

**An Art of Becoming Whole: An Exploration of both Lacanian and Frommian
Frameworks Found in Umera Ahmed's *Peer-E-Kamil***



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Frameworks Found in Umera Ahmed's *Peer-E-Kamil***

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.



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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgment of collaborative research and discussions.



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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my mother, whose presence has strongly shaped my understanding of perseverance, faith, and growth while standing beside me strongly. This thesis is also dedicated to my father who has blessed me with his duas' from the sky above. Their sacrifices were never announced, yet they echoed through every step of my academic journey, reminding me that there is nothing called "impossible".

It is also dedicated to young researchers who stand at the threshold of questioning—those who feel incomplete, uncertain, and curious about the world they are trying to adjust in. May the sky become your limit!

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Abstract

The thesis views at Umera Ahmed's novel *Peer-e-Kamil* examining the emotional and psychological transformation of its two main protagonists, Salar Sikander and Imama Hashim, through Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic ideas of love from Bruce Fink's book *Lacan on Love* and Erich Fromm's book, *The Art of Loving*. The aim of this study is to reveal the true form of love in *Peer-e-Kamil* that critically addresses the protagonists' pre-love and post-love state from a psychoanalytical perspective. Hence, the paper incorporates Lacan's key ideas about lack, desire, split subject, *objet petit* besides using Fromm's prominent idea of understanding love as a learned skill. Also, it acknowledges the earlier studies on *Peer-e-Kamil* that have covered topics like spirituality, socio-cultural ideas and feminism, while very limited exploration has been done on the psychological studies of the characters' metamorphosis. This thesis employs a qualitative method to support the analysis further. *Peer-e-Kamil*, the thesis argues, teaches its readers how real love is based upon constant emotional growth, inner transformation and self-assessment, rather than just an intense feeling through exploring both Salar's and Imama's narrative.

Keywords: *Peer-e-Kamil*, psychological transformation, Jacques Lacan, Erich Fromm, metamorphosis, love, desire, emotional growth.

Chapter 1: Reframing Love: A New Analytical Approach

Umera Ahmed's *Peer-e-Kamil*, is considered to be one of the most influential contemporary Urdu novels ever constructed in Pakistan, delineated as a significant literary work that portrays spiritual, emotional and psychological dimensions of its protagonists, Imama Hashim and Salar Sikander. It projects the female protagonist, Imama's escape from her oppressive familial environment and her transformative spiritual awakening, besides showcasing Salar, the male protagonist's existential emptiness, internal conflict and eventual transformation from an intellectually arrogant young man to a morally driven individual. Their parallel but transformative journeys portray the novel's prominent focus area in spiritual completion over earthly rejoices. *Peer-e-Kamil* is not just a mere love story; rather, it is an exploration of the psychological evolution of two individuals who were seen to seek wholeness. This study particularly demonstrates a crucial theme that perfectly aligns with both Jacques Lacan's and Erich Fromm's psychoanalytic approach of love.

Umera Ahmed, one of the most prominent literary figures in contemporary Urdu literature, is popularly known for her works with ethical, moral, and spiritual dilemmas that end up shaping the lives of young individuals in modern Muslim conservative societies. Ahmed was born in Sialkot, Pakistan; and eventually gained popularity through her translucent writings that often draw the tensions between worldly pursuit and the yearning of the spiritual, a parallel combination that is seen to play an essential theme within the novel. Her choice of the novel's title, which translates to *The Perfect Guide*, reflects the novelist's intent to explore the concepts of morality and guidance and overall effect on human development. The reason for which I have chosen this particular novel is to explore how the protagonists have encountered the successful completion from a pre-love state to a post-love state. The narrative revolves around two different individuals who belong from two different societies with distinct values. Imama Hashim, belongs from a conservative house hold that

she later on leaves as she faces clash from her family and society for becoming a converted Muslim. Salar Sikander, on the other hand is an egoistic and intellectual driven male figure who cannot find the real purpose of his life even after coming from an aristocratic background. Ahmed has brought these two opposite characters together through several courses of events that include their impulsive decision of marrying, misconception about themselves, leading secular lives, and nine years of prolonged separation period that I am going to elaborate further in the next chapters. I have specifically chosen these two characters to work on as they both exhibit significant psychological complexity, making them an ideal choice for me to construct this paper from a psychoanalytical vision. Also, they portray fundamental ideas such as lack, divided subject formation, guilt, repression and many more alike components that are quite vastly explored within the field of Psychoanalytical studies and is well connected with the frameworks I have selected to examine my paper. Therefore, examining only these two characters will be ensuring my evenly concentrated and comprehensive analysis of their individual approach toward love, portraying a graduation transition of their pre-love state to post-love state.

I have chosen the theoretical frameworks of both Jacques Lacan's and Erich Fromm's Psychoanalytical view on Love consecutively from Bruce Fink's *Lacan on Love* and Erich Fromm's *The Art of Loving* for this current study. Both theories have consecutively offered ideas highlighting the psychological and emotional complexities depicted in *Peer-e-Kamil*. Fink's book, *Lacan on Love* is divided into three main sections under which concepts like Plato's Symposium, Lacan's Imaginary Register and love and real have been vastly discussed that have assisted me to explore the core components such as split subject, lack and mirror stage to critically examine the in-depth internal conflicts and existential hollowness experienced by individuals such as Salar, as Lacan argued, "When one's love for someone is repressed, it becomes hidden – not only from everyone around one but even from oneself"

(Fink 17). The statement highlights Salar's transformative journey being grounded within his self assessment. In contrast with Salar, Imama is both morally and spiritually driven that can be further explained through Erich Fromm's *The Art of Loving*, describing love as a sense of completion defining through human attributes such as care, responsibility, understanding and respect to portray her self-growth and emotional resilience. Altogether these frameworks create a thorough interpretive structure capturing the psychological depth of the characters independently, creating a scope for me to utilize the concepts for further analyzing the multilayered narrative of *Peer-e-Kamil*.

