

## Construction of the Self in Antonio Tabucchi's *Indian Nocturne*

### Abstract

*This paper examines how the self is constructed in Antonio Tabucchi's Indian Nocturne in the light of Lacanian psychoanalytical theory. Tabucchi's novel depicts a journey set by an unnamed character to India in search of his long-lost friend, Xavier. The protagonist searches a lot but in the end, instead of searching, he treats himself as a Xavier. Therefore, this research paper focuses on three specific questions: If the protagonist had no intention to search for anyone rather self, why does Tabucchi illustrates a long story of searching for Xavier? What is the exact relationship between the protagonist and his friend, Xavier? In the end, why does the protagonist assures that Xavier is rather he himself? This research, therefore, adopts Jacques Lacan's concept of three fundamental stages of a child: the mirror stage, the imaginary stage, and the symbolic stage, to explore the hidden meaning of the novella. The paper claims that the novella is the exposition of the quest for the protagonist's lost self because of the symbolic world codified by the linguistic structure. Xavier is the initial self of the protagonist who in course of time succeeds in adopting the playfulness of the language and delude the identity. The struggle of the protagonist to find Xavier is the struggle of a child in the symbolic stage and the protagonist's desire to find Xavier is similar to the desire of a child to return to the mirror stage where there is a complete wholeness, a plenitude of self.*

**Keywords:** Quest, self, mirror stage, symbolic stage, imaginary

Antonio Tabucchi's *Indian Nocturne* tells a story about people trying to understand themselves in a world where language is tricky and can confuse their feelings. How people think and feel about themselves is closely connected to their relationships with others. Understanding oneself can be difficult and people often make mistakes when trying to figure it out. Sometimes, people make assumptions about what is true without having all the information, which can lead to misunderstandings. Antonio Tabucchi's *Indian Nocturne* is a book that talks about how hard it can be for people to understand themselves. The characters in the story have trouble figuring out what they want and need, and they feel like they are in a dream. This makes it hard for them to find their true selves. The book shows that people are not always in control of their thoughts and feelings, and this makes it difficult for them to understand what they really want.

The book *Indian Nocturne* is about a man who is violently attacked while he is searching for his friend Xavier in the streets of Indian cities. The story shows how the man feels scared, alone, and uncomfortable in different parts of India. It seems like what's happening is real, but also like it's not quite real. Each chapter starts in the middle of a conversation, which makes the person telling the story seem strange and mysterious. The author, Tabucchi, uses a technique in the book to help readers understand how hard it is to find yourself by looking at others. The person telling the story in the book is not named and seems to be going through a lot of pain and confusion. This shows how difficult it is to figure out who you are. The way the story is told makes it clear that the person telling it is not feeling completely sure about their thoughts and feelings.

The way the main character in the book thinks is not very clear, and the ending of the book is confusing. This makes it hard for readers to understand how the story is

put together. The different parts of the story, the characters, and what the main character is trying to do, are not easy to understand. This might be why it's hard to read. Some people might think that the story is like a dream because of how it's written. For instance, reviewing the novella David Watson writes:

The book, it states, is insomnia . . . . It is also a journey through real locations that the author himself has visited. It is as if this topography, 'with the force that the real possesses, might throw some light on this nocturne in which a shadow is sought'. This real , as we well learn, is merely maya, illusion; if you throw light on the shadow, it disappears. (58)

Watson, referencing the highlights of the novella, points out the book as a journey of the author, shedding the light upon the illusion of reality. In other words, Watson is conspicuous that Antonio Tabucchi's contention to project character like an Italian character, the protagonist, who ultimately finds everything finding nothing, is to show the veil of Maya, an illusion. Contradictorily, he argues, "The traveller is searching for his lost friend and alter ego, Xavier, following a set of vague clues and his own, already faded memory, retracing a journey which is his own journey, which is perhaps taking place for the first time" (58). On the one hand, Watson is arguing the traveler is searching for his other self who, in another way, is again searching for himself; on the other hand, he is claiming Tabucchi is reflecting upon the delusion of reality. The problem with Watson's claim is itself puzzling because there is no connection to resolve who is searching for what? In this relevance, the research points out Watson is right in revealing the search for self but quite irrelevant in defining the logical connection between the illusion of reality and searching for self. If he is right, therefore, in defining the fact of reality, then he should have remarked that the search of the traveler itself was an illusion.

Reviewing the literary dimensions of Antonio Tabucchi, Anna Botta, from a different perspective, illustrates the journey to discover others as the background to finding the self. Discussing the three different Tabucchi's novellas: *The Edge of the Horizon*, *Indian Nocturne*, and *Requiem*, Botta argues, "In all three works, it quickly becomes evident that the quest for the other functions as a pretext for protagonists to reconstruct the story of their own unconscious and its phantasms" (423). Moreover, foregrounding the fictive spectrum of Tabucchi, she claims, "the horizon of our knowledge is not the outside or the future but the inside, one's own past; his fiction explores the line of that horizon which we carry in our eyes, which moves as we move" (423). Botta thinks that Tabucchi's books can help us understand how people see things differently. This is because what we understand depends on who is looking at it.

