

**BINARY OPPOSITION OF ALIF AND VIKRAM
CHARACTERS IN *ALIF THE UNSEEN* NOVEL**

A GRADUATING PAPER

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Gaining
the Bachelor Degree in English Literature**



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2024

A FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

I certify that this graduating paper is definitely my own work. I am completely responsible for the content of this graduating paper. Other researcher's opinion or finding included in this research is quoted or cited in accordance with ethical standards.

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Saya menyatakan bahwa skripsi tersebut sudah dapat diajukan pada sidang Munaqosyah untuk memenuhi salah satu syarat memperoleh gelar Sarjana Sastra Inggris.
Atas perhatiannya, kami mengucapkan terima kasih.

Wassalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb

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MOTTO

وَالِى رَبِّكَ فَارْغَبْ

"dan hanya kepada Tuhanmulah engkau berharap."

(QS. Al-Insyirah 94: Ayat 8)



DEDICATION

I dedicate my graduating paper to:

My dearest self

My beloved family

My lecturers in English Department



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Assalamu'alaikum wr.wb

My greatest grateful appreciation is to Allah SWT, who has been giving me His blessing so that I can finish my graduating paper, entitled “Binary Opposition of Alif and Vikram Characters in *Alif the Unseen* Novel”. In addition, I would like to express my gratitude to those who have helped and supported my research; they are:

1. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Wildan, M.A., serving as the Dean of the Faculty of Adab and Cultural Sciences at UIN Sunan Kalijaga.
2. Ulyati Retno Sari, S.S., M.Hum, as the Head of the English Department and my research advisor. I am deeply thankful for the guidance, support, and motivation provided throughout my paper's completion. Your generosity of time is truly valued.
3. Dr. Witriani, S.S., M.Hum, as my academic advisor during my college years. Your assistance has been invaluable.
4. The lecturers of the English Department, including Dr. Danial Hidayatullah, SS., M.Hum, Aninda Aji Siwi, S.Pd., M.Pd., Dr. Arif Budiman, S.S., M.A., Bambang Hariyanto, S.S., MA., Ph.D., Dr. Dwi Margo Yuwono, M.Hum., Febriyanti Dwiratna Lestari, SS., MA, Harsiwi Fajar Sari, SS, M.A, Dr. Ubaidillah, S.S., M.Hum., Nisa Syuhda M.Hum, Rosiana Rizqy Wijayanti, S.Hum., MA, Amy Griffin. I express my gratitude for the valuable knowledge imparted to me; the learning experience has been truly enriching.

5. To my cherished family, I extend my thanks for the prayers and motivation so that I can complete my study. Your love is deeply appreciated.
6. My dear friends in the Bramantyo Family – Vika Fitriyana, Eni Ambarwati, Eva Elmiyah, Najiha Yustika Ghina Puspita, Siti Sholihah, and Rizqiani Azizaturrohman. I am immensely grateful for your continuous companionship and support. Meeting individuals as kind, lovely, wonderful, and humorous as you all have been a blessing; you are my other family. Let's be friends till Jannah.
7. My beloved EXO members, Kim Minseok, Kim Junmyeon, Zhang Yixing, Byun Baekhyun, Kim Jongdae, Park Chanyeol, Do Kyungsoo, Kim Jongin, Oh Sehun. Thank you for being my support system and my mood booster in the hard time. We are one, EXO saranghaja.
8. Rosa Rahmawarti, a close friend in the English Department, I express my thanks for consistently being a supportive partner in various situations, significantly contributing to my college experience.
9. My esteemed reviewers – Ghulam, Farah, Reva, Binti, Shifa, and Ulwi. I extend my heartfelt appreciation for dedicating your time to providing insightful reviews and critiques for my research paper.
10. My high school friends – Inung, Puput, Tika, Fuad, Haris, Rizki, Dian, Nafi, Hendra, Latifah, and all Risalah members – I offer my sincere thanks for your unwavering support and motivation; you have been my pillar of strength.