Although the novel has not been critically explored vastly like any other literary works readers may have encountered, over the years, the novel has been able to attract a considerable amount of scholarly prudent gestures who tried to explore it through multiple aspects such as gender studies, cultural studies and religious studies. Hence, scholars such as Rizwan and Neha have examined the novel from a feminist perspective whereas, critics such as Sheeza and Kainat have emphasized on the linguistic significance of the narrative. Also, Maqsood and Bashir besides Kiran, et al. have explored the existential crisis found in the characters. This study also acknowledges the individual exploration of my chosen frameworks by critics such as Marcus and Darlene. However, I have not come across any scholarly articles that have exhibited the incorporation of these dual studies altogether which addresses a notable gap in research to be explored further. Thus, I intend to fill that gap through employing both Lacan's and Fromm's view on love altogether to critically examine how love is seen to function as an essential fuel in terms of depicting the transition of the protagonists' from their withdrawal from pre-love situation to post-love. I have particularly chosen to examine the transition of the protagonists from pre-love to post-love states as I believe it depicts the dynamic psychological evolution through reading the characters' close involvement with human relationships besides acknowledging their self assessment between

their feelings and realities. Hence, it will allow me to examine their view on love through evaluating the key components from both Lacan's and Fromm's perspectives.

Research Questions:

1. How does Umera Ahmed's, *Peer-e-kamil* define that self-awareness is the initial foundation before falling in love, as suggested by both Lacan and Fromm?
2. What are the possible unrevealed psychological struggles both Salar and Imama come across as they grow and evolve?

Research Objective:

The main objective of my study is to examine the protagonists' both emotional and psychological dimensions through the lens of both Lacanian and Frommian frameworks from Bruce Fink's *Lacan on Love* and Erich Fromm's *The Art of Loving*. I aim to explore how Lacan's ideas of lack, divided subject formation, desire can assist me to depict Salar's psychological complexity, reflecting through Imama's metamorphosis centered on care, respect, responsibility, and understanding the qualities introduced by Fromm. Therefore, I intend to provide a profound understanding of love as a transformative force in *Peer-e-Kamil* to highlight the protagonists' gradual voyage from their pre-love condition to post-love condition.

Research Methodology:

This paper incorporates a qualitative research methodology where my purpose is to examine the novel through the dual studies from Bruce Fink's book *Lacan on Love* and Erich Fromm's work *The Art of Loving*. I have used Close reading as my primary method to analyze the narrative where I have focused on the narrative style and the underlined meaning of the story. Also, I have undergone multiple readings of my primary text's each chapter to bring relevancy with the research questions, incorporating relatable quotations from it to make my arguments strong. This analysis has incorporated multiple secondary literary sources such as articles and critical essays as well. Thus, the methodology has assisted me to build a broader understanding of how the novel can be interpreted from a psychological perspective to depict its protagonists' dual states from pre-love to post-love.

Significance of the Study:

The paper is significant in its own nature as it offers a detailed psychological reading of Umera Ahmed's *Peer-e-Kamil*. Although the study is not overlooking the significance of the prior scholarly articles that have well acknowledged the protagonists' moral and spiritual transformations, the psychoanalytical angle has attracted fewer scholarly attention. Hence, by incorporating Bruce Fink's, *Lacan on Love* and Erich Fromm's *The Art of loving*, I tried to introduce an interesting and distinct perspective surrounding the novel. Through Lacan's framework, I have analyzed Salar's journey from his fragmented self towards his true self. Fromm's framework, on the other hand, has supported me to highlight Imama's spiritual metamorphosis as a form of completed love that comes with qualities such as care, respect and mutual understanding. The integration of these two frameworks therefore, has allowed me to view the novel beyond a romantically driven narrative. Lastly, this study carries a significant value by demonstrating the parallel coexistence of South Asian Literature and

Western dominant psychoanalytical approaches, illustrating how culturally specific narratives can be examined through modern studies without compromising its authentic meaning.

Scopes and Limitations of the Study:

Since this research focuses on analyzing the novel primarily based upon Bruce Fink's *Lacan on Love* and Erich Fromm's *The Art of Loving*, the possible scope of it includes a thorough examination of both emotional and psychological complexities portrayed by the protagonists'. Secondary literary sources and analyzing the novel have also supported the theoretical frameworks to shape this study. However, this study has also quite a few limitations. Firstly, the study is restricted only within two psychoanalytical frameworks because of the duration of the time limit as it could not include the other psychoanalytical lens' such as Freudian and Slavoj Žižek, a Slovenian philosopher who views love as a form of catastrophe, an idea might have provided additional valuable insights to understand Salar's waiting as his ethical decision. Secondly, the study has centered on only two prominent characters of the novel, preventing from analyzing the other characters' psychological complexities. Lastly, the research is based upon the transcript version of the novel which indicates the variations between the original Urdu text and the English words used to make it vastly readable such as linguistic nuance, cultural interpretation and tone, influencing this study's psychological reading of specific dialogues or scenes. I have hence acknowledged the fact that while my study offers a specialized lens to look at the novel from a different angle; it does not aim to allow a complete reading of *Peer-e-Kamil*.

Course Outline:

My research is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the aim of my study, the plot of my primary text, brief introduction of my theoretical frameworks and my study's hypothesis. The second chapter has acknowledged multiple secondary resources that

had been done on *Peer-e-Kamil* by other scholars. The third and fourth chapters consecutively focused upon the independent psychological complexities that both Salar and Imama have gone through to discover their true love with the help of my chosen frameworks. The last chapter delineates my final observation on my study merging the protagonists' psychological transformative journeys altogether. At the end, I have provided a works cited list using MLA format for the in-text citations I have used throughout my study.

Chapter 2: What Other Scholars Had to Say

Muhammad Rizwan, the author of the article “Faith and Feminism: A Comparative Study of Elif Shafak’s *The Forty Rules of Love* and Umera Ahmed’s *Peer-e-Kamil*” has delineated interesting insights into the feminist along with spiritual approaches of the novel *Peer-e-Kamil*, specifically focusing on the female protagonist Imama Hashim’s resistance to patriarchal dominance and her journey towards spiritual awakening. As the article showcases the narrative through themes of both gender empowerment and faith, it also constructs a foundation for the researchers to examine further how the characters are being driven by their different psychological insights. Moreover, through highlighting the characters’ moral dilemmas and internal conflicts, this particular article has indirectly exposed the subconscious struggle that will be uncovered through how both Lacan and Fromm have perceived the notion of complex psychological exploration shaped by individuals’ repressed desire and ethical responsibilities. Hence, the article’s thorough discussion on the spiritual as well as the emotional transformation would become quite useful in order to explore the novel’s characters as psychologically complex entities driven by their unconscious and repressed desires. Although the insights of the article assist this paper to have an idea regarding how Imama Hashim has challenged the patriarchal society while exploring her ethical and spiritual journeys, her emotional as well as unconscious dimensions remain unexamined.