Botta's point of view is somewhat convincing, but she does not talk about why people remember things from the past even when they are in the present. This makes her argument incomplete. In this research paper, critical distancing will be significantly profuse to answer the unanswered question Botta left behind. To answer the question, the research will embody Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, providing the structural formation of the psychological development of the child.

Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst, in his seminal paper, "The Mirror Stage," most specifically—extracted from the book *Ecrits*, projects the structural version of child development where he defines the construction of 'I' or the formation of identity. Defining Lacanian notion of "The Mirror Stage", Jane Gallop assesses:

The mirror stage is a turning point. After it the subject's relation to him is always mediated through a totalizing image which has come from outside. For example, the mirror image becomes a totalizing ideal which organizes and

orients the self. But since the "self" is necessarily a total division between an inside and an outside - there is no "self" before the mirror stage. (120-121)

The images comprehended by the body in the mirror stage are the undefeated and compound organization of perceived icons. In other words, the images received by the body totalize the whole notion of self, which is complete in itself. Indeed, Lacan conspicuously presents the formation of 'I' as, in fact, a delusion rather than the formation of identity, as such, the reality beneath is vehemently a certain understanding of complete wholeness. Gallop further remarks, "It is a turning point in the chronology of a self, but it is also the origin, the moment of constitution of that self. What therefore precedes it" (121). The centrality of self and the origin of the sense of 'I' indecisively paves the way for the next stage of the child which further complicates the understanding of the self.

Tabucchi's *Indian Nocturne* does not show the stages of growth that Lacan talks about. But the experiences of the characters in the story still have a strong effect on them, just like in the mirror stage. Even though the story doesn't follow the same structure as the stages of growth, it still shows how people face experiences that affect them in important ways. Lacan's theories are useful for understanding the protagonist's journey in *Indian Nocturne*. The protagonist is searching for his friend, but he ends up discovering things about himself instead.

The protagonist in the novella has a clear goal of finding his Portuguese friend in India, but when he finally meets a woman and tells her a made-up story from his novel, it becomes unclear whether he actually achieves his original goal or not. This confusion can leave the reader feeling unsure about what really happened. In this connection, Gary Krist argues, "Thus the book, in undermining the idea of direction or intentionality, becomes, in my eyes at least, a celebration of the serendipitous. This

narrator doesn't find what he's looking for, but he does find what he isn't looking for” (666). Describing the features of the novella, Gary clarifies that the resolving quality addresses the finding unsearched element of life. Yet, he distinguishes between the literary and real-world offering her analysis:

The book takes the form of a series of conversations between the narrator and the various people he finds as he traces Xavier's tortuous path across India . . . . What all of these conversations share, however, is a sense of partial understanding that is so common in real-life encounters yet so rare in fiction.(666)

Gary can differentiate between real-life and fictional experiences, but he cannot understand that imaginary experiences can also become real, and fiction can help to understand reality.

Tabucchi's protagonist in *Indian Nocturne* is on a quest to discover an unknown part of himself. This protagonist is similar to Tabucchi himself, as he was always searching for answers during his life. The protagonist could be seen as a representation of the answers Tabucchi was seeking. Antonio Tabucchi confesses, “I must say that *Indian Nocturne* is a novel that has left me unquiet and unsatisfied. For many years I wrote other books on other topics, but I carried within me a problem that I could not manage to solve. Simply stated, the problem was this: I knew that I was also "somebody else," but I did not know where to find my other self” (175).

Tabucchi may have been trying to depict his own confused self or his search for another part of himself, but it is not clear. However, the way he portrays the unusual experiences of the protagonist is fascinating and prompts one to ask deeper questions.

As the story progresses, the main character starts to uncover the secrets of his friend, Xavier. He learns from Vimals Sar that Xavier was going through a tough

time, both mentally and financially, and was not in a good state. When he dares to ask her why he was in rafty mode and what sort of business he was involved with, she replies, “I don’t know . . . he didn’t tell me anything. Sometimes he wouldn’t say anything for days and days, then all of a sudden he’d get restless and flare up in a furious rage” (10). In this conversation, a sense of the turbulent realities of human beings comes front. Turbulent in the sense that there is an uncertain confrontation that stimulates the psychology of individuals, paving the way towards the restless situation without predilections.

The protagonist is searching for his friend but he is unaware of his friend’s personal details. The business his friend was associated with, the psychological state of his friend, and the uncommon interest that his friend was fascinated with, letters from Madras, for instance, these facts were underneath the mysterious land of India and the key to unlocking were missing. More interestingly, the seeker himself is unknown whom is he searching for. He says Xavier is his friend; nonetheless, he even does not have very common information about his friend. He came from Italy to search for his friend with whom he has no good relationship. He got to know about his missing through Vimala Sar. She, in fact, found his address in Xavier’s diary and informed him. The story demystifies that the protagonist was remoted by an external agency. To be more precise, his coming to India was powered by some other character, and neither was his intention. In other words, the protagonist is working as a mechanism rather than the self as a whole. His performances are the outcome of what other people say. Perhaps, this might be the reason he is lacking what he desires to acquire.