11. Arum and Vina, my future neighbors. Our times together have been such a blessing.

12. Dear friends from the English Department chapter 2017. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for knowing such exceptional individuals like you. Your support and solidarity have made my college life wonderful and filled with cherished memories.

Lastly, I acknowledge that there are still numerous errors in my graduating paper. Therefore, I welcome any suggestions and corrections to enhance the quality of this graduating paper.

Wassalamu'alaikum wr. wb.

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BINARY OPPOSITION OF ALIF AND VIKRAM CHARACTERS

IN *ALIF THE UNSEEN* NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

Literary works often delve into the intricacies and contradictions inherent in the human experience, embodying the philosophical concept of dualism, which emphasizes the existence of opposing forces or elements. In the novel *Alif the Unseen*, the central characters, Alif, a young hacker, and Vikram, a djinn with magical powers, serve as counterparts in this dualistic narrative. Despite Alif's contemporary, technology-driven existence and skepticism toward myths, he encounters Vikram, challenging his beliefs. The problem highlights the conflict between contemporary and ancient elements, as depicted by Alif, a modern hacker who is not expected to believe in the existence of Vikram, a mythical creature, in daily life. This research delves into the dualistic nature of characters Alif and Vikram in the novel *Alif the Unseen*. This research is a qualitative study that applies the binary opposition theory by Levi-Strauss. Through the lens of binary opposition theory by Levi-Strauss, the study focuses on Human vs. Supernatural, Fear vs. Courage, and Modern vs. Traditional binaries. This research aims to discover how the binary opposition between Vikram the Vampire and Alif is depicted and uncover the important meaning behind their dualism. The findings illustrate that the novel invites readers to navigate human complexities, where the supernatural complements the human, facing fears fosters bravery, and tradition and modernity converge in self-discovery. This exploration reveals the harmonious interplay of opposing forces within each character's journey, offering a meaningful narrative experience.

Keywords: *Binary Opposition, Alif the Unseen, Structuralism*

OPOSISI BINER KARAKTER ALIF DAN VIKRAM DALAM NOVEL *ALIF THE UNSEEN*

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ABSTRAK

Karya sastra sering menggali kompleksitas dan kontradiksi yang melekat dalam pengalaman manusia, merepresentasikan konsep filosofis dualisme yang menekankan eksistensi atau elemen yang saling bertentangan. Dalam novel *Alif the Unseen*, karakter Alif, seorang peretas muda, dan Vikram, seorang jin dengan kekuatan magis, berperan sebagai lawan dalam narasi dualistik ini. Meskipun Alif menjalani kehidupan modern yang didorong oleh teknologi dan skeptis terhadap mitos, ia bertemu dengan Vikram yang menantang keyakinannya. Masalah dalam penelitian ini menggambarkan konflik antara unsur modern dan kuno, sebagaimana yang digambarkan oleh Alif, seorang peretas modern, yang seharusnya tidak meyakini keberadaan Vikram, makhluk mitos, dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Penelitian ini menelusuri sifat dualistik karakter Alif dan Vikram dalam novel *Alif the Unseen*. Penelitian ini merupakan studi kualitatif yang menerapkan teori oposisi biner oleh Levi-Strauss. Melalui lensa teori oposisi biner oleh Levi-Strauss, penelitian ini berfokus pada biner Manusia vs. Supernatural, Ketakutan vs. Keberanian, dan Modern vs. Tradisional. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana oposisi biner antara Vikram the Vampire dan Alif digambarkan, serta untuk mengungkap makna penting dibalik dualisme mereka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa novel ini menjelajahi kompleksitas manusia, di mana hal gaib melengkapi keberadaan manusia, menghadapi ketakutan dengan memupuk keberanian, dan tradisi serta modernitas berpadu dalam pencarian jati diri. Eksplorasi ini mengungkapkan perpaduan harmonis kekuatan yang saling bertentangan dalam perjalanan setiap karakter, menawarkan pengalaman naratif yang bermakna.

