

Identity Development in *Q&A* by Vikas Swarup

K. Kiruthika¹ and Dr. H. Surya Prabha²

¹Student of MA, Department of English, Government Arts College, Udumalpet, Tiruppur.

²Associate Professor, Department of English, Government Arts College, Udumalpet, Tiruppur

Abstract

Erik Erikson, an ego psychologist said that ‘Identity development’ is vital to a person’s understanding of self and participation in their social systems. He introduced the psychosocial development theory that is taken for comparison in the novel ‘*Q&A*’. The novel is related to Identity Development Theory. This article examined how the protagonist Ram Mohammed Thomas developed his proficiency and knowledge by travelling various places and his self- development is related with Erik Erikson’s first five stages of Psychosocial development and Sigmund Freud’s Id, Ego and Super Ego. This article also talks about racial and social discrimination and identity crisis.

Keywords - Self-awareness, Discrimination, Racism, Adolescence, Prejudice, Class distinction, Social relationships, Conflicts and Crisis.

Ram Mohammed Thomas is a protagonist of the Indian Novel *Q&A* written by Vikas Swarup. He is a teenage waiter from the world’s biggest slum with no educational background stuns an audience of millions by winning the Indian version of ‘Who wants to be a Millionaire?’ through his self-development process. This article discusses Identity development, discrimination, social relationships and the experience of the main character of the novel *Q&A*.

Vikas Swarup, an Indian diplomat was born in Allahabad, India. *Q&A* is his debut novel published in 2005. The novel was translated into over forty languages and adapted into film as *Slumdog Millionaire*, the winner of the best film of the year 2009, and won multiple Oscar Awards and BAFTA Awards. His other notable works are *Six Suspects* (2008) and *The Accidental Apprentice* (2013). He said, “India is a country where no one leads the life of an Island. The lives of the rich and the poor, the high and the low, intersect every day (370)”.

The protagonist Ram Mohammed Thomas a teenage waiter from Mumbai leads a miserable life in poverty. The novel *Q&A* presents the life of Ram who is an orphan teenage waiter from Dharavi, Mumbai in India. He never went to school in his entire life but won a billion rupees by participating in a TV reality show. The question arises how can a boy from no educational background win the show. The novel mainly talks about discrimination and prejudice. The idea of the novel is based on the story came from a report in a local newspaper about children living in the Indian Slums using mobile phones and the internet. Charles Ingram, a British army major was found guilty of cheating in the British version of the television show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* The discrimination Ram faces in his life is the essence of the novel. Swarup said, "if someone as well educated as an officer of the British army can be accused of cheating, why could I not have a consistent who would definitely be accused of cheating" (369).

On a winter night Christmas day, the protagonist of the story was abandoned by his mother in the bin. The sisters of St Mary ran an orphanage and an adoption agency to adopt the baby. He was put up for adoption together with a clutch of other orphan babies. He was the only one left and all the other babies were collected. Perhaps he was too dark and ugly. So, he remained at the orphanage for two years. Oddly enough, the sisters never got around to giving him a name. So, he was just called Baby – the baby that no one wanted. It shows the practice of racial discrimination that exists in our society. The great protester Martin Luther King Jr said that darkness cannot drive out darkness; Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; Only love can do that. Racism is not merely a simplistic hatred. It is, more often broad sympathy toward some and a broader skepticism toward others. The discrimination of his appearance started first by his birth. Everyone knows black is the colour of our originality but people hesitate to be themselves and run behind to colorimetric. His colour says his identity that he is an Indian.

Identity development is a process of a lifelong journey. It distinguishes the character or personality of an individual. The name is the first thing that stands for identity. He was first named Joseph Michael Thomas with Father Timothy after he abandoned by his new parents. In the meantime, unexpectedly some men came from various religions and argued with the father about why he gave a Christian name to the Orphan boy. So, Father Timothy Changed the name to Ram Mohammed Thomas for satisfying them. Ram Mohammed Thomas was raised by Father Timothy. He thought about the life of Jesus, Adam and Eve, and this extended

family instructed him on the rudiments of other religions. Ram Mohammed Thomas came to know about the Mahabharata and the Holy Koran. He learned about the Prophet's flight from Mecca to Medina and of the burning down of Lanka. Bethlehem and Ayodhya, St Peter and the Hajj all became part of his growing up. Place identity is a versatile notion upon which many psychological theories of human environment relations are built. Proshansky said that those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioral tendencies relevant to a specific environment.