In this relevance, Tabucchi, I assume, is trying to expose the causes or the energy that instigates human beings to participate in a voyage that is directed by

particular other. The journey of the protagonist is the journey of human beings, being actively participated but motivated by others. How cordially one engages in the promises of life is determined by the forces imposed by others. Why it was necessary to search for his friend if internally we ask the protagonist, the answer would be, I guess because Vimala Sar said. Isn't it a problem in itself? How is it possible to achieve something which is desired by others? Let it be okay, but is it worth searching that one does not desire? This is the problem with the protagonist in the novella. Of course, the search is necessary; nevertheless, why the protagonist if he is not concerned? These questions are quite subjective but within the premises of this research, I endeavor to forge an alternative to show the reason behind his meaningless search and how it becomes meaningful.

The story slowly reveals the mystery of the protagonist's friend, Xavier, but it is still unclear. The protagonist tries to gather information, but it only provides bits and pieces and doesn't fully solve the mystery of Xavier. In fact, as the narrator moves on, the situation becomes more chronic and blurry. When the protagonist insists Vimala Sar make an effort to recall the events regarding Xavier's association, she replies, "he was a good man, he meant well. It was his nature. He had a sad destiny" (11). The information is shattered, what happened really is not conspicuous. The fragments work as an apparatus to knock on the door which is locked from the outside. What Vimala meant by 'good man,' who was not good at her and what was the nature that destined him to be disappeared is mysterious. Moreover, as she says Xavier was associated with 'The Theosophical Society,' she also reveals that "Xavier had written a great deal . . . then one day he burnt everything. Here in this hotel, he got a copper basin and burnt everything" (12). Open it may be as information, but doubtful in terms of finding reality. Vimala says many things but remains silent not

saying many things. The point is the psychological tension is eminently intensified by Vimala's answer. This process is the crudest thing among the events that the protagonist goes through.

With the comprehension of blur information, the protagonist is left to move on in search of the one who is more opaque than the mystery itself. This is something like searching for a drop of water in an ocean as S. T Coleridge in his famous poem 'The Rime of the Ancient Marine' writes: "Water, water, everywhere, Nor any drop to drink" (Lines 125,126). The pieces of information are everywhere but not sufficient enough to uproot reality. Probably, Tabucchi has deliberately used such scattered information to delude and delay the faithfulness of the human psyche. Moreover, to uncommonly portray the dark and secret aspects of the unconscious mind, the writer might have foreshadowed these very details. The gruesome faculties or, as Jacques Lacan argues, ". . . the unconscious is the whole structure of language" (113). To illustrate the unconscious domain of the human mind, the writer has illustrated the information in such a vague and incomplete motion. Since our mind encompasses the layer of data, these messages are stored in a form of language; and possibly, these languages are the master key to diluting the information.

The point is with the help of playfulness of language, in the name of information, the narrator is trying to depict the unconscious state of mind. These data are rendered by an external agency but more importantly, overlapped in the mind of the protagonist himself. To be more precise, as Charles D. Hackett mentions, "Lacan resists systematic schematization because the unconscious cannot be known in any clear or objective manner but is known only partially and indirectly in its manifestations or symptoms" (187). In this sense, these pieces of information are the unconscious state of mind of the protagonist, and Vimala is working as a triggering

factor to resonate with the unconscious psyche of the protagonist. With these faculties, the shreds of evidence expose that Tabucchi is trying to show how random information can be an imprint of human unconsciousness. To be more specific, Tabucchi is trying to portray human unconsciousness through the narrative technique.

We need to carefully examine the information in the story because it is full of unclear pieces of information. Vimala is not the only one who provides ambiguous details. The protagonist becomes nervous and tense when he describes Xavier to the doctor at the hospital where he was admitted a year ago. He, then, puts his irrelevant statement: “you can forget your European notions, they are an arrogant luxury” (14). The statement is totally out of context and so was his question, if not his attitude. When the conversation, however, proceeds, the question-answer symbolizes indifference. For instance, when the doctor asks, “He was a friend of yours?” (15), he replies, “In a way . . .” (15). Why was the protagonist unable to say, yes, if he was really there to find his friend? To befriend in a way or to befriend makes a huge difference. In a way can be suggested as an optional whereas ‘Friend’ means absolute. In this difference, Tabucchi, I guess, is showing how the protagonist is distancing himself from his friend. But interestingly, the hero is trying to differentiate himself from the same person whom he is searching for, traveling a long distance and impatiently trying to trace the location.