Kata Kunci: *Oposisi Biner, Alif the Unseen, Strukturalisme*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Study

Literary works serve as reflective mirrors that delve into the intricacies and contradictions intrinsic to the human experience. William Henry Hudson argues that literature is a written repository of individuals' experiences, thoughts, and emotions regarding life's enduring and immediate facets. It becomes a linguistic expression of life, encapsulating memories and offering a powerful medium to share personal narratives (Hudson, 1965, p. 10). According to Hudson's insightful definition, literature becomes a vessel that captures and preserves the essence of human experiences.

In exploring literature, the philosophical concept of dualism, which acknowledges the coexistence of opposing forces or elements, plays a crucial role. When literature delves into dualism, it provides readers with profound insights into the intricate dynamics of the human psyche and societal structures. Through the lens of dualism, literature emerges as a potent tool for understanding, questioning, and navigating the multifaceted complexities that define human existence.

The term dualism has an assortment of employment throughout the

thought (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). In the way of thinking of the psyche, dualism is the hypothesis that the psychological and the physical – or brain and body or brain a lot – are, in some sense, profoundly various types of things (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). For example, in religion, dualism implies the confidence in two preeminent restricted forces or divine beings, or sets of celestial or satanic creatures, that made the world exist (Britannica).

Alif the Unseen novel explores the concept of dualism through the two main characters - Alif, a young hacker from the Middle East, and Vikram the Vampire, a djinn with magical powers from a different background. The two characters are opposing entities; their contrasting natures demonstrate dualism in literature. Readers are encouraged to reflect upon the role of opposing elements in the narrative as they examine the characters' interactions.

Alif the Unseen is a science fiction novel written by G. Willow Wilson, an American converted to Islam. The novel tells about Alif struggling to express his critical views on religion and politics in the digital realm. The story's conflict begins when Alif's romantic relationship with Intisar, his beloved, falls apart due to Intisar's arranged marriage with The Hand, a government security agent. In his endeavor to win back Intisar, Alif creates a mysterious program that inadvertently opens a gateway to the mystical world of djinn. This situation leads Alif into an unforeseen adventure. Simultaneously, an authoritarian government increasingly

threatens religious freedoms and targets Alif due to his hacking activities. Alif decides to flee and embarks on a journey through a mystical realm with the help of Vikram, a djinn from Islamic mythology. During the journey, Alif encounters various conflicts between modern technology and traditional mythology and the struggle between religious authority and individual freedom.

In *Alif the Unseen*, the two characters are oppositional. They are Alif as a programmer and Vikram the Vampire as a djinn. Vikram can be defined as a "mythical creature" in the novel. A mythical creature is from mythology or folklore and is often called a "fabulous creature" in historical literature (New World Encyclopedia). In a modern, scientifically oriented society, the idea of supernatural beings and powers commonly associated with myths and folklore is often viewed with skepticism. Myths are typically described as non-intellectual, primal, emotion-laden, experiential, and imagistic (Agatucci, 2010). Most people view myths as folklore or cultural and religious heritage rather than subscribing to them as literal truths in daily life. This concept contradicts the story of *Alif the Unseen*, where Alif, a technology expert living in a modern era, is supposed to refrain from believing in myths that happen in daily life, including the existence of Vikram.

The combination of djinn and hacker/programmer in this novel is contradictory. In the context of their respective roles, Vikram the Vampire represents an archaic or traditional manifestation, while Alif's role as a

programmer reflects modernity. As a programmer (<https://www.techopedia.com/definition/4813/programmer>), Alif creates computer software or applications by providing specific programming instructions to the computer. Archaic can be referred to as something old-fashioned and ancient, while modern is the opposite. Archaic and modern are not supposed to be together. This contrast highlights the intersection of traditional and modern elements in the narrative. The dualism of the archaic and modern entities are contradictory.

"He's found Tin Sari," Alif said. An ache had begun in his temples. "He got it off of Intisar's machine, of course, like Abdullah knew he would. He's trying to figure out what it is and how to use it. He's making a hash of it for now, but that will change."

Vikram snatched the netbook out of Alif's hands.

