



Human Mind and its Psychological Disposition: A Comparative Analysis of Ghazalian Nafs-e -Lawwamma and Freudian Superego

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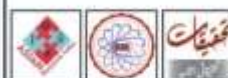
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Abstract:

The current paper aims to provide the venue to the spiritual insights of Ghazalian thought to be integrated into the study of Freudian psychoanalysis. The study has adopted descriptive and analytical approach to make a comparative analysis of Ghazalian concept of nafs e lawwamma and Freudian superego. Zepetnek's (1998) theory of comparative literature has provided the guidelines for an in depth analysis of both the models. This analytical approach may lead to an alternative critical agenda for the better understanding of human psyche. Moreover, the present study emanates from the assumption that though Freudian psychoanalytic theory has provided insightful psychological considerations, equally appropriate readings will possibly result from analyzing Ghazalian theory of soul. Simultaneously, it is also hoped that the insights yielded by this research study may open new panoramas for the study of human nature.

Key words: Mind, soul, psyche, nafs e lawwamma, superego.

Introduction:

The functioning of human mind has been a topic of perpetual interest to man since the dawn of time. There have been a vast array of writers, poets, psychologists and philosophers who have endeavoured to interpret it. The hugely complex phenomena in human beings is nature, which can be approached through several ways. In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the critical analysis of the Western worldview which inclines to study man in a highly-compartmentalized manner, considering him fundamentally as a material being. In trying to gain a deeper understanding of human nature, Western psychological theories have tended to focus on one aspect of the self (e.g., psychoanalysis focuses on the conscious/unconscious mind, cognitive psychology focuses on thoughts, and behavioral psychology focuses on human behaviour), emphasizing more on the biological and psychical dimensions of an individual, occasionally ignoring the metaphysical side of human nature.¹ As a result, the spiritual entity in man is either less recognized or simply dismissed completely. For this reason, several attempts have been made by social scientists who recognize the need to understand personality and human psychology from a more holistic perspective, concluding that the spiritual component of man is too vital to overlook with regard to human psychological and personality studies.²

Concisely, this entire development has increased our knowledge about what religion articulates about human psyche, its origin and development. However, due to the assertion that religious ideology with regard to human psyche lacks empirical substantiation, there still prevails lesser interest in this area of study.

Though this seems to be a genuine concern on the part of researchers, yet there is no denying the fact that some of the most prominent theories in psychology (i.e., personality and clinical psychology) are far from being scientifically based.³ Furthermore, a huge treasure of religious teachings and wisdom that have exerted a tremendous impact on the thoughts, behaviours and attitudes of countless generations of people, need to be considered worthy of attention while studying human psyche. Hence, psychological frameworks, provided by influential religious scholars, should be given due attention as a valid field of investigation.

So, the present study intends to provide the venue to the spiritual insights of Ghazalian thought to be incorporated into the study of Freudian psychoanalysis since both the theorists have enriched the world with their innovative and pioneering ideas. Though these Islamic and Western models offer somewhat similar attitude towards the inner workings of human mind, yet the major concern of the present study is to make a comparative analysis of Ghazalian concept of *nafs e lawwamma* and Freudian *superego*.