In the novella, the protagonist's behavior is odd and difficult to understand. For example, when the doctor asks for a photo of Xavier, he feels it's not enough and instead, he relies on his memory to recall all the details. He remembers the exact time when Xavier was brought to the doctor during the monsoon, but the doctor couldn't remember the patient well. Indeed, from a doctor's perspective, at least, it is acceptable. However, the way the protagonist emphasizes his memorial capacity and

as far as his description is concerned, the images are still inadequate to substantiate the appearance. Denying having photographs, he describes: “I only had my memory: and my memory was mine alone, it wasn’t describable, it was the look I remembered on Xavier’s face . . . . He’s the same height a I am, thin, with straight hairs; he’s about my age; sometimes he has an expression like yours, Doctor, because if he smiles he looks sad” (15-16). The things the protagonist remembers and describes are interesting but not enough to solve the mystery completely. There are two important things to consider: memory and images. These are connected to other parts of the story like the unconscious mind and language used. The next sections will focus on these ideas.

The way the unconscious mind, language, and memories work together is important in conveying a symbolic message in the novella. This is similar to what Jacques Lacan talks about as the different stages of human development. As Lacan points out the mirror stage, the imaginary stage, and the symbolic stage are the three crucial stages of human development, according to Hazard Adams, Lacan says, “In the mirror stage the child discovers its own image, which becomes other to the self, thereby establishing subjectivity” (897). The Lacanian analysis argues that the mirror stage is the process of constructing a sense of ‘I,’ through a process of mirroring. This practice symbolically resonates in the novella as well. The protagonist tries to map Xavier, replicating his own identity. In a deep sense, it is conspicuous that symbolically Tabucchi is trying to show how the protagonist understands himself, mirroring Xavier.

Xavier is physically different but deeply rooted in the body of the protagonist. In fact, the protagonist’s comprehension of self or a sense of ‘I’ was a profound understanding of Xavier. Tabucchi was conscious of reflecting the Lacanian mirror

stage; however, the protagonist, when he was with Xavier, was actually in the mirror stage, psychologically. Indeed, Lacan has structurally allocated time for this stage as he puts it, “This event can take place . . . from the age of six months, and its repetition has often made me reflect upon the startling spectacle of the infant in front of the mirror” (1). In the novella, the protagonist is not really like a six-month-old child, but the way he sees Xavier is similar to how a child in the mirror stage understands themselves through their reflection. The protagonist sees Xavier as a complete whole, just like a child sees themselves as complete when they see their reflection. This means that the protagonist, in a way, was not in the mirror stage but in something like a mirage of the mirror stage when he was with Xavier. It is because, as Lacan assesses:

This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the infant stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject. (2)

The assumption that the child makes before entering the realm of linguistic playfulness, is a complete understanding of self. But as soon as the child starts mirroring himself and looking at his mother, there starts a new dimension, the formation of a sense of self or the formation of ‘I.’ In this relevance, more importantly, Xavier, instead of being a friend, was his mother with whom he was deeply rooted. Perhaps, this might be the reason that the protagonist is quite photographic in his memory. He does not have photographs but the memory is so connected with the image of his friend, Xavier.

Indeed, the state of mind that the protagonist going through resembles the mirror stage. It is important to note that this phase is not constant in the human process. The traces of this stage works as the foundation of human beings, as Lacan argues:

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic – and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development. (3)

Lacan illustrates that the mirror stage is fundamental for the mental development of the child. This development, of course, has a significant impact on the psychological process in the future. This reality has been projected in the novel as well. The protagonist goes through several searches. He finds Vimala, the doctor, and some other characters; nonetheless, their pieces of information are insufficient to detect his friend. He travels to many places, Mumbai, Madras, and Delhi, to name a few, and talks with strangers on irrelevant topics. For instance, when a distant sound comes asking what did you say while describing the travel, the protagonist says, “I was referring to our bodies . . . Perhaps they’re like a suitcase; we carry ourselves around” (33). Moreover, out of nowhere, he asks the man “Do you know Mantegna?” (33), replying ‘No’ the man puts another question: “is he Indian?” (33). When the protagonist answers ‘Italian’ the man says, “I only know the English . . . the only Europeans I know are English” (33). Interestingly, when the man says “I thought he might be a friend of yours” (33), he replies, “Mantegna is a painter, but I never knew

him, he's been dead a few hundred years. He was dressed in white, but he wasn't Moslem that much I had understood" (34). Their conversation is neither contextual nor textual. The man asks illogical questions but the protagonist's question is no less absurd than the man's question. What is happening in the character is the problem with the symbolic interplay of language and meaning.

