane, Amir does find a surrogate father in Rahim Khan, who understands and encourages his scholarly and creative interests, *The Kite Runner* deviates from one of the important paradigms of the canon which lays down that either the father dies when the protagonist is still a child, or more importantly, the son is irrevocably alienated from him. This shift in the canon can be attributed to the emergence of the sub-genre - the migrant Bildungsroman, the category to which *The Kite Runner* belongs and consequently the changes that migration has brought about in the psycho-sociological determinants of father-son relationships. In the migrant Bildungsroman, family bonding tends to play a crucial and often a positive role where the migrants are faced with acute sense of displacement, racism, alienation and the need to belong, this brings them closer, forging a new, healthy relationship.

A common theme of Bildungsroman is for the son to either come to terms to his father or free himself from his grasp. Buckley’s taxonomic definition lists the father as an important figure in the typical Bildungsroman, where the protagonist often loses his father by either death or alienation, “A child of some sensibility grows up in the country or in the provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination. His family, especially his father, proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts or flights of fancy, antagonistic to his ambitions, and quite impervious to the new ideas he has gained from unprescribed reading.” (1974, 17)

From Buckley’s definition it follows that the protagonist of a typical Bildungsroman finds himself at odds with the expectations of his family leading to his loss of faith in the values of his home and family, forcing him to look for substitutes. The father’s repression is often the main force behind the youth’s assertion of his independence. The father-son relationship in *The Buddha of Suburbia* takes on a different trajectory compared to classical Bildungsromane and the

father-son relationship in this novel has to be seen in the backdrop of their status as first and second generation immigrants.

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