"Plastic and electricity," he said with a look of disgust. "This is how you people think you will ascend to the heavens. But if you climb too high, younger brother, the angels will ask you where you're going." (Wilson, 2012, p. 103)

The passage above highlights the clash between modern and traditional elements through the interaction between Alif, a tech-savvy hacker, and Vikram, a mythical being. Alif referred to finding Tin Sari, a technological artifact. He explained how Vikram obtained it from Intisar's machine, demonstrating the modern use of technology for information gathering. However, Vikram's disdainful reaction to the netbook, expressing contempt for "plastic and electricity," signifies a traditional perspective that contrasts with Alif's reliance on modern tools. This clash becomes apparent as Vikram questions the effectiveness of modern methods, suggesting a conflict between the contemporary world's reliance

on technology and the traditional, perhaps mystical, understanding embodied by Vikram.

This novel is chosen by the researcher because, from the novel, the researcher discovered that Islam is perceived as a dynamic and ever-evolving entity that endeavors to navigate the challenges and opportunities emerging in the era of modernity. The character Alif employs modern technology to express and uphold the values of Islam within the context of modernity. Alif is a hacker and programmer who uses the internet to create an identity called *Alif the Unseen*. Through this persona, he shares messages about Islam, creatively expresses religious thoughts and perspectives and speaks out against authorities that he believes infringe upon religious values. Alif's actions demonstrate how Islam can adapt and evolve in response to modern challenges by utilizing modern technology to promote religious values and freedom.

From what has been said previously, the dualism of Alif and Vikram entities is worth analyzing. This research aims to find the meaning of the dualism of djinn and programmer entities from Alif and Vikram's characters. Based on the contradiction of dualism, the researcher used the binary opposition theory. Binary opposition theory figures out the meaning behind the contrasting aspects of two things, which is compatible with the problem of the dualism of Alif and Vikram the Vampire.

1.2. Research Question

According to the background above, the researcher formulated questions:

1.2.1. How is the binary opposition of Vikram the Vampire and Alif portrayed?

1.2.2. What is the significant meaning of Alif and Vikram dualism?

1.3. Objective of The Study

Based on the background and the problem statements above, this research aims to find out the way the binary opposition of Vikram the Vampire and Alif is portrayed and the significant meaning of Alif and Vikram's dualism.

1.4. Significance of The Study

This research is one of the references for those who study literature, especially for those who study binary opposition theory. This research contributes to the application of the binary opposition theory. This research is also used to discover the relationship between human and mythical figures through Alif and Vikram, the vampire entities in *Alif the Unseen* novel.

1.5. Literature Review

The researcher found several studies that used the same object or

theory as this research. From the object, *Alif the Unseen*, the researcher found that some researchers have analyzed it. One of them is the thesis "*AMERICAN HERO AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF ARAB SPRING DISCOURSE: AMERICAN HERO ARCHETYPE IN WILLOW WILSONS ALIF THE UNSEEN*" by Ramda Sari Ode (2022). The thesis focuses on the Transnational American Studies paradigm to interpret the main character as an archetype of the American Hero. It uses the Jungian Archetype and Campbell's Hero's Journey theories. The research explores Alif's position as an American hero within the Arab Spring discourse, referring to Theodore L. Gross's criteria for an American hero. The analysis of Alif's journey through three stages and sixteen sections leads to the conclusion that Alif is an American hero due to his embodiment of American ideals and adherence to the Hero's Journey. This research illustrates the novel's manifestation of Alif as an American Hero amidst the political turmoil of the Arab Spring. This characterization creates a dichotomy between the United States and the Middle East, serving as a literary tool to influence territorial and ideological practices on a global scale.