The words used in the conversation between the main character and the old man are making it difficult for them to understand each other. They are both using language in a playful way and this is causing confusion because they are too focused on the words instead of their actual meaning. As Adams notes: "In the symbolic stage the child enters language, and the subject, now linguistic, is continually defer down the chain of signifiers. Subjectivity is thus always on the move and is formed only in and as dialogue, which is never ending except in death" (897). This condition is exactly replicated in the conversation between the man and the protagonist. These characters are speaking through unconscious thought, which is penalizing the mode of their conversation. Moreover, the unsequential records of answer-question are the resemblance of the struggle of human beings in the realm of the symbolic stage of psychological development. Their discussion is controlled by unconscious thought. As Lacan assesses, "The unconscious . . . in a tone that is all the more evident in proportion as the speaker is less capable of justifying what he means – the unconscious needs time to reveal itself" (72). That is why both the characters: the man and the protagonist, keep discussing without logic. However, what it has to do with the protagonist's search? Not so cool be the answer, even though, a way out it could be, because a significant remark upon the protagonist's psychological state can be traced, which is significant to deal with the motif of his search.

The main character has come to India to find his friend Xavier, but he is not sure what he is looking for. He feels stressed and confused because he doesn't know where to start. He keeps searching, but he doesn't find much information about his friend. He's motivated by his feelings rather than logical thinking. Thus, he thinks: "I realised that after my rather mysterious note, my telephone calls, the afternoon visit in which I had referred only 'missing person' I could hardly carry on in this cryptic and alarmist way. I would have to explain myself clearly, precisely. But what did I have to ask, after all?" (49). These lines expose that the protagonist is searching for his friend without any clue. He decides to search in an appropriate way; however, he is still unaware of what to ask. In this sense, the protagonist is transcended with the unconscious function of his mind because as Habib, explaining Lacan, writes, "The unconscious is much a product of signifying systems, and indeed is itself as much a signifying system, as the conscious mind: both are like language in their openness, their constant deferral of meaning, their susceptibility to changing definition, and their constitution as a system of relations" (590). Lacan argues that the unconscious deeply resembles the functionality of the language, which is slippery and untrustworthy. Since language is incapable of conveying the message rightly, so is the case of understanding the world through it. Here, the point is since the protagonist has to understand the hidden clues through the language, he is incapable to understand what to search for and what to ask for. His search is incomplete because he is at the nexus of the symbolic paradigm. In fact, he is unconsciously searching for someone with the help of something that never results in his finding.

The main character felt complete when he was with his friend Xavier, but now that he's lost, he's searching for him. This is like when a child grows up and starts to understand the world through language and symbols. M.A.R Habib, explaining

Lacan, writes, “The child, in passing from the imaginary to the symbolic order, continues to long for the security and wholeness it previously felt: it is now no longer in full possession of its mother and of entities in the world; rather, it is distinguished from them in and through a network of signification” (589). In this sense, the loss of Xavier, for the protagonist, is the loss of his complete wholeness, the rupture of his *imago*, or in other words, the detachment from his mother.

Xavier might be physically different from him; however, psychologically connected so strongly that in the puzzle of linguistic playfulness, he is still searching for his lost one. As he says, “I am looking for someone, . . . His name is Xavier Janata Pinto, he’s been missing [for] almost a year. The last I heard of him he was in Bombay, but I have a good reason to believe that he may have been in contact with the Theosophical Society and that is what brings me here” (49), he is logically claiming something with poor evidence. It is clear that the last time when he knew his friend was in Bombay, but the point to remember is that it was one year ago and actually that was his last knowing but possibly could not be of Xavier. Can it be possible for a man to stay in the same place for a way long year? Perhaps or Perhaps not. Whatsoever the case is but the important thing is why is he still incapable to find his friend even after his constant struggle?

The main character is living in a world where language is very important and shapes how people see things. He wants something very much, but he doesn't have a way to make it happen. Actually, his search is similar to what Lacan says a constant struggle to return to the *imago* state. “The child’s desire . . . passes in an unceasing movement along an infinite chain of signifiers, in search of unity, security, of ultimate meaning, in an ever-elusive signified, and immaturely clinging to the fictive notion of unity selfhood that begins in the imaginary phase” (Lacan 589-590), similarly, the

protagonist is searching for his friend which is symbolically a search to reach his state of complete wholeness, the lap of his mother.

The main character feels like he has been separated from his friend Xavier in the same way a child might feel when they are separated from their mother. This separation represents the main character entering a new stage of development where language and symbols are very important. Therefore, since “The child exists in an alienated condition, its relationship with objects always highly mediated and controlled by social structures at the heart of whose operations is language” (590). The protagonist is detached from his comfort zone. He is alienated and he is constantly displaced by the interplay of signifying process. In this scenario, his search can be traced as his will to return to the mirror stage, but the social codification has become the major obstruction.