While scholars like Muhammad Rizwan have uncovered how faith, spirituality and gender empowerment have been seen to persist within the socio-cultural framework of Pakistani community, articles such as “Struggle to Self-Realization: A Feminist Analysis of Umera Ahmed’s *The Perfect Mentor*” delineates a more profound narrative using more explicit feminist lens further highlighting the discussion and emphasizing the female protagonist’s transition towards her individuality and empowerment in a male-dominated society. It explores how Ahmed portrays Imama Hashim’s psychological struggles of being a

woman who strives for her identity within moral and social constraints. Furthermore, the article prominently delineates her inner conflict and resistance, while projecting the character's psyche, making it quite valuable for the researcher for her further psychoanalytic interpretation. Although the article interprets the female protagonist's development as feminist resistance, the narrative also delineates the similar psychological patterns, such as guilt, repression, and the search for identity a vastly discussed topic within the very field of psychoanalytical framework where theorists like Freud, Lacan and Fromm have provided their enriched insights emphasizing upon subjectivity, lack and desire. Hence, this particular connection between feminist and psychoanalytic studies would allow the researcher to indulge in a deeper exploration behind the driven source of the protagonist's actions and emotional turbulence while acknowledging the unexplored dimension of the protagonist's psychological, which extends beyond gendered peripheral events to further explore the aspects that shapes her autonomy and emotional insight.

Building upon the thorough discussion of female agency and resistance, some literary critics have extended their studies of the novel beyond its gendered identity formation while emphasizing on the broader transitions of the protagonists' metamorphosis. In this regard, another article, "Exploring Self-Actualization in *Pir-e-Kamil* by Umera Ahmad: A Journey of Protagonists' Personal Growth and Spiritual Fulfillment" provides a thoughtful description of the psychological and spiritual metamorphosis of the novel's main protagonists, Imama Hashim and Salar Sikandar. It further emphasizes how both of them evolve from their inner turmoil and moral conflict toward their self-awareness and moral awakening. Hence, by detecting their emotional as well as moral dilemmas, the article highlights the process of self-actualization as described by humanistic psychology, specifically Maslow's hierarchy of needs. As a result, this article would significantly support my analysis of the novel from a psychoanalytical lens, as it connects the protagonists' external struggle with their internal

psychic development. Although the narrative is heavily focused upon the protagonists' spiritual goal, my goal is to delve deeper into the unconscious thoughts, repressed desires, and internal conflicts – the essential aspects discussed by theorists such as Freud and Lacan, navigating the protagonists' metamorphosis while understanding the stages of their self-realization and questioning. Hence, even though the article has incorporated the thematic understanding of the novel itself, the current study aims to extend its scope through adopting both Lacan's and Fromm's contribution within the psychoanalytical genre in order to reframe the protagonists' growth as a form of complex psychological reconstruction.

While the discussion on self-actualization portrays protagonists' journeys from their moral dilemmas towards inner fulfillment, a similar yet more focused study has been seen to examine the existential struggle found within the novel, *Peer-e-Kamil* itself. In this regard, “Existential Crises and Spiritual Redemption in Salar Sikander's Journey: A Socio-Philosophical Analysis of *Peer-e-Kamil*”, a distinct study projects a critical yet informative framework in order to understand Salar Sikander, the male protagonist's transformation through his existential and spiritual dimensions. As a result, by examining Salar's moral disorientation and internal conflict besides eventual transcendence, the article further demonstrates his journey within self-realization, and redemption. This study therefore highlights how societal expectations, intellectual pride and moral chaos have contributed to Salar's existential crisis before he encounters spiritual awakening. As a consequence, such comprehensions work as a base for further psychoanalytic interpretation, where Lacan's mirror stage explains the portrayal that the male protagonist has been looking up for categorizing himself within a particular mould that the world wants him to be in. In a parallel way, the article's emphasis on guilt, moral rebirth and redemption represent psychoanalytic themes of the ego's confrontation with the superego while allowing the current study to move beyond perceiving the novel solely as a moral or spiritual acknowledgement, and instead

analyze it through a continual process of self-realization that is further constructed by the protagonists' psychological conflict and their repressed desires.

Correspondingly, while previous scholarly studies have provided emphasis on the protagonists' psychological transformations and the role of their existential crises, the contribution of linguistic coherence and translation in building the aspects of psychological study cannot be considered any less. In this context, the article "Translation Quality Assessment: A Case Study of the Novel *Peer-e-Kamil*" provides insightful thoughts into how translation alternatives highly affect the thematic and emotional intensity of the respective novel. Through analyzing the English adaptation against the primary text itself, the paper highlights various differences, such as the subtle shifts in tone, character psychology that influence readers' interpretations and cultural nuances. Based upon this outcome, to study the novel through a psychoanalytical approach, the article becomes particularly relevant to represent the repression of the unconscious mind to further resonate with Jacques Lacan's view on subjectivity as well as desire through the characters. Despite the study's meaningful contribution, it fails to explore the psychological dimensions found with the novel itself while emphasizing only upon the linguistic shift of the narrative. Thus, the present study has extended this discussion through exploring how translation assists in influencing the elements of the psychoanalytical approach – such as desire, lack, and love.

As the previous study has explored how translation highlights the idea that meaning is being constructed and shaped, "An Exploration of Code-Switching in Umera Ahmad's *Peer e Kamil* (PBUH): A Sociolinguistic Perspective", a similar study showcases the novel's portrayal of code switching from Urdu to English, where language plays a crucial role to portray multilingual identity. The authors of the article further quantifies how often pure loan-words versus cultural loan-words can coexist beautifully in order to provide an impactful literature to the readers. Furthermore, this article offers a unique yet useful

groundwork where it shows how the language shifts in the narrative mirroring characters' inner psychological traces such as fragmentation and identity conflict which psychoanalytic lens frequently addresses. Beyond the sociolinguistic value of the paper, it fails to extend his analysis to explore the protagonists' of the novel's emotional as well as psychological turbulence. The limitation of the study hence creates an opportunity for me to examine further how language functions as one of the essential tools to be used not only as a cultural marker but also as a reflection of the psychic dimension while focusing upon the protagonists' emotional growth seen in the novel itself.