1. Conceptual Underpinnings of the Study:

The basis of theoretical framework for the present study is the theories propounded by Ghazali and Freud, whose ideas, with regard to the intricacies of human mind are greatly connected. If, in the West, Sigmund Freud has enriched the world with his psychoanalytic theories; in the Eastern world, there have been various approaches that render great help in understanding an individual's personality. Among them, Ghazalian theory of soul explicates, in very clear terms, a distinct concept of individual growth and development. Since Ghazali's theory of soul is founded on the teachings of Quran,⁴ so it runs parallel to his conception of God. A significant feature of Ghazalian thought is its concept of the illumination of the divine light within soul. Ghazali sees human nature in its "relation of unity with God, from whom it receives its inner light".⁵ Correspondingly, in Ghazali, the detailed study of human behaviour requires a deep and thoughtful analysis of human soul. Ghazali, as a true knower of human psychology, embarked on the task of examining the real psychological nature of man and discovered the existence of two particular tendencies in human nature, one that incites a person towards evil and produces such qualities like "impurity, deceit, deception, treachery".⁶ The second tendency is divine and produces good qualities such as "wisdom, knowledge, certain faith.....pardon, contentment, self-satisfaction, asceticism, piety".⁷ On account of the existence of these two tendencies, three potentialities govern human soul; namely, *nafs e ammara*, *nafs e lawwama* and *nafs e mutmainna*. Every now and then, Ghazali elaborated the true nature of these human potentialities by stating that if the lower self or *nafs e ammara* gets stronger, it makes the divine elements of human soul subject to evil, which affect his behaviour and action. Contrarily, if the divine elements of *nafs al-lawwama* get strong hold by becoming highly conscious of God, the evil elements yield to goodness. In this manner, evil elements are substituted with goodness, and it finally culminates in the tranquil state of mind or *nafs e mutmainna*.⁸

In a similar fashion, the psychoanalytic discovery of Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, in the realm of unconscious, heralded the beginning of modern psychology as one of the intellectual milestones of the 20th century.⁹ Freudian dynamic view on human mind, encompassing its three structures - the *id*, *ego* and *superego* - opened new vistas of understanding and insights into modern psychology. In the first phase, it was through his most influential work *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud presented his vehement arguments on the existence of the unconscious, hidden below the conscious.¹⁰ In the second phase of psychoanalysis, Freud improvised his topographical model and introduced his structural model using terms like *id*, *ego* and *superego*. For the very first time, he gave voice to this model in his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 1920. The entities of *id*, *ego* and *superego* were not separate regions that divide human mind, rather they had been employed by Freud as theoretical constructs, describing various functions of human mind. During the year 1923, Freud provided a more detailed explanation on the working of human mind in his essay *The Ego and the Id*. Freudian explanation of *id* refers to that dark and distant part of human mind which comprises raw forces and represents elemental drives.¹¹ It is the “biological and instinctual” part of human personality.¹² In order to satisfy the basic instincts under pleasure principle, *id* transforms the biological needs into psychological tensions. At the time of birth, these inner forces have not been influenced by the external world, so they remain unsocialized.¹³ The hidden forces present in *id* are driven by the pleasure principle, which tend to strive for the immediate gratification of its instincts “to survive and reproduce”.¹⁴ *Id* represents forces which result in behaviour, generally considered destructive by the majority of a civilized population.¹⁵ Although *Ego* has multiple meanings depending on both theoretical and cultural contexts, but this study will use Freudian’s descriptions only. He views *ego* as a protective, intermediary shield between the *id* and the external world. This is the structure of personality that deals with the real world and has been literally termed as the “I”.¹⁶ The demands of *id*, which merely aim at pleasure gratification, get balanced through *ego*’s attempts of providing appropriate satisfaction. Since *ego* operates on reality principle and can tolerate pressures built up by the *id*, it makes our instinctive drives delay gratification till they can be properly fulfilled.¹⁷ Furthermore, the structure which compels an individual to observe societal rules and helps him shape his personality is termed as *superego*. It is somewhat similar to the conscience which provides a set of guidelines, inculcating a sense of right and wrong, which develops with the internalization of parental figures. Moreover, certain parts of *superego* are unconscious because human beings are not always aware of the internalized moral forces that constrain their actions¹⁸.

2. Literature Review:

Theories of mind have long been a question of great interest in a wide range of literary fields. The issues regarding the intricacies of human mind have been raised and discussed by mighty intellectuals of all times. The frequent attempts intended to explore human psyche and mind reveal that it has been an essential concern in almost all ages. Moreover, to construct a better and more

comprehensive view of human mind is “not to pit the various theories against one another but rather to synthesize across them”¹⁹ Contemporary trends in interdisciplinary theorizing between science and the humanities reveal that the knowledge about human mind can be enhanced, if seemingly dissenting viewpoints are brought into dialogue. Therefore, the current study is an attempt to explore the variances in the theories propounded by Ghazali and Freud, the two mighty minds of the world.