The main character struggles with understanding the way people use language in society. Sometimes he can't understand what's happening around him, even if he is not completely unable to understand reality. This novella shows how people can have trouble understanding each other because of the limits of language. For instance, during the travel, while moving towards Mangalore by bus at night, when the bus stops, the protagonist observes abnormal phenomena. While stretching his legs, climbing down from the bus—as it was waiting for the passengers of Mudabiri and Karkala—the protagonist happens to see, “Sitting on the bench at the far end was a boy of about ten with short trousers and sandals. He had a monkey with him, hanging onto his shoulders, its head is hidden in his hair and its little hands clasped together round the neck of its master in an attitude of affection and fear” (63). The protagonist finds it strange because the boy alone in such a place with a monkey at night was quite unusual. However, more terrific it becomes when their eyes stuck to one another

and exchanges smile because only then the protagonist realizes “ with a sense of horror that the tiny creature he [the boy] was carrying in his shoulders was not a monkey but a human beings” (64). When the protagonist carefully observes that human, the nightmare he confronts has been projected in the novella in the following ways:

Some atrocity of nature or terrible disease had shrivelled up his body, distorting shape and size. The limbs were twisted and deformed with no proportion or sense other than that of an appalling grotesque. The face too, which I now glimpsed amid the hair of his carrier, had not escaped the devastation of the disease. The rough skin and wound-like wrinkles gave him that monkeyish look.(64)

The crippling character is demonish in terms of its physical features. The material body of the character is not similar to that of humans. Moreover, “the only thing that was still human about that face were the eyes: two very small, sharp, intelligent eyes, which darted uneasily in every direction as if terrified by a great and imminent danger, wild and fear” (64). The differences as a result of the observation suggest that there are differences when something is explored closely. To be more reflective of the premises of the novella, the conspicuous side of the observation initially gives a different perception of the protagonist.

When the main character first sees a strange character, he thinks it might be an animal like a monkey, but then he realizes it's actually a person. This shows how our first impressions can be wrong, and how we can be misled by what we see around us. The main character's thinking changes when he realizes his mistake, and this shows how language is important in shaping our thoughts and understanding of the world. Since, as Fathi Hasan Malkawi writes, “. . . there is no doubt that the relationship

between language and thought is reciprocal and integrative. It is reciprocal in that one affects the other, and it is integrative in that each one needs the other; whereby the richness of one would enrich the other, and each one contributes to enhancing the other” (137), the thought of the character is a supplement to develop a linguistic code, Language.

Moreover, in the process of comprehension, “Language serves thought when an individual needs to express his or her thought and bring it out into the linguistic realm, where the idea becomes a subject of communication” (137). Malkawi suggests that thought is expressed in terms of language in the meaning-making process. In this premise, the protagonist is expressing his thought through language which is, in Derridian understanding, more slippery and inconsistent. As Derrida argues, “. . . there is no transcendental or privileged signified and that the domain or play of signification henceforth has no limit, one must reject even the concept and word “sign” itself—which is precisely what cannot be done” (97). Derrida elucidates the impossibility of fixed meaning through language. He focuses that the language itself is capable of transforming into an irreducible transcendental element with multiple meanings.

The reason for talking about language is to understand how Tabucchi uses it in the novella to show that sometimes words and ideas can be unclear or uncertain. The main character's thoughts are closely related to language and they affect each other. Moreover, as Ellie Ragland Sullivan writes, Lacan views language as acquired in a series of temporal conjunctions and disjunctions, then” (49). In this instance, the protagonist's change of comprehension from animal to monkey is a resemblance to the slipperiness of the language. The point is that the shift of images in the mind of the protagonist is possible because psychological comprehension in the linguistic

realm is deeply rooted in language. Therefore, since the language is slippery so is the comprehension of the protagonist. In this relevance, the grotesque body of the man is the result of linguistic interplay, symbolically because the protagonist is in a symbolic realm where the language rules and functions as a critical apparatus to comprehend the world. In this sense, Tabucchi's attempt to show the shifted images is to expose the delusive reality of human beings in the symbolic stage.

The protagonist, in fact, is searching for a way out to overcome the illusionary state of linguistic space. He is in a constant rummage to be back in his mirror stage where there was complete wholeness, a continual bond of self. This desire is the driving mechanism for the protagonist. These happenstances are implicitly incorporated into the novella through the dream of the protagonist. Once he dreams where he confronts a prophet who says: "Xavier doesn't exist, . . . He is nothing but a ghost. . . We are all dead, haven't you realised that yet? I am dead, and this city is dead, and the battles, the sweat, the blood, the glory and my power, all dead, all utterly in vain" (77-78). This might be a dream but actually, in a deep sense, it is his desire because as Lacan argues, "the dream is made for the recognition . . . of desire . . . the elaboration of the dream is nourished by desire" (178). In this connection, the protagonist has the desire to meet his friend and it is possible only through death. It is similar to the Lacanian proposition that returning to the mirror stage is only possible after death because the chain of signifiers constantly and consistently holds its firmness to human beings till they exist.