Furthermore, building upon the prior focus on the linguistic contributions examined within Umera Ahmed's *Peer-e-Kamil*, scholars such as Ali and Azhar have seen to examine the English translation of Umera Ahmad's novel besides Venuti's key binary of domestication vs foreignization through their article, "Application of Lawrence Venuti's Theory on English Translation of *Peer-e-Kamil*". As a consequence, their findings have illustrated how the translator negotiates between preserving source-culture specificity and rendering text fluent for the English speaking readers. As for the psychoanalytic study of the novel, this article deeply offers a valuable foundation led by answering the questions of unconsciousness and identity. Hence, the visible tension between foreignization (preserving otherness) and domestication (making familiar) parallels psychoanalytic components such as repressed thoughts and desires. However, the study does not profoundly analyse the protagonists' inner psychological growth, as it emphasizes upon the cultural as well as the linguistic embodiment within the novel which further allows the present study to analyze how translated language itself can be a source of medium to represent the protagonists' emotional struggles besides portraying their inner conflicts while exploring both Lacan's and Fromm's concepts regarding how psychoanalytical dimensions work, contributing to characters' psychical metamorphosis.

As the study has incorporated previous scholarly articles and papers that have dealt with frameworks such as feminist studies, socio-cultural studies, spiritual studies and many more, the article, “Lacanian Perspectives on Love” by Darlene Demandate offers an unique perspective on Jacques Lacan’s understanding of love, the one of the main theorists of the current study to understand the parallel relationship of both “desire” and “lack” when it comes to define love. Based upon Demandate’s analysis of Jacques Lacan, the article is seen to challenge the very conventional idea of love that can be interpreted only from a romantic angle. In contrast with the prior idea, it has positioned love as a more structured phenomenon that derives from acknowledging the incompleteness of the subject rather than running behind the notion of wholeness. Therefore, the article highlights how Lacan has viewed love symbolically that functions within absence and desire. As an outcome, this article is significant enough to guide the study towards exploring the complex ideas regarding love that have been introduced by Lacan while providing a ground necessary to discuss elaborately.

Similar to the previous article, another article, “Evaluating Fromm’s Theory of Love and its Pedagogical Significance” by Marcus Schulzke critically analyses the current study’s another theorist’s idea of love depicted as a constant process to be acquired through human practice skills. The article further denotes the idea of how Fromm’s framework has been perceived within the broader aspect of psychology as it focuses on the prominent theme of Fromm suggesting that love is not a spontaneous outcome. It also incorporated the techniques following which love can be attained such as learning and practicing discipline and responsibility. The study further critiques the earlier notion regarding love that it is instinctive. Instead, it states that love is a framework that ensures a systematic path to follow and acquire emotional maturity. Schulzke also highlighted the importance Fromm’s theory holds pedagogically as it ensures the reader's self-awareness and humility toward their emotions. The article therefore, will be assisting the current study to bring relevance with his

very idea of love as a learned skill to further incorporating how the protagonists' of the novel have seen to explore their emotional development and moral transformation while being rooted in utmost humility.

In summary all the beneficial information gathered from the above articles and papers have performed a significant role in the following research to critically structure all the details that demonstrate the psychological dimensions between the protagonists of the novel itself through providing an analytical framework to depict how both of the characters have their own psychological involvement to process their repressed feelings. Despite all these enriched insights, a notable research gap still remains to be explored further. Therefore, I aim to address the gap, providing an integrated psychoanalytic reading of the novel while examining how emotional, spiritual and cultural as well as linguistic components assist collectively to reflect the protagonists' self-realization as well as moral awakening.

Chapter 3: Deconstructive Love: A Distinct Study in *Peer-e-Kamil*

Umera Ahmed's *Peer-e-Kamil* narrates a story of two individuals, Salar Sikander and Imama Hashim, who transform themselves deeply over time. Although the novel is grounded on their love story, this chapter is independently focusing on examining the male protagonist, Salar Sikander's pre-love condition through integrating Jacques Lacan's framework. The study demonstrates Salar's inner fears, weaknesses, helplessness and lacks through navigating his journey of transformation from an ignorant individual to a self-assessed being. Thus, when I look at his journey through Jacques Lacan's key concepts, it becomes transparent enough that his pre-love state has created a faded distinction between his imaginary and real to be examined further.

In the beginning of the novel, Salar is being represented as a person by Ahmed who seems to be a perfect individual who has everything, including money, confidence, intelligence, yet ends up feeling a deep hollowness within his heart. As Salar's father, Usman Sikandar is seen to question himself, "Humne usay kis cheez se mehroom rakha? Humne usay kya nehi diya? Sab luxuries, best education...mein usay best psychiatrist ke pass bhi le gaya aur phir bhi yeh natija" (Danish 82) (What did we deprive him of? What did we deny him? All the luxuries, the best education... I even took him to the best psychiatrist, and yet this is the result [My Translation]). The quotation suggests Salar's psychic nature of finding enjoyment through self-harming even after experiencing all the luxuries he had been born with. According to Lacan, "every individual carries a fundamental inner "lack" that makes them desire the things beyond them, "Love – "affectionate love," as he puts it here – is considered to result from the inhibition of desire" (Fink 30). That examines Lacan's view on lack that gives birth to the feeling of obtaining something to finally be able to escape from the feeling of absence. However, even after obtaining, the feelings return as a form of lack. The male protagonist, Salar is seen to try his best to fill his inner hollowness or emptiness through