Ghazali’s immense intellectual stature is well recognized in literature, yet very little is known about the contributions of Ghazali, one of the several Arab-Islamic precursors of medieval Europe’s Latin Scholastics, who wrote extensively on human psychology.²⁰ Similarly, he is among the first whose works fascinate the attention of European scholars²¹. Moreover, Ghazali has also been “acclaimed as the greatest . . . certainly one of the greatest”²² and “by general consent, the most important thinker of medieval Islam”.²³ Ghazali believes in the existence of two fundamental tendencies in human soul²⁴; the evil tendency (animalistic), producing vices and the tendency which motivates an individual towards good (angelic). On account of these two peculiar tendencies,²⁵ there appear three types of *nafs*, namely; *nafs e ammara* (the evil-instigating soul), *nafs e lawwama* (the reproaching soul), *nafs e mutmainna* (the contented soul). Moreover, Ghazali has also highlighted the role of *aq’l* in human psyche which plays the dynamic role of reason.

Turning now towards Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, it has been found that his discovery in the realm of unconscious and the development of the scientific inquiry of psychoanalysis, heralded the beginning of modern psychology as one of the intellectual milestones of the 20th century²⁶. In the history of human civilization, Freudian theories regarding human mind have a huge impact in the realm of scientific, intellectual and cultural thought, despite the fact that many agree²⁷ and some disagree²⁸. Although the genuineness of Freudian metapsychology remains debatable, yet Freudian theory encompasses a huge corpus of concepts which continues to exercise a deep impact on 20th century.²⁹ He has been considered as one of the greatest explorers of the human mind that ever lived.³⁰

Freudian dynamic view on human mind, encompassing its three structures - the *id*, *ego* and *superego* - opened new vistas of understanding and insights into modern psychology. Nevertheless, despite this reputation of psychoanalysis, there remains a paucity of evidence on its scientific nature. Until recently, literature has emerged that offers contradictory findings about psychoanalytic approach. This approach denotes a combination of scientific and non-scientific because Freud hardly ever gave “operational definition of his theoretical constructs of *id*, *ego* and *superego*” so the final verdict might be given in favour of his approach being unscientific³¹.

The present study is based on the assumption that the spiritual insights of religion may offer distinctive potential to the field of psychological studies. Presently, this can be seen in such contemporary movements such as transpersonal psychology, which aims at directly incorporating a spiritual component to psychological counseling. An evidence, in support of this argument, can be found in a

discussion on the subject when he mentions that psychoanalysis in its “skeptical denial of transcendence, has turned its back on the possibility of transcendence”, while transpersonal psychology has an “enthusiasm for transcendence”.³² Increasingly, in the west, there is a trend of incorporating the insights, beliefs and spiritual doctrines of non-western traditions, especially Buddhism and eastern philosophy, to the practice of modern psychology. Though the spiritual dimension finds least attention by the followers of modern psychology, yet the American Psychological Association recognizes religious psychology as a separate field in modern psychology³³. Foundational to this, is the drastic change in the whole scenario that the last two decades witnessed. Initially, Christian models were focused exclusively, but later on, a widespread interest has been felt in research studies highlighting Muslim³⁴, Jewish³⁵ and Hindu models³⁶. As a result, it might safely be asserted that the new field of the psychology of religion has emerged as a legitimate area of research.³⁷

3. Method of Comparative Study

This research study has been developed as per the guidelines provided by Zepetnek’s (1998) theory of comparative literature. Since this study deals with the comparative analysis of *nafs e lawwamma* and superego in the theoretical models of Ghazali and Freud, Zepetnek’s theory proposes an essential structure to meet its requirements. This model fundamentally covers two main aspects of comparative literature. Firstly, it outlines the nature of comparative literature, and secondly, it gives ten different principles to be followed in comparative study of literature. In accordance with the first aspect of this model, “Comparative Literature means the knowledge of more than one national language and literature, and/or it means the knowledge and application of other disciplines in and for the study of literature”.³⁸ The second aspect of Zepetnek’s model discusses different principles of the comparative study of literature. These principles include: “method instead of a theory, dialogue between literatures, acquiring in-depth grounding in several literatures, Literature and other forms of artistic expression, comparative conceptual approach and focus on literature within cultural context, ideological inclusion, interdisciplinary study, content against globalization versus localization, and the significance of comparison”.³⁹ The present study applies the seventh principle of Zepetnek’s model for the comparative analysis of variances in Ghazalian and Freudian theories. According to this principle, “Comparative Literature is theoretical, methodological as well as ideological and political approach of inclusion”.⁴⁰