Some people think that the main character's desire to find his friend is so strong that it appears in his dreams, but it might be impossible for him to achieve his goal until he dies. This idea shows that going back to a simpler time in life is impossible for humans. It's hard to understand this reality because language is very

powerful and can be confusing. This can make it difficult to understand things and find meaning in life. It is not to argue that it is impossible to understand this hard-core faculty but to suggest that the mirror stage is so lovely for human beings that they always try to return to this stage. However, since the child enters into the symbolic stage, the swampy foundation grabs and grasps their limbs, ultimately submerging them until they surrender their life. This is what Tabucchi wants to suggest from the dream of the protagonist. In other words, to reflect the dream with ghosts and dead people in the protagonist's sleep is to illuminate the impossibility of regaining complete wholeness of the mirror stage. Moreover, to search for the mirror stage is to search for the complete 'I,' and the inability to return to the mirror stage is the inability to find the complete self.

It might be impossible to find the exact thing the main character is looking for, but there is a chance he can find some clues that lead to it. This means that language can be playful and sometimes hide the truth, but it can also leave hints that point to what's real. In the novella, the main character is connected to language and its meanings, so he might not be able to find his friend directly. But he can use small details that are connected to reality to understand what's happening. When we use words to stand for things, we create symbols, and language is connected to this symbolic process. As Marcus Pound, reuttering Lacan, writes, "The symbolic orders our perception as we enter the chain of signifiers that constitute language. The moment we enter the symbolic a gap opens up between our empirical body and our voice" (511). These diminutive components, therefore, can be anything that paves the way for the evidence to find Xavier, for instance, the people, the places, the notebook, the guidebook, and some others.

Out of many, the guidebook that the protagonist has, *India, a Travel Survival Kit*, is one of the significant examples. The guidebook is important because it helps to find temporary meanings, just like what was mentioned before. Language is powerful and can make it difficult for people to understand the ultimate truth because it's always changing. But by following the clues that language leaves, we can get closer to temporary meanings. To do this, we need certain tools. In a linguistic regime, the compromise with linguistic playfulness is at stake and in this novella the guidebook is. To be more precise, the guidebook helps the protagonist to know about the physical description of the places where he visits in quest of his friend but the guidebook is incapable of exactly underpinning the location of his friend. In this connection, Tabucchi's articulation of the guidebook has significant meaning to show how dependable human beings are and what sort of agencies they use to attain their desire. The protagonist is trying his best to find his friend or in the Lacanian sense, his mother, using several apparatuses like the guidebook and information from other people; nonetheless, he is incapable to procure it.

The novella ends with a baffling status of the protagonist which is beyond the expectation. As Charles D. Klopp writes, “. . . when Xavier, the apparent drug smuggler who has been the object of the narrator's pursuit throughout the narrative, is finally cornered and confronted, he is revealed - in a turn that defies conventional logic - to be the same person as the narrator” (334). Charles concludes that Xavier is no other than the narrator or the protagonist himself but he fails to talk about lack of self-identity. Though, He further claims:

For such characters, even a "small misunderstanding" can change one's destiny from positive to negative and one's life from banal to tragic or from upright to iniquitous. As a result, the roles of miscreant and investigator, judge and

accused, hero and villain are interchangeable, not fixed, and it is pointless as well as uncharitable to attempt to divide humankind into sinners on the one hand and sinned against on the other. (334)

Charles thinks that when the protagonist discovers the truth about Xavier, it changes the way he thinks about things. Even a small thing can have a big effect on how he sees things. Charles believes this because he thinks that Xavier and the protagonist are very similar. He might be right if we accept his basic idea. But it is also important to consider what the protagonist is really looking for. This becomes clearer when he meets Christine and tells her a made-up story about a novel he is writing. The theme of the novel is expressed in the following ways:

The central idea is that . . . I am someone who has lost his way in India . . . .

There is someone else who is looking for me, but I have no intention of letting him find me. I saw him arrive and I have followed him day by day, we could say. I know his likes and dislikes, his enthusiasms and his hesitations, his generosity and his fears. I keep him more or less under control. (107)

The protagonist through his explanation clarifies that he himself is searching and being searched. He is the same guy whom he is searching for. In fact, in this narration, he is describing his situation from Xavier's perspective. This is more transparent when he says, "He, on the contrary, knows almost nothing about me. He has a few vague clues: a letter, a few witnesses, confused or reticent, notes that doesn't say much at all: signs, fragments which he laboriously tries to piece together" (107). These lines suggest that actually Xavier knows everything about the protagonist or from the narrator's perspective he knows what the protagonist is searching for. This narration changes the entire direction of the story. It discloses that Xavier is not someone who is other than himself because reasoning the quest of the protagonist he says, "Perhaps

he's looking for a past, an answer to something. Perhaps he would like to grasp something that escaped him in the past. In a way he is looking for himself" (108). If it is analyzed from the Lacanian perspective the narration ostensibly represents that the protagonist is willing to go back to the mirror stage, to revisit the lost self. As Lacan suggests that

Movement of the mirror phase is from the child's actual insufficiency through the anticipation of its entry into the symbolic order to the child's assumption of the protection of a unified identity; this identity, however, is alienating: it is fictive, a spatialized projection into unity of the child's actually temporally discrete self. (592)

This stage is so adorable throughout the life and till the death human beings try to return back to this state, to regain this pleasure though it is imaginary and fictitious. In these backdrops, the protagonist of the novella subtly exposes that he is willing to regain his lost self which is why he is searching for his lost friend. In fact, the friend is none other than himself but not a mature self, an imaginary self that was formed in his mirror stage instead.