chasing excitement, taking decisions without give it a second thought or thinking about its consequences, as he admits, “main sirf yeh jana chahta tha ke marne ka dard kaisa hota hai...kaisa mehsoos hota hai” (Danish 38) (I just wanted to know what the pain of dying was like...how it felt [My translation]). His statement suggests Lacan’s idea of *Jouissance*, an intense pleasure that goes beyond the idea of enjoyment and is rather tied with both pleasure and pain simultaneously. Salar tries several suicidal attempts only to experience the ultimate joy of death but without wanting to die truly. To identify his disturbed psychology as a continuation process of desire where it is an endless movement unlike lack is well reflected through the statement, “This desire to understand the nature of pain and death indicates a deeper psychological and existential exploration, where self-inflicted harm becomes a means to confront and comprehend the ultimate limits of human existence” (Tanveer et al. 577). Initially, Salar’s interest in Imama at first is nothing but just his way of trying to find out how far it can ease his emptiness. The idea further denotes Lacan’s concept of *objet petit*, a feeling often misleads individuals about what they truly want but is actually how they want to perceive it through their imagination to believe it will make them complete. Imama hence becomes an *objet petit* for Salar who he believes to use to fill in his internal void but is actually embodied the missing ‘something’ within him. She evokes a desire within Salar as he wants to suppress it by replacing his lack with owning Imama that is further explained in Lacan’s statement, “He feels a lack or emptiness within himself, and a yearning for something to fill the hollow, to make up for his sense that he is missing something – this is the lack or gap from which desire springs” (Fink 35). However, this desire cannot be defined as love. The wave of emotions which Salar is facing is what Lacan has defined as the “Imaginary” stage, where individuals see themselves through their illusions. Salar truly believes he knows himself, but in reality when life challenges him, he starts to feel how fragile his ego really is further projected through the argument of Tanveer et al. that says,

“His existential crisis is not alleviated by intellectual brilliance, but rather by his eventual spiritual awakening and the realization of a greater purpose beyond intellectual accomplishments” (578). The claim portrays how Salar is divided between his constructed identity and his unconscious desire. His early attitude towards invading Imama’s privacy while acting without caring about the consequences depicts how he wants to find pleasure from the fabricated bubble that he has created for himself rather than trying to understand her with empathy as Danish quotes, “Salar ke honto par ek muskurahat aayi. Use Imama ki mushkilat bohat dilchasp lag rahi thi” (127) (A smile appeared on Salar's lips. He found Imama's predicament very interesting [My Translation]). Salar’s initial attitude towards Imama also illustrates his curiosity to know her beyond the image she upholds in front of the world which involves his infatuation towards her rather than admiration. The claim is further delineated by the quote of Danish that says, “Pehli baar, usne uske kohni tak ke baazu dekhe; kuch dair ke liye, uski nazar uske kalaiyon se hat nahi saki phir usne apni nazar uske chehre par mor di” (Danish 159) (For the first time, he looked at her arms up to her elbows; for a moment, he could not take his eyes off her wrists, then he fixed his gaze on her face [My Translation]).

Additionally, Lacan argues that, “It goes to the heart of our perceived individuality, to the core of our “subjective difference” – that is, to the core of what makes us different from everyone else” (Fink 36). That explains the idea of how individuals feel to have an independent and secular identity of their own, distinct from others based upon their individual beliefs, and personal uniqueness. That is further delineated by Salar’s withdrawal from all the materialistic enjoyments he has explored within his surroundings and has solely dedicated himself to reunite with the divine creature. This distinct and secular nature of his can be interpreted through the statement of his close friend, Furqan, illustrating the metamorphosis he has gone through as Furqan states, “Tumhara tarz-e-zindegi bohot mutawaze lagta hai,

tum aur tumhara khandan bohot mukhtalif ho” (Danish 288) (Your way of life seems very different; you and your family are very different [My Translation]). Salar clearly begins his journey with his utmost immature form. Hence, his actions toward Imama comes from everything (need, ego, curiosity) but care as Danish says, “Salar ko Imama ke liye koi hamdardi nahi thir aur na ji usne yeh uljhan kisi nek irade se shuru ki hi; ye bas ek adventure tha uske liye” (130) (Salar had no sympathy for Imama, nor did he begin this entanglement with any good intentions; it was simply an adventure for him [My Translation]). It highlights Salar’s impulsive nature toward looking at Imama not with a gaze of love or affection but with a lens of mere excitement and adventure. Salar is seen to float between identities, as he is blindly empowered by his ego and brilliance. He tries to secure his existence through his intelligence and power. At one moment Salar wants to possess Imama to complete his hollowness while treating their marriage as “Aakhri Adventure” (Danish 132) (Last Adventure [My Translation]). The next moment he is seen to appear self-sufficient to avoid his lack as a form of depending on her as he denies having any kind of romantic encounter with her through his statement, “Main pagal hoon ke is umar mein pyar karoon?” (Danish 132) (Am I mad to fall in love at this age? [My Translation]). It further explains how individuals often try to appear self-sufficient to avoid their dependency on others while hiding their emptiness through Lacan’s idea that “we may be protective, not wishing to show we feel lacking in any way, that we need anybody, that we are castrated” (Fink 36). Also, Salar has tried to satisfy his ego through Imama while using the power he has on her at that moment given by her when she asked him to help her to reunite with her former lover through convincing him to marry her (Danish 127).

Interestingly, Salar's transformation plays a pivotal role in the novel. He gradually begins to overcome his inner weaknesses while accepting it and eventually realizes that he does not understand himself as confidently as he believed. Hence, his ability to distinguish between his imaginary and real is the first step that has directed him towards his self-assessment as the quote explains his inner turmoil more clearly, “Agar 22 saal ki umar mein, 150+ IQ level, photogenic memory ke sath, aur kai ghanton tak sochne ke baad bhi koi acha kaam yaad nahi aata, to wo kaise khuda se apni mushkilat se nikalne ki ummed kar sakta tha?” (Danish 270) (If at the age of 22, with an IQ of 150+, a photogenic memory, and even after hours of thinking, he couldn't remember a single good deed, how could he expect God to get him out of his predicament? [My Translation]). From a Lacanian perspective it can be stated that he is coming into contact with the ‘Real’ while leaving his imaginary self behind. At this moment, he starts searching for purpose, for meaning, and his search reaches its peak during his spiritual encounter in Medina, pious pilgrim of Islamic followers. Salar's tears in the Prophet's Mosque marks his intense psychological arc besides the intense love he feels for Imama as he pleads, “Yahan khada, main tujse paak aur nek aurat ki dua maangta hoon-main Imama Hashim ko maangta hoon” (Danish 397) (Standing here, I ask you for a pure and virtuous woman – I ask for Imama Hashim [My Translation]). He therefore, begins to vision life not through his ego but through responsibility, humility and a purpose to fulfill. Furthermore, many critics often think of Salar's transformation as a reflux of the way he has met love. However, they rarely note that his transformation does not happen because he met love rather it happened because of his capability of knowing and recognizing love at all. Salar desires validation, projecting through the defense mechanism he keeps looking for to escape from his true reality in a form of trying to escape into the memories of Imama as Danish writes, “Wo sab kuch bhool gaya, sirf woh ladki yaad rahi” (200) (He forgot everything but the girl [My Translation]). Additionally, Salar's growth is directed through the guilt he keeps

feeling as a reoccurring event suggested by his confession, “Yeh Imama nahi thi- yeh aik bura saya tha jo uska peecha karta tha jahan bhi wo jata. Ya to uska chehra hota ya uski awaz aur agar yeh na hotay to uska pachtawa hota” (Danish 242) (It wasn't Imama—it was a nasty shadow that followed him wherever he went. It was either her face or her voice, and if it weren't for those, he would regret it [My Translation]).