Thomas's relationship with Father Timothy was never precisely defined. It was never made clear to him whether he was a servant or son, parasite or pet. First few years of his life, Ram lived under the happy illusion that Father Timothy was his real father. But gradually he began to realize something was amiss. Everyone who came to Mass on Sunday mornings would call him Father, and it intrigued him that Father Timothy was the father of so many people. He was also perplexed by the fact that Father Timothy was white and he was not. So, one day he asked the father about the fantasy world he had lived in till then. In the gentlest possible way, The Father explained to him that he was an orphan child abandoned by his mother in the clothes bin of St Mary's Orphanage, and that was why Father Timothy was white Tomas was not. So, it was the first time that he understood the distinction between father and Father.

The realization slightly changed Ram to become responsible. During childhood, self-awareness grows and changes. Children describe themselves in terms of observable characteristics and behavior and physical attributes such as skin colour. This is how Ram Mohammed Thomas discovered himself that he is different from Father Timothy. Erikson said that children can realize that they are different from father and mother. Ram realized that he is different from Father Timothy. According to Erikson, it is the stage of Autonomy versus shame and doubt. The stage falls approximately between the ages of Eighteen months and three and half years for the infant. Erik Erikson designed identity as a mixture of one's experiences, beliefs, values, and memories that shape one's perceptions of self. This identity he proposed develops over the whole course of one's life. Erikson's "ego identity," is related to this concept which he evaluates was a sense of identity that plays a significant role in maintaining continuity in life, especially in times of change. An adequate ego identity can be

understood as a strong sense of self.

Erikson proposed that one's identity expands over the lifespan, which is classified into eight stages of psychosocial development. He assumed that various stages of life make an evolution in one's identity. This copying leads to the development of certain components of identity. "Identity development also follows the eight stages of psychosocial development proposed by Erikson. Trust vs. Mistrust, Autonomy vs. Shame, Initiative vs. Guilt, Industry vs. Inferiority, Identity vs. Role Confusion, Intimacy vs. Isolation, Generativity vs. Stagnation, Ego and Integrity vs. Despair. Trust vs. Mistrust is the stage forms the ground for an individual's identity development". It is the first stage in human life cycle. It leads to the basic virtue of hope and a sense of trust and security even when threatened. It resolved and characterized by a lack of fondness and inconsistency ushers to suspicion, unpredictability, unrealistic expectations, mistrust, and anxiety in a baby while interacting with others. He suggested that identity has two ways of coping with development crisis is trust and mistrust. The development of Trust contains truthful of others and development of sense of one's own reliability.

In the chapter ' The Burden of the Priest' Ram Mohammed Thomas trusts Father Timothy by stating "he became my Father, Mother, Master, Teacher and Priest (53)". He believed that Father Timothy is his real father. The trusting infant has developed the confidence and a feeling of security. And he mistrusts Father John and questions "Why father John has all these strange designs on his body and keeps those strange Magazines under his bed? I don't know (60)". The mistrust of confusion grows out of unhealthy experiences at the early stage. Ram Mohammed Thomas's bitter experience of finding the truth that Father John is gay and sexually harassed Ian who is the secret biological son of Father Timothy. Initiative vs. Guilt is the stage where the child normally shows curiosity. During this stage the child asks a number of what questions. In chapter "The burden of a priest", Ram got many questions, doubts and curiosity to know mysterious things of Father John. And he used confession box for the first time in his life which means he experienced guilt. He went to Father Timothy and said "I peeped inside Father John's room through the keyhole. And I looked at some of his things without his permission "(62). During the self-development process of child, the initiative and guilt stage occurs. Industry vs. Inferiority is the stage when a child learns recognition, roles and feelings of others and a feeling of success. In chapter "A Brother's Promise" Ram understood the pain and suffering of the neighboring girl Gudiya and tried to

comfort her. “It is not very easy to comfort someone when there is a wall, howsoever thin, between you “(82).