In this manner, the successful application of Zepetnek’s method of thematic inclusion needs to be based on its being (1) goal-oriented, organized to achieve particular goals (2) reciprocal, given or shown by each of two sides or individuals to the other, (3) based on equal status of both participants, (4) comparative and not influential, no side can influence the other, and (5) both sides maintain their individuality. These are some of the principles which are kept in mind while juxtaposing Ghazali and Freud to find certain variances which may manifestly exist in their theories. Though these theorists belonged to different eras, cultures, languages and religions, they hold certain similar views on the points that define

features of the human mind, its role and impact on human life. However, the differences found in their respective views are fundamentally based on their religious beliefs.

4. Human Mind and its Psychological Disposition in Ghazalian and Freudian Discourse

Human nature is considered an enormously complex phenomenon in human beings, which has been approached through numerous ways. There exists a huge array of Western theories, attempting to explore the intricacies of human mind, but none of them seems to present the whole truth, on account of their attitude of overlooking the spiritual dimension. Thus, the diverse outlook of human experience makes it imperative to search for a model, which contributes in better and all-inclusive understanding of human nature.

In view of all that has been mentioned so far, it is important to bear in mind that if in the West, Freudian theories render great help in understanding an individual's personality; in the Eastern world, Ghazali has enriched the world with his distinct concept of the growth and development of human mind. Furthermore, a detailed and extensive study of the psychological disposition of human beings sheds light on the similarities in the theories propounded by Ghazali and Freud. Of paramount significance is the fact that the selected theorists vary in origin, chronological orders, cultural and temporal settings, and are separated by a nine-century gap, they still address similar psychological issues and provide insight regarding, "the most probing inquiry into the dynamics of psychic life".⁴¹ The universality of the selected theorists strengthens our belief in the similar working of human mind.

Of vital significance is the fact that a close examination of the Freudian and the Ghazalian theory, reveals prominent similarities in "structural and topographic",⁴² dimensions of both the models. Human psyche comprises various structures, each possessing a distinctive and highly-defined functions. Freud considers the three components of personality (i.e., *id*, *ego*, *superego*) constantly functioning in a different direction, which results in psychological conflict and anxiety and a craving for peace of mind⁴³. The exact dynamic of *id* and *superego* characterizes *nafs e ammara* and *nafs e lawwama*, the evil and celestial components of human mind respectively, while Freudian constructs of *ego* is similar to the Ghazalian concept of *aq'l*. Human mind is prone to irrational, primitive behaviour, under the influence of *nafs e ammara* or *id*, despite the existence of a neutralizing force, i.e., *aq'l* or *ego*. So, these conflicting forces, operating on varying levels, cause psychological conflict and anxiety in their desire for mental peace. Besides, both the models are Dynamic which suggests that "there are forces in conflict within the individual and thought, emotion and behaviour are the resultants of these conflicting forces".⁴⁴

Of vital significance is the fact that Ghazalian *nafs e lawwamma* impels an examination of the moral aspects of any action⁴⁵. This "reproachful psyche" (Hisham, 2012 (b), p.329) exists in the unconscious part of mind and functions as conscience, constantly developing the feelings of remorse on wrongdoings.⁴⁶ This dimension of *nafs* struggles to subdue human evil and compels *self* to "upbraid man and berate itself".⁴⁷ It is the stage which cannot respire in one state, since, at

this stage, the soul is in the middle of its voyage towards its evolution and perfection. It is in a state of continuous awareness, “scrutinizing, criticizing and self-accusing”.⁴⁸ This second stage of self-development starts when these overpowering passions of *nafs-e-ammara* are threatened by reason⁴⁹. It detects evil deeds, criticizes itself for wrongdoings and develops feelings of remorse. Besides, this stage of *nafs* has quite strange vicissitudes and is always in the state of fluctuation⁵⁰. At this stage, *nafs* is in the mid of its voyage towards its spiritual evolution and perfection. This state is attained when appetent *soul* is opposed and driven off.