Salar's growth is seen to happen in prolonged phases where he does not know any information about Imama's whereabouts, and this silence forces him to only rely upon his inner discipline rather than looking for any other external escape, as Danish captures Salar's helplessness through picturing his sincere pleading to his creator to let him meet with the love of his life while carrying a hope inside his heart as the statement suggests, “Yahan khada, main tujse paak aur nek aurat ki dua manngta hoon- main Imama Hashim ko maangta hoon” (397) (Standing here, I ask you for the blessings of a pure and virtuous woman – I ask for Imama Hashim [My Translation]. Also, Peer-e-Kamil explores that Salar not only ends up transforming himself but also attempts to repair the moral and the emotional damage he once caused by admitting, “Agar meri dua qubool hoti to main Amina se nahi, Imama se shadi kar raha hota” (Danish 482) (If my prayers had been answered, I would have married Imama, not Amina [My Translation]). The quotation therefore depicts the guilt he has carried within his heart while getting married to Amina as a form of divine punishment for not being able to keep Imama the way she truly deserves, interestingly not knowing the true self of Imama disguised as Amina. Hence, love is not just a mere feeling but the courage to face one's mistakes and rectify them, leaving behind his narcissist self to acknowledge his mistakes and trying to rectify them accordingly as Salar says, “Kitna zyada gir chuka hoon main, ke is paak aur muqaddas jagah mein khada ho kar ek aurat ke liye ro raha hoon?” (Danish 396) (How low have I fallen, that I am standing in this holy and sacred place and crying for a woman? [My Translation]). Lacan also supports this thought through his argument that desire

intensifies in the absence of only the object unlike lack which is a permanent feeling. Therefore, Salar's deepest metamorphosis happens as Imama's absence drives him to confront his lack face to face as he says, "Jahan bhi woh hai, woh ab bhi meri biwi hain" (Danish 383) (Wherever she is, she is still my wife [My Translation]). His powerful statement denotes that he is able to access both his imaginary world where he is still not well aware of the idea if Imama is alive or has married someone else and his real world where he still hopes to find her. For Salar, Imama has transformed into his 'desire', shaped by his 'lack' that has no ending.

Chapter 4: Reconstructive Love through the Lens of Erich Fromm

The transformation that the novel has depicted through its female protagonist, Imama Hashim does more than simply delineate Erich Fromm's core concept that love needs to be learnt, unfolding the unnoticed layers of learning it. Hence, *Peer-e-Kamil* becomes a modern portrayal of how individuals learn to love through their repeated acts of self-acknowledgements and courage than considered it as an emotion only. I have therefore examined Imama's narrative from a distinct angle, where she explores love as a form of post-love that illustrates the completion of her feelings through the components Erich Fromm has introduced in his framework.

In *Peer-e-Kamil*, Imama's love has been portrayed disguised as a form of care rather than a romantic encounter. She is depicted as a female with strong morals and values as she decides to stand on her personal beliefs rather than the values that are being imposed by her family on her. Unlike Salar she is not driven by impulsive decisions but tries to secure herself through creating her social belonging. She looks at life with a spiritual angle as she talks about the particular attributes she looks for in her partner delineating her foundation towards Fromm's concept of mature love that does not derive from infatuation but practicality as she says, "Meri khwahish thi ke main kisi aisi shakhs se shaddi karoon jo Nabi Muhammad (PBUH) se mujhe zyada mohabbat karta ho" (Danish 155) (I wished to marry someone who loved the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) more than I did [My Translation]). As mentioned earlier, Imama's early circumstance is quite different yet filled with pain and agony. She is seen to be trapped between her family's strict and conservative restrictions and her personal religious beliefs. This feeling therefore gives her a notion of a divided sense of her-self along with her denial to blindly follow a path that her heart refuses to believe, which she further agrees with when she says "Main andhi taqleed karne ke haqq mein nahi hoon" (Danish 63) (I am not entitled to blind imitation [My Translation]). Imama feels this "subjective

difference” intensely because her final aim of following her faith directly creates a clash between what she believes independently and the collective notion regarding her family’s view on faith. Although she is portrayed as strong, she is wounded by societal pressure and fear, as Bano embodied in her paper, “Imama becomes an outcast as a result of her independent decisions, particularly her refusal to submit to social norms and her transformation in faith” (108). Imama, stands still in her values yet faces her own emotional struggles. For instance, her decision to leave her family and follow what her heart truly believes is right depicts great courage which is further highlighted by Fromm’s idea that “Knowledge would be empty if it were not motivated by concern” (29). The claim highlights the notion that knowledge remains meaningless if it does not derive from proper concern or inquiry behind it to motivate it further. The study has found Imama emotionally caged as she is seen to search for the meaning to live life. Imama’s final decision to escape from her oppressive surroundings is a symbolic rebirth of her female agency as Bano explains, “Imama embraces her faith to establish her autonomy and make decisions for her life and future rather than giving in to her father's control” (106). Therefore, her journey pictures not only her ways to find safety but also learning how to make her heart accept love again.