Identity vs. Confusion is the important stage for development of adolescents. This stage is known as an "identity crisis" When fixed, it results in a cohesive identity marked by confidence, and a stable self-concept. A sense of personal identity, role diffusion and identity confusion are interpreted in this novel. This is kind of evaluation of identity development. Differences of pretty aspects of languages, gestures, hairstyles, attitudes and dressings are explained by Erikson as the “Necessary defenses”. During this stage adolescents relies on peers for comfort, love, and companionship. Mostly adolescents are attracted to temporary goals like actors, Musicians, popular figures and socially famous heroes and imitate them. In this novel, Salim (friend of Ram) worships a famous actor Armaan Ali in chapter “The death of a hero”. Ram said “Salim loves Armaan...he worships Armaan” (31). And Salim told Ram “No. Something even better than winning a lottery. I have seen Armaan Ali” (31). Even though Salim’s ambition is to shake hand with Armaan and he wanted to be a famous actor like Armaan Ali. It is an unpredictable state where success and failure stand equal. The impact of both failure and success gives great lesson to the adolescents.

In this novel everyone questions how can a teenager from slum without educational background can win a billion rupees by answering all questions correctly. Studies and learning is a similar but different things. Ram won the show by answering all questions correctly by his learning skill. He never went to school for studies even though he never had the chance to go to school but the situations and circumstances made him to run one place to another. He explored multiple footpaths. He worked as a waiter, servant, illegal tourist guide in various places to various people. Ram participated in the show not for winning the money or securing pride. He knows that the whole show is a script which is for attracting audience. He waited for the opportunity to murder the host of the show Prem Kumar for brutality over actress Neelima Kumari and Nita. Neelima Kumari was a famous actress and known as a tragedy queen who had a relationship with Prem Kumar and got brutally accused by him. Nita worked as a prostitute by the completion of her brother. She is a lady love of Ram. Prem Kumar bruised her body. So to take revenge Ram has participated the show. But fortunately, the situation leads Ram to answer all the questions correctly.

Sigmund Freud's Id, Ego and Super Ego interrupted in this situation. Ram's Id personality made him to take choice to kill Prem Kumar. The Ego personality made him to raise his gun towards Prem Kumar to shoot. Finally, the Super Ego personality makes him to realize the situation if Ram will not murder Prem Kumar probably the producers of the show will kill him for the suspect that they have on Prem Kumar for helping Ram to win the show. And he also knows the power of Money. "Dreams have power only over your own mind; but with money you can have power over the minds of other" (359).

Identity is based on many questions like Who I am? Where I am from? Skin colour, Gender identity, Religion and community, etc. Education and money has the power to change the identity of one's own. It gives the power to lead better life even in the poor situations. When he won the show, the Super Ego interrupted and made him realized the power he was going to get. He gained the power which he never had before and will never come back again. By applying Sigmund Freud's Interpretation of Dreams, Ram oftentimes dreams about a lady who wears white saree with long hair comes and rescues him. He thought that the lady was his mother. Actually, it is not his mother but he understands that Smita Shah, the lawyer who comes to save Ram from the false accusations of cheating. Sigmund Freud in his Interpretation of dreams said that dreams do not consist purely and simply of delusions.

In this article the researcher has interpreted about the self-identity process and how it works in social and individual lifespan by applying Erik Erikson's Stages of psychosocial development and Sigmund Freud's Id, Ego and Super Ego. A person's identity development is based on one's own psychology and socio psychology. It based on where he is born, how he grows up, the people he meets, things he has experienced, the problems he has faced etc. Ram Mohammed Thomas won the show through his self-developing process. He dreamed and believed that one day he would be a millionaire and would get family. His identity crisis vanished by the development of self- identity. His dream comes true at the end of the novel.

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