The other research using *Alif the Unseen* novel is a journal from Universitas Pesantren Tinggi Darul' Ulum with the title "*A Confrontation on Gwendolyn Willow Wilson's Alif the Unseen: A Study of Postmodernism by Ninik Afriani and Endang Suciati (2018)*". The study investigates Alif's reactions to the confrontations in the postmodernism

community shown in the novel. Postmodernism emphasizes that the plurality could create a confrontation that must be accepted by postmodern society, as when Alif experiences it as the main character of *Alif the Unseen*. McHale's theory also states that Alif, as the Postmodern society, must recognize the djinn creatures around him as a hacker with a high ability and dependency on technology. In the journal, the researcher found that plurality creates confrontation that the postmodern community must accept.

From the theory, the researcher found a related graduating paper from the English Department of Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga titled "*Binary Opposition of The Parents' Figure in Caroline Movie by Nurrochmah (2018)*". The research explains the contrasting aspects of the parents' characters in the Coraline movie. The researcher applied the binary opposition theory to analyze and classify the contrasting aspects between the Real Parents and the Other Parents. The result of this research is that the ideal figure of parents for Coraline is the Real Parents. The Real Parents are portrayed as stingy parents, especially the Real Mother because she does not want Coraline to be consumptive.

Another research related to Binary Opposition theory is a graduating paper by Auliana (2021) titled "*Binary Opposition of Characters in Casey Watson's A Boy without Hope*". The research in this study focuses on the characterization of the main characters, Casey and Miller, in Casey Watson's "*A Boy without Hope*." The analysis is

conducted to examine the qualities of one character in contrast to the other character, aiming to discover the meaning behind their traits. The research findings reveal that Casey and Miller are depicted with contrasting personalities. Casey is portrayed as a positive character, taking on the role of a hero or godmother, while Miller presents himself as repellant and negative. The study delves into their differences and the binary opposition that explains why their characteristics are so distinct.

Binary opposition theory was also used in a graduating paper by Multazam (2021) titled "*Social Inequality As Seen in Charles Dicken's Oliver Twist: A Binary Opposition Analysis*". The paper discusses the analysis of Charles Dickens's novel "*Oliver Twist*" using the binary opposition theory, focusing on themes of social inequality and the contrasting characterizations of Oliver's caregivers. The research utilizes the setting of locations and the characterizations within the novel as data sources. The findings reveal social inequality within the novel, emphasizing the disparities between various settings. The characterizations of Oliver's caregivers exhibit binary oppositions, highlighting the differences in how he is treated as an orphan. The message derived from the novel suggests that orphan care should be characterized by gentleness and affection.

None of the previous research analyzed *Alif the Unseen* novel using Binary Opposition. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by employing the Binary Opposition theory to dissect the novel and shed light

on its narrative's contrasting elements, characterizations, and themes. This research is different from the other research because it analyzes the dualism of programmer and djinn using the binary opposition theory.

1.6. Theoretical Approach

In this research, the researcher analyzes dualism using binary opposition theory. Dualism in literature is the division of something into two contrasting parts. The theory of dualism serves as a theoretical tool in the analysis of literature, enabling the understanding of how differences, contradictions, and tensions among characters, conflicts, and themes play a role in a literary work.

Dualism comes from the Latin word "duo," which means two. In simpler terms, some things require the assumption of two opposing principles to be explained. People usually talk about dualism when discussing religion and philosophy systems. Throughout history, dualism has been interpreted and applied in various ways. It asserts that within a specific domain, two fundamental kinds or categories of things or principles exist. For instance, in theology, dualism is exemplified by believing in the independence and relative equality of forces such as Good and Evil or God and the Devil. This dualistic perspective contrasts monism, which posits that only one fundamental kind or category of thing or principle exists. (Robinson, 2003, p. 85-101)

Dualism, as a concept, pertains to the existence of two opposing or

contrasting entities or principles. It is frequently used to gain insight into characters' inner and outer conflicts, ultimately adding richness and intricacy to the narrative. In literary works, dualism can allude to the contrast between two characters, two forces, or two opposing concepts.

Using dualism theory is related to the binary opposition theory. *Binary opposition* is a concept that refers to pairs of elements or concepts that oppose each other within a specific context. These pairs create contrasts that help define or provide meaning to these elements. This research compares and contrasts Alif and Vikram, the vampire characters.