Similarly to Salar, she is impatiently searching for stability just as much as he is. However, Imama is also seen to live in a fabricated bubble of her own where she has installed stereotypical notions about love as she considers her former lover as an ideal man who has left her empty-handedly. She judges Salar based on her compromising interactions with him, ignoring the help she gets from him to run away from her family as she says, “Ek Shakhs jo khudkhushi ki koshish karta hai, jo sharab peeta hai, jisne apne kamre ki deewar par nangi auroton ki tasveeren lagayi hain, who acha nahi ho sakta” (Danish 161) (A person who tries to commit suicide, who drinks alcohol, who has pictures of naked women on the walls of his room, he cannot be good [My Translation]). Her statement clearly shows her lacking of

understanding the inner-true self of an individual, emphasizing on the outer self. Interestingly, Imama's statement matches with an idea introduced by Fromm that suggests individuals cannot completely understand and feel others' love for themselves but their own perception towards how they view love through his statement, "To love is a personal experience which everyone can only have by and for himself" (107). Thus, it can be said that perception shapes particular molds to perceive individuals accordingly beyond which one does not want to view any other alternate notions.

According to Fromm, "The active character of love becomes evident in the fact that it always implies certain basic elements, common to all forms of love. These are care, responsibility, respect and knowledge" (26). Fromm's argument suggests how love is not that easy to happen suddenly but instead a process to be achieved skillfully. Imama hence gradually develops her feelings for Salar who she considered as a spoiled brat once from perceiving him as "Jhoota aur dhokebaz" (Danish 479) (Liar and cheater [My Translation]) to accept him as a blessing from her divine creature (Danish 484). Fromm further states that "Love is an activity, not a passive affect; it is a "standing in," not a "falling for" (22). The claim explains how love has to be obtained through patience, consistency and understanding rather than just expecting it to happen magically and can be examined further through her dialogue:

Usko dekh kar, pehli dafa usne samjha ke uske aur Jalal Ansar ke darmiyan kya tha; Kyun uski Jalal ke liye dua qubool nahi hui; kyat ha jo Fahd ko aakhri lamhe mein use door kar diya. Zaroor us aadmi mein kuch aisa tha jo Allah ne uski duaen qubool ki aur uski nahi; aur har mod par uski kismet usko uske taraf le aayi (Danish 483) (Seeing him, she realized for the first time what was between him and Jalal Ansar; why her prayers were not answered; what was it that had pushed Fahad away from her at the last moment. Surely there was something in that man that made Allah answer

his prayers and not hers; and at every turn, her fate brought her towards him [My Translation]).

Imama's self-reflection portrays her transformation to perceive love beyond the idea of a picture perfect concept and accepting it as a form of skill that has been learned by Salar during the separated period they endured. Another unique idea the study has revealed is how the novel uses silence as an instructor of love. Imama accepts Salar wholeheartedly as she witnesses the transformation he has gone through from wanting her to only keep her as a gesture of his victory to someone who patiently waited nine long years to finally get reunited with her, as her soliloquy demonstrates:

Ab lagta hai ke Allah ne mujhe bade pyar se banaya. Unhone mujhe kisi aise insaan ko dena nahi chaha jo mujhe tasleem ya izzat nahi dega; Aur yahi hota agar main Jalal ke saath hoti. Usne mujhe kabhi izzat nahi di hoti. In nau saalon mein, Allah ne ujhe yeh haqeeqat dikhayi hai. Unhone in nau saalon mein sab aadmiyon ke achche aur bure pehlu dikhaye hain, aur phir mujhe Salar Sikander se nikaah karaya, yeh jaante hue ke sirf woh mujhe sachche dil se pyar karta hai (491) (Now it seems that Allah created me with great love. He didn't want to give me to someone who wouldn't give me Tasleem or respect; and that's what would have happened if I had been with Jalal. He would never have given me respect. In these nine years, Allah has shown me this reality. In these nine years, He has shown me the good and bad aspects of all men, and then married me to Salar Sikandar, knowing that only he truly loved me [My Translation]).

The claim suggests how it is important for an individual to go through a self-assessment to finally be able to find his true destination just like Imama. Imama's transformation takes a longer period of time than Salar because her wounds are depicted deeper by the novelist. She

spends years living quietly and concealing her identity from the world, which helps her develop inner strength but also makes her more vigilant. As a result, Imama has to relearn how to trust again. The moment she slowly begins to accept Salar, she does not do it as she wants to depend on someone, and rather she does it because she recognizes the changes and sincerity within him as she reflects her conscious choice to accept Salar wholeheartedly, learning eventually that opening her heart again does not mean losing herself as she says, “Allah ne usko mere liye chuna hai” (Danish 484) (Allah has chosen him for me [My Translation]). Moving forward, the novel has depicted Imama’s love as reconstructed, where Imama does not just simply ‘transform’ but is seen to rebuild her entire inner perceptions, much like Fromm’s description that reflects how it is important for individuals to know their true identity without any assumptions and distorted personality of their own to be able to see the true-selves of the others as he writes, “I have to know the other person and myself objectively in order to be able to see his reality, or rather, to overcome the illusions, the irrationally distorted picture have of him” (31). This argument can be further synchronized with Schulzke, a scholar who says, “Fromm thinks that any feeling of particularistic love should push us to consider what we love in another person and then to recognize those characteristics of value in others and to extend love beyond the immediate object” (4). Schulzke’s argument suggests individuals do not just end up loving other individuals rather than they try to search for the qualities in others for which they have been attracted foremost. Therefore, it can be said, it can never be the idea of love alone but the qualities that make it significant to one. While transforming, Salar learns to depict Imama as a subject who has her own agency rather than a passive character. Thus, this shift is a crucial part of learning love, as Fromm says, “Respect exists only on the basis of freedom” (28). Fromm’s statement suggests the price of respect that can be only paid by providing freedom. Fromm’s argument can be examined through the event when Imama asked Salar if he has any questions about her

whereabouts of nine years but ends up hearing, “Mere pass tumhare liye koi sawal nahi hain. Tum mere samne ho, yeh kaafi hain. Tum yahan ho, yeh kaafi hai” (Danish 488) (I have no questions for you. You're here, that's enough [My Translation]). The statement beautifully captures the authenticity of love that only requires beloved's existence beyond any worldly regulations and norms. Similarly, Imama transforms her relationship with herself by practicing what Fromm calls 'self-love' which cannot be delineated as selfishness but the foreground of her being able to love another individual. According to Fromm, “If an individual is able to love productively, he loves himself too; if he can love only others, he cannot love at all” (60). The statement highlights the emphasis on how Imama has to search for her true-self, abandoning her family, social boundaries and identity before meeting her true-love as self-love is the only way to be eligible enough to love other human entities.