Tabucchi projects such a protagonist whose statements are clear enough to speculate that he and Xavier are the same. However, why it was so difficult and confusing through his journey to exactly identify and find his friend? The statement that the protagonist makes through his narration makes it conspicuous. As he says, "He wasn't finding me partly for a very simple reason that I had assumed another name. And he manages to find out what it is. In the end, it was not impossible to find out because it was a name that had to do with himself, in the past. Except that I had altered the name, camouflaged it" (110). The protagonist fails to find his imaginary self because since he entered into the symbolic stage the playfulness of the language

concurrently deludes him. The imaginary self is derogated by the chain of the signifier. As Hackett articulates,

The child is introduced to the symbolic while suffering the alienation of the imaginary. He or she inevitably attempts to heal the narcissistic wound of the imaginary with reference to the remedies of the symbolic. The child seeks to become a whole self in terms of the reality into which he or she is plunged in language.(187)

The difficulty of understanding the self is because of the structural code that the child uses as a medium of communication and so is the case with the protagonist. In fact, the protagonist got a different name in the process of identification which resulted in the confusing state of Xavier's recognition.

The imaginary self of the protagonist is a lost self. The protagonist has achieved other selves, therefore, "The initial alienation of the self, the imaginary identification of the ego with mirror-image, is now recreated in the symbolic through the use of "objectifying" language" (188). Moreover, "Through this medium human beings tend to construct a language world in which they are vindicated, released from the fear they knew as infants that they may not be seen as the perfect baby reflected in the mirror" (188). The main character in the novella is searching for something that he cannot find. He is searching for his friend, but he eventually realizes that his friend is actually himself. The story shows how language can create an incomplete version of ourselves that drives us to keep searching for something that we may never find.

When we are young, language can make us believe in things that are not real. In the end, the main character finds happiness in this realization and stops searching for his friend.

When a child learns language, they may feel incomplete and unsatisfied. But they can overcome this by realizing something important. In the story, the main character stops looking for his friend Xavier because he realizes Xavier was just a part of his imagination. ‘What was his name?’ ‘His name was Xavier,’ I answered. ‘Like the missionary?’ he asked. And then he said: ‘It’s not an English name, that’s for sure, is it?’ (5). Actually, this realization is the real way through which the protagonist satisfies himself at the end. It will be appropriate to recall James J. DiCenso: “For Lacan, the task of psychoanalysis is not to pursue the chimera of an unmediated reality but to foster the development of the truth of the subject as an intersubjective or relational process occurring within the symbolic structures of culture” (54). Truth is something intersubjective. It is never an objective fact. Therefore, rather than understanding and striving to search for objective truth, it is always better to quest for subjective reality through realization. This bitter reality has been understood by the protagonist so the novella could end on a happy note.

To sum up, Antonio Tabucchi’s novel *Indian Nocturne* is a quest of imaginary lost self. The sense of ‘I,’ perceived in the mirror stage of the protagonist, is lost when he enters into the symbolic stage. This lost self is replicated in his friend Xavier in the novel. Despite the fact that the protagonist strives a lot to find Xavier, ultimately he realizes that his friend is none other than his imaginary self that he had achieved during his mirror stage. The combination of Xavier and the protagonist is similar to the relationship between a mother and a child in the mirror stage.

The protagonist struggles a lot to find Xavier but the blur information is strong enough to rupture his robust enthusiasm. These happenstances, in the novel—as I argue, are the symbolic representation of the chaotic space created by the slipperiness of the language in the symbolic stage of a child. The protagonist could not find Xavier

because the playfulness of the language deludes him and throw him into the nexus of the linguistic realm. His strong passion to meet Xavier is similar to the Lacanian concept of a child who ever dreams to achieve the wholeness that was during the mirror stage in the lap of his mother. The ghostly dream of the protagonist and his inquisitive nature are simplified example that shows she was searching for the best way to achieve the lost ones.

The protagonist, creating a fictional story, describes that Xavier is actually he himself. This is rather a sense of realization. The protagonist ultimately stops searching because he realizes that Xavier is not his lost friend but rather his imaginary self lost when he entered his symbolic stage. The novel is a replication of human psychological problems that each individual goes through. Tabucchi, through the narration of the unnamed protagonist, exposes the difficulty that a child confronts in the symbolic stage. Tabucchi's *Indian Nocturne*, therefore, is the exposition of the quest for self, which is lost during the mirror stage of a child.

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