Similarly, Ghazali considers this type of *nafs* as constantly in the state of self-observation, always criticizing man’s wrong actions, disobedience and the negligence of his responsibilities by enhancing his “sense of morality”.⁵¹ Besides, when *nafs-e-lawwama* becomes aware of certain undesirable actions, it feels remorse; thus, always remaining cognizant of its own deficiencies⁵².

Similarly, in Freudian psychoanalysis, the structure which compels an individual to observe societal rules and helps him shape his personality is termed as the *superego*. It is somewhat similar to the conscience⁵³ which provides a set of guidelines. Moreover, certain parts of the *superego* are unconscious because we are not always aware of the internalized moral forces that constrain our individual actions. Freudian notions of the *superego* indicate “conscience”, “sense of guilt”, “need for punishment” and “remorse” as its major functioning.⁵⁴ The *superego*, representing the “internalized value system of society”⁵⁵, demonstrates an ideal state of the most appropriate and socially acceptable behaviour of an individual. According to Freudian model, the *superego* fundamentally concerns itself with the perfect ideals of morality. It plays the role of a judge, constantly scrutinizing the actions of the *ego*. Anxiety arises when the demands of the *id* or the *superego* endeavor to “overthrow the power of *ego*”⁵⁶. The internalization of all the moral standards of parents are accurately epitomized by the *ego ideal*. It seems to be a yardstick that measures all actions. If there occurs any slightest kind of disagreement between the *ego ideal* and an action, guilt arises. In addition, the *superego* also subverts “the sexual and aggressive instinctual pressure exerted on the individual by the *id*”,⁵⁷ which could cause destruction to entire civilization if given full expression. Besides, the *superego* controls and regulates those psychic dispositions whose unrestrained expression might threaten social stability.⁵⁸ This guilt has been considered one of the major causes of neurotic behaviour of an individual because in order to reduce this uncomfortable state, the person seeks self-punishment. On the contrary, if behaviour becomes up to the standard of *ego ideal*, a person feels satisfaction and inner happiness. Thus, the *superego* comprises both consciously held moral doctrines and “unconscious, primitive, unrealistic and rigid rules”⁵⁹. Freud regards this agency of the *superego* as “conscience”⁶⁰, which minutely scrutinizes intentions behind each action and is normally present in every human being. Though the *superego* is the part of a “larger *ego*”, most of its part is unconscious, having very deep and complex associations with the unconscious *id*.⁶¹ This internal critic in the form of conscience produces feelings of guilt for the benefit of an individual because it

enables him to anticipate how other people will judge his behaviour or react to any dishonesty on his part.⁶² In this way, *superego*'s advance warning occurs in evolutionary terms, first making a person evaluate his behaviour and then estimate its possible consequences for others.⁶³ The presence of a strong conscience leads to a "strait-jacket existence"⁶⁴, or the individual may become exceptionally idealistic ethically; rather than realistic in approach and conduct.⁶⁵ Due to its constant tussle with *id* and *ego*, "it prizes, reproves", and makes demands and it tries to do away with both the pleasure principle and the reality principle.⁶⁶ In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud emphasizes that the development of human mind occurs over the course of history and the central notion behind this development has been the idea that some "gradually internalized agents" play the role of external coercive forces.⁶⁷ Freud considers the *superego* to be instrumental to this; concepts like conscience, feelings of guilt and regret for Freud, are all aspects of the *superego*'s functioning:

The *superego* is an agency which has been inferred by us, and conscience is a function which we ascribe, among other functions, to that agency. This function consists in keeping watch over the actions and intentions of the *ego* and judging them in exercising a censorship. The sense of guilt, the harshness of the *superego*, is thus the same thing as the severity of the conscience. It is the perception which the *ego* has of being watched over in this way, the assessment of the tension between its own strivings and the demands of the *superego*.⁶⁸