Chapter 5: Love as an Ethical Intervention

Through the dual studies, both Jacques Lacan's and Erich Fromm's theory of love explored in the novel has revealed that the plot twist is far more complex than just being a spiritual evolution of the protagonists'. This study is a continuation of a psychological study of both the characters Salar Sikander and Imama Hashim who belong from two different worlds of their own and become together while developing their emotional maturity through their eventual psychological reconstruction. Hence, the study has become a reflection of their conscious life choices that are not simply functioned by the external course of events but also constructed by both of their mutual understanding toward their lives and lastly towards their true identity formation.

Through Lacan's framework, both Salar and Imama emerge as individuals who have started their journeys in a fragmented way where both of them are being challenged psychologically and emotionally. Salar's arrogance, brilliance, reckless behaviour and intellectual pride are seen to hide his profound emptiness that stays deep down within his very core. The study highlights his early infatuation with Imama, is not a mere expression of true love but just a symbolic chase for him to obtain the imagined object that he believes is important to satisfy his fragile ego. In contrast, Imama faces a conflict consisting of her family's rigid expectations and her own personal moral awakening. She therefore is caught in a struggle where her identity is at stake while she runs behind unfolding her inner truth. The narrative of both of them further clarifies Fromm's idea of love that requires courage, discipline, sense of responsibility and emotional maturity, the qualities that both of them lacked at the very beginning of the narrative. Fromm says that "It is clear that respect is possible only if I have achieved independence; if I can stand and walk without needing crutches, without having to dominate and exploit anyone else" (28). His argument pictures how both respect and independence can coexist beautifully. After Salar's spiritual

transformation, he begins to treat Imama with respect rather than mere his desire. He protects her dignity and integrity, respecting her boundaries, and stops forcing his feelings upon her while allowing her to experience the feeling of space. This new version of Salar finally complements Fromm's concept of responsible love in which responsibility does not derive from rules, obligations or control rather than is independently chosen.

Imama, on the contrary, is someone who functions through her morality, which is burdened with distrust, fear, and self-doubt. Although she is strong and morally guided enough to stand still against her family, she fears to even trust her again. Therefore, Fromm's framework assisted this study to illustrate the importance of all the struggles that both of the characters are intended to experience before becoming strong enough to understand what love really is and how it works from both ends. Furthermore, Salar's spiritual awakening in Medina reflects the very moment he gets to find his true self. This is the exact moment where his false illusions about himself start to disappear, allowing him to confront the real version of him. Similarly, Imama's nine years of long isolation and endurance have helped her reconstruct her emotional boundaries while she rediscovers her trust. As the scholars have suggested their gradual acceptance of their true selves, acknowledging their hardships as they said in their article, "When both Imama and Salar are set in their respective paths, they well portray the aspects of self-actualization whereby they undergo hardships, accept their true identity, and find personal satisfaction in religious convictions" (Maqsood and Bashir 191). Interestingly, the outcomes that this study has found from their separate journeys are that both of them have learned to love themselves way before they understand how they are capable of loving each other. This aligns with Fromm's view of how self-love is not selfishness but an essential foreground for loving another individual. It also intersects with Lacan's idea that desire emerges while evolving itself when one confronts and accepts another's lack rather than attempting to fill it in with blank illusions.

Considering both Imama's and Salar's transformation after them encountering faith while undergoing the various unusual course of events in their separate lives, is like a symbolic death of both of their arrogant egos. They have unlearned their pride, shame, fear and false beliefs about themselves. Although Salar and Imama have learned love independently before encountering it together, demonstrating that mature love cannot be learned communally until one learns it alone. The novel has also showcased how the protagonists have practiced love through absence, as they learn to become capable of loving only because their beloved is physically absent for longer period (nine years more precisely), which also means their transformation is not influenced by their desire for reciprocation but by their longing for inner growth, explaining how love is not a mere feeling for just a specific person rather it is a quality that helps one to better understand the world including inner self with utmost humility as Fromm suggests, "Love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person; it is an attitude, an orientation of character which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole, not toward one "object" of love" (46). Furthermore, the novel also shows the movement from their journey from their ego centric love to selfless love. As initially Salar begins wanting admiration from Imama, while she wants nothing but protection from him, both are seen to receive a form of love instead of giving it; this shift perfectly fits Fromm's belief that "Love is active penetration of the other person" (30). The statement pictures love as the constant practice with proper patience and consistency. By the very end of the novel, both Imama and Salar understand that as human beings they both are incomplete but still capable of loving. Salar's statement shows that an individual can lose his love because of his impulsiveness and can regain that love through showing care, patience, courage and persistence as he says, "Mujhe wohi aurat di gayi hai jiske liye maine dua ki thi" (Danish 423) (I was given the woman I prayed for [My Translation]). Thus, the metamorphosis of Salar and Imama highlights their love as an ethical intervention.

By integrating both Lacanian and Frommian frameworks, this study has tried to fill a critical gap in academic discussions surrounded by the novel itself. It further demonstrates that both of the individuals' transformations cannot be completely explored without examining or decoding their inner conflicts and the emotional qualities that they gradually obtain. The novel suggests that love is a mechanism to escape reality but is a path carved through courage and patience. As Salar learns sincerity and the sense of responsibility, and Imama learns to trust again while accepting her inner truth which is further being delineated by the love for one another that has proved their capability of respecting each other's boundaries and agencies. In this circumstance, their union is not an instance of true love but a true sense of completeness by two individuals who have finally completed themselves.

In summary, it is a novel that restates love not just as an instant feeling but as a constant act of practice and patience. By the time Salar and Imama finally come together, they have both undergone significant psychological shifts. Also, their relationship has worked precisely because it is built on the maturity they have gained through years of suffering, waiting, self-reflection, and spiritual effort. Lacan has helped the study to highlight why Salar's early connection or bond could not be succeeded with Imama as it was built on only desire and misunderstanding. Fromm has directed this study to see how important it was for Imama to inherit the qualities of responsibility, respect and emotional acknowledgement internally before understanding what she truly expects from her relationship with Salar. Lastly, their love becomes the ultimate result of psychological adaptation rather than just a mere attraction where Salar learns the importance of patience, humility, and longing whereas Imama learns how important it is to trust again and take a leap of faith. Together, they have showcased that love is not something that happens instantly or through something called love at first sight.

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