



**Creative Pride and Psychological Tragedy: A Freudian Reading of G. Sankara Kurup's
*The Master Carpenter (Perumthachan)***

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Abstract

*The Master Carpenter (Perumthachan), a contemporary psychological tragedy by G. Sankara Kurup, retells a famous story from Kerala and examines the complex connections between moral responsibility, pride, and creativity. Even though the poem is often interpreted as a moral allegory warning against either excessive artistic ego or human perfection, these readings mostly ignore the extreme internal conflict that motivates the master carpenter's tragic deed. This essay analyses the psychological forces behind the protagonist's actions by applying Sigmund Freud's theory of the tripartite structure of personality, the Id, Ego, and Superego, to a psychoanalytic reading of the poem. This study presents the master carpenter as a complex individual whose identity is inseparably linked to his creative skill. When his son's talent starts to outshine his own, the Id's expression of creative pride gradually gives way to unconscious jealousy and fear. Even though the carpenter actively maintains the view that no human creation should achieve perfection, this idea serves as a justification for suppressed rivalry and insecurity. By maintaining the carpenter's self-image as a responsible father and a disciplined craftsman, the ego tries to act as a mediator between these inborn urges and social expectations. However, the violent act that almost kills his son is the result of his inability to control unconscious desire. Following the event, the Superego makes its presence known through intense regret, guilt, and psychological breakdown. The conflict between the carpenter's private moral collapse and his public persona as a respected craftsman is revealed by his suffering, which is a reflection of the moral penalty allocated by an internalised ethical authority. This study shows that the tragedy in *The Master Carpenter* is not an accident but rather the unavoidable result of unresolved psychological conflict by analysing the imbalance between the Id, Ego, and Superego.*

Keywords: *id, ego, superego, pride, tragedy*

Myth, legend, and folklore have often been used in Indian English poetry as living frameworks for examining contemporary psychological and ethical issues, rather than just as sources of narrative. Poets like G. Sankara Kurup reinterpret traditional material to delve into the complexities of the human mind, rather than simply reciting inherited stories. In this sense, one of Kurup's most impressive works is *The Master Carpenter (Perumthachan)*. The poem turns a moral tale into a profoundly self-examining psychological tragedy, drawing inspiration from a well-known Kerala legend. Its focus point is the master carpenter, an artist renowned for his self-control, moral uprightness, and skill, but internally torn by pride, insecurity, and moral struggle. The poem depicts the point at which creative genius devolves inward and becomes destructive rather than watching over life and continuity.

Although *The Master Carpenter* has often been read as a parable about artistic humility or the dangers of human perfection, such readings do not fully account for the emotional intensity and inner struggle that Kurup carefully constructs. It is impossible to fully explain the carpenter's act of throwing the chisel that almost kills his son using just chance, principle, or accident. Instead, it is the result of an extended, mostly unconscious psychological conflict. A strong framework for comprehending this conflict is provided by Sigmund Freud's theory of the tripartite structure of personality, which consists of the Id, Ego, and Superego. With Freud's theory, the carpenter's tragedy is not a singular instance of mistake but rather the unavoidable result of an unbalanced psyche in which moral restraint is subordinated to unconscious desire. According to this essay, Kurup's poem illustrates the damaging effects of uncontrolled artistic pride and suppressed jealousy, showing how psychological strife can sever even the most sacred human connection, that of a father and son.

As a writer who effectively combined modernist psychological depth with indigenous cultural material, G. Sankara Kurup holds a significant position in Indian English poetry. Kurup, the inaugural Jnanpith Award winner, is widely acknowledged for bringing philosophical inquiry, ambiguity, and introspection to Indian poetry. His poetry frequently examines the conflicts between social role and private emotion, tradition and individuality. *The Master Carpenter* provides a strikingly clear illustration of these issues. According to the Perumthachan legend, a master craftsman feels that humans must leave a flaw in their creations and that the divine has the right to absolute perfection. When his son makes a drumstick that sounds perfect, the father throws a chisel to break the instrument, only to find that it has hit his son instead. Kurup's poetic retelling drastically changes the legend's emotional core while preserving its narrative outline.