Thus, in this way, the *superego* keeps check on the *ego* by constantly watching over it. Freud introduces certain crucial ideas while illustrating the *superego* and asserts that "a distinction between doing something bad and wishing to do it disappears entirely" because nothing can be concealed from the *superego*, even thoughts are clearly exposed to its all-seeing eye.⁶⁹

5. Similarity between *Nafs e Lawwama* and *Superego*:

Ghazalian construct of *nafs e lawamma* and Freudian *superego* play the role of the conscience.⁷⁰ They strongly criticize the desires of *nafs e ammarah* or *id*, and constitute the ideals that a person attempts to reach. Besides, Freud splits the *superego* into two parts: "the punitive and the 'ego-ideal' aspects."⁷¹ The punitive aspect of the *superego* develops out of social norms which reproaches a person and causes feelings of guilt, in case of his yielding to the demands of *nafs e ammara* / *id*. It also offers a crucial choice either to change behaviour or continue seeking the destructive path of evil inclinations. In contrast, the 'ego-ideal' aspect of the *superego* characterizes social norms, values or ethical principles, the emotional attachment and respect which helps in socializing man's behaviour.⁷²

This state of human psyche remains in continuous awareness "scrutinizing, criticizing and self-accusing".⁷³ Both Ghazali and Freud agree on the functioning of *nafs e lawamma* or *superego* as to inculcate a sense of guilt and regret. The *superego* is all-seeing and its all-pervasive eye makes a distinction between acts and intentions. This strong power develops a feeling of remorse even for those acts which are just envisioned but never carried out.

Moreover, there is a slight difference between Ghazalian concept of *nafs e lawamma* and Freudian *superego*. Ghazali considers it in the mid of its journey towards its spiritual evolution and perfection, the highest state which can only be

achieved when appetent soul is opposed and driven off, while Freudian model fails to capture this spiritual aspect of *superego* on account of his secular foundations.

6. Recommendations and Suggestions

Based on the findings of this research, the present study recommends the need for a diverse outlook which may contribute in better and all-inclusive understanding of human nature. Since the modern psychological disorders have led to a reawakening among psychologists to analyze human mind and personality by incorporating a spiritual component, so Ghazalian theory of soul had never been more meaningful to the world as to respond to the moral decay and value crisis of the present atheistic-materialistic globalization. However, Ghazalian concept of human psyche is not purely psychological, but has great concern with philosophical-metaphysical aspect of human psyche. Besides, it is also noteworthy that the concept of human nature in Ghazalian discourse focused on making an in-depth analysis of the self, with its functions, its absolute purpose, and the factors that bring about its distress and delight. Thus, the present study recommends that although Freudian psychoanalytic theory has provided insightful psychological interpretations, equally appropriate readings result from analyzing Ghazalian theory of soul. Ghazalian theory balances the Freudian emphasis on the unconscious. This analytical approach may lead to an alternative critical agenda for the better understanding of human psyche. Besides, it is also hoped that the insights yielded by this research study may develop into new forms of understanding in the realm of psychology.

Conclusion:

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that though, in the West, important achievements have been made to explore the intricacies of human mind and behaviour, yet no single western model is truly comprehensive in itself in providing insight into the interplay between body, mind and soul, and the results of this interplay on human personality development. These major limitations in understanding human mind, raise the questions regarding the extent of human knowledge about self, and the depth of human understanding about personality. Even multiple Western schools of thought have proven limited, as they continue to ignore a dimension of the self that many regard as central to being human, i.e., the spiritual dimension.

Though, Ghazalian theory of soul and Freudian psychoanalysis have developed in utterly different times and in dissimilar social, cultural, and religious frameworks as models of the individual human psyche, but they offer diverse possibilities for the growth and development of human mind. This interdisciplinary study, has established the fact about the similar functioning of human mind, despite the variations in geographical, cultural and religious backgrounds. The rationale behind profound ideological similarities in Ghazali and Freud, is the depth of their psychological experiences and insight into human consciousness.



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