According to G. Smith, binary opposition refers to the strict definition and distinction between two opposing ideas in language and thought (Smith, 1996, p. 383). This idea was introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist who believed that, much like language, binary opposition is a fundamental concept that shapes human cognition. The value or meaning of language units is determined through binary opposition. Each unit is defined as another term in a structural and complementary way rather than a contradictory one. (Fogarty, 2005)

Binary opposition is how language units acquire significance or value; each unit's definition relies on its interdependent connection with another term, akin to binary code. As Selden explains in his book, this view of language emphasizes that the foundation of human language is a

system of paired and binary oppositions (2005, p. 77).

Binary opposition, however, is not limited to language use. Claude Levi-Strauss, a structuralist anthropologist, believed that primitive thinking or myth is structured as binary opposition. This state means that two related things contradict each other, one considered positive and the other negative. This binary divides things into opposites to reveal the initial meaning. According to Levi-Strauss, every binary opposition has a meaning that can be revealed by combining existing elements in myth. The language of myth is more complex and complicated than other languages (Strauss, 1963, p. 211) and has its specific grammar.

Binary oppositions are a valuable tool for both authors and readers. Using binary oppositions can be an effective tool for authors to present their works. Binary oppositions help authors establish, integrate, and highlight concepts and meanings within their writings. On the other hand, they provide readers with a better understanding of the big picture of a literary text and a deeper comprehension of its content. Therefore, binary oppositions can be useful for both authors and readers.

In literature, binary opposition means looking at differences like good versus evil, light versus darkness, or virtue versus vice. Adding conflicts and complex characters to stories can make them more exciting and engaging. When opposite things clash, it creates problems in the story. For instance, when the hero and the villain are very different, it creates a

big conflict in the plot. So, binary opposition is a key way to make stories interesting with conflicts and interesting characters.

Moreover, binary oppositions help us understand characters better. Literature frequently employs binary opposition to create conflict and tension within a narrative. For example, characters with contrasting traits make it easier for readers to see how they change and grow. Characters' internal conflicts and how they cope with contradictions are depicted. By understanding this theory, this research will better analyze the differences and conflicts in characters like Alif and Vikram in *Alif the Unseen* and how it shapes our understanding of the characters and the story.

Through a grasp of binary opposition theory, the research provides a more profound exploration of the contrasts and conflicts between Alif and Vikram, shaping our understanding of the characters and how the story unfolds in the novel. The result of the analysis used by the researcher to find out the explanation of the binary opposition of Alif and Vikram and the meaning of the dualism entities.

1.7. Methods of Research

1.7.1. Type of Research

The type of research is qualitative research. According to Creswell (2009, p. 1), qualitative research is to figure out "the meaning of individuals or groups ascribing to social or human problems." Qualitative

research applied in this research as the purpose of this research is to find out the meaning of the dualism of Alif and Vikram the Vampire. The data explanation is served in the researcher's version words (Creswell, 2009, p. 4).

1.7.2. Data Sources

In this research, the data sources consist of two kinds of data. There are primary data and secondary data used in this research. The primary data was obtained from *Alif the Unseen* novel. The primary data includes the direct speech and the narrator's explanation (indirect speech). The secondary data is from journals, books, and any other sources related to support this research.

1.7.3. Data Collection Technique

There are several steps used by the researcher to collect the data. The researcher collects the data from *Alif the Unseen* novel. Before selecting the data, the researcher reads the novel repeatedly and does a close reading. The researcher selects the data related and helps the analysis. Then, the researcher classifies the data based on Binary Opposition Theory.

1.7.4. Data Analysis Technique

The data collected by the researcher will be analyzed using Binary Opposition Theory. First, the researcher analyzes the intrinsic elements of

Alif the Unseen novel. Second, the researcher analyzes the main data related to the dualism of Alif and Vikram the Vampire. The researcher analyzes the chosen data using binary opposition. After that, the researcher concludes all the analysis.

1.8. Paper Organization

This paper is served in four chapters. The first chapter consists of the introduction of the research. The first chapter includes the background of study, problem statements, objectives of study, significance of study, literature review, theoretical approach, methods of study, and paper organization. The second chapter consists of the explanation of the intrinsic elements of *Alif the Unseen* novel. The next chapter contains the analysis of the contrasting of Alif and Vikram characters. The last chapter is the conclusion of the analysis.

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CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

4.1. Conclusion

After analyzing the data, the researcher concludes the binary opposition analysis of *Alif the Unseen* by blending the contrasting elements between Alif and Vikram. The characters of Alif and Vikram represent opposing concepts, such as Human vs. Supernatural, Fear vs. Courage, and Modern vs. Traditional. By examining these differences, we can observe a captivating interplay of contradictions within the story.

In the binary of Human vs. Supernatural, Alif embodies human vulnerabilities in the face of danger, uncertainty, and oppressive regimes. His struggles with privacy, assurance of success, and physical and psychological limitations make his character relatable. On the other hand, Vikram, with supernatural abilities like manipulation, shape-shifting, and heightened senses, introduces an otherworldly dimension. The exploration of Human vs. Supernatural reveals that Alif and Vikram are not only contradictory but also partners in a unique interplay. Alif, with his human limitations, reflects human struggles, while Vikram, as a supernatural being, transcends those limits. This partnership creates a harmonious blend, demonstrating that their strengths and weaknesses complement

each other, offering a deeper understanding of the characters.

In the dichotomy of Fear vs. Courage, Alif's profound fears and Vikram's unwavering courage form a compelling narrative contrast. Alif grapples with the harsh realities of the physical world. His anxieties were exacerbated by threats from both the government and societal expectations. The complexities of his relationship with Intisar, intertwined with social and financial differences, add another layer of fear. In stark contrast, Vikram embodies fearless determination, ever-ready to confront challenges with his supernatural prowess. His unwavering courage, loyalty, and willingness to take risks serve as a beacon in adversity. Looking at Fear vs. Courage, the researcher discovers that it is not a straightforward opposition but a journey. Alif's initial fear transforms into a powerful self-discovery. His courage emerges not as the absence of fear but as its conqueror. Vikram's unwavering courage becomes a guiding light, inspiring Alif. The interplay of fear and courage forms the characters' growth and resilience.

Moreover, in the binary of Modern vs. Traditional, the clash between modernism, embodied by Alif, and tradition, personified by Vikram, paints a vivid portrait of contrasting worldviews. Alif, a digital adept, navigates the complexities of the modern era with skepticism and critical thinking, seamlessly adapting to novel environments. In contrast, Vikram cherishes traditional values steeped in cultural and religious heritage, holding onto identity and cultural roots. Despite his commitment to

tradition, Vikram is open to the challenges of the modern world, grappling with the complexities of adapting to societal shifts. In the clash of Modern vs. Traditional, Alif and Vikram represent more than just conflicting ideas; they symbolize a journey of blending opposites in a changing world. Alif's modernity mixes with Vikram's traditionalism, creating tension that propels the characters into a journey of self-discovery. They become symbols of an evolving world, navigating the quest for identity and purpose in a changing landscape.

Alif the Unseen novel invites readers to understand their complexities, recognizing that being human involves a harmonious blend of contradictions. The characters navigate a world where the supernatural complements the human. Courage arises from facing fear, and tradition and modernity come together in the search for self-discovery. Through this exploration, the novel mirrors the enduring interplay of opposing forces within every human soul.

4.2. Suggestion

After conducting this study, there is a need for improvement to expand the scope and depth of this research. However, the research aims to contribute positively to the literary discussion. The researcher hopes to increase readers' awareness of the intricate contradictions inherent in the human experience. Therefore, the author encourages future scholars to explore uncharted aspects of *Alif the Unseen*. This captivating tale provides a rich platform for further investigations, inviting scholars to

apply alternative theoretical frameworks such as feminism, cultural studies, and postcolonialism, revealing new layers of meaning and interpretation.



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