Kurup emphasises the carpenter's internal conflict rather than portraying the act as a purely ideological gesture based on spiritual humility. The poem challenges readers to consider the emotional undertones that drive the act and to see past the professed belief in imperfection. A psychological tension that ultimately explodes into violence is caused by the carpenter's pride in his work, his fear of being outdone, and his tense relationship with his son's talent. Kurup's poem is in line with contemporary psychological realism in this regard, showing the person as a divided self battling conflicting impulses rather than as a single moral agent.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory offers a framework to describe this distinction. Freud suggests that in *The Ego and the Id*, there are three interrelated forces that make up the human psyche. The pleasure principle governs the Id, which stands for unconscious desires and instinctual drives. It pursues instant gratification regardless of morality or consequences (Freud 14). As the logical mediator, the Ego seeks to appease the Id in ways that are consistent with social norms and the outside world (Freud 15). As an internal authority that judges the Ego and generates emotions of pride, guilt, or shame, the Superego represents internalised moral standards (Freud 34). A dynamic balance between these three forces is essential for psychological well-being. Internal conflict escalates when this equilibrium is upset, frequently resulting in repression, anxiety, or destructive behaviour.

The protagonist's strong sense of artistic pride and emotional dedication to his work in *The Master Carpenter* are the most obvious manifestations of the Id. Craftsmanship is the cornerstone of his identity and not just his line of work. His status as an unparalleled artisan is

inextricably linked to his sense of self-worth. Freud notes that instinctive desires for self-assertion and self-preservation are closely associated with the Id (21). The carpenter sees his son's extraordinary talent, a talent that rivals or even surpasses his own, not just as a sign of paternal success but also as a serious threat to his identity.

Despite his conscious recognition of his son's genius, the carpenter is unconsciously overcome with jealousy and fear. These feelings are suppressed because they are socially unacceptable for a father, especially one who is admired for his discipline and wisdom. Repressed desires do not go away; rather, they continue to function subconsciously, influencing behaviour in indirect and frequently harmful ways (Freud 18). This area of repression includes the carpenter's will to maintain his position of authority, even at the expense of his son's welfare. Unconsciously, the son who ought to stand for pride and continuity becomes a rival.

Thus, the Id's eruption can be interpreted as the chisel's throwing. The act is sudden, impulsive, and emotionally charged, hallmarks of instinct-driven behaviour. Instead of portraying the carpenter as serenely carrying out a moral precept, Kurup infuses the scene with tension and internal turmoil. The deeper psychological motivation is concealed by the carpenter's belief that no human creation should be flawless, which serves as a logical justification after the fact. According to Freud, this belief acts as a screen that allows unconscious envy to function. The Id overrides ethical restraint and paternal affection in its quest for instant relief from the fear of being outdone.

In the poem, the ego plays a tragic and nuanced role. While keeping an eye on social reality, the Ego should ideally act as a mediator between the moral imperatives of the Superego and the instinctual demands of the Id. The carpenter, a revered craftsman and father, is very conscious of his reputation. Therefore, the ego makes an effort to uphold a perception of reason, self-control, and moral intent. This effort is demonstrated by the carpenter's framing of his actions in terms of artistic principles rather than feelings.

One of the defence mechanisms Freud identifies as essential to ego functioning is rationalisation, which the ego engages in after the incident (Freud 36). The carpenter shields his conscious self from the intolerable realisation of jealousy and animosity toward his son by persuading himself that the injury was unintentional or predetermined by God. He is able to maintain his social functioning, at least temporarily, by engaging in self-deception, but in the end, the Ego's mediation fails. Both before and after the act, it is unable to completely silence the Superego and restrain the Id. Thus, when unconscious emotions are disregarded or denied, the tragedy highlights the weakness of rational control.

After the act, the Superego comes out with terrible force. According to Freud, the Superego monitors and judges the Ego's behaviour by internalising parental and societal authority and turning it inward (Freud 29). The Superego appears in *The Master Carpenter* as crippling guilt, mental anguish, and psychological breakdown. The carpenter's anguish is existential rather than just emotional. The knowledge that he has betrayed his moral obligations as a human being and his role as a father haunts him.

By emphasising the disparity between the carpenter's public persona and his inner suffering, Kurup increases this moral dilemma. On the outside, he is still regarded as a master craftsman who is respected for his morals and discipline. On the inside, though, he is overcome with regret and self-loathing. The Superego forbids simple escape via denial or rationalisation.

Rather, it forces the carpenter to face the moral ramifications of his actions, turning his inner world into a place of punishment. When moral boundaries are crossed, the Superego frequently results in "a sense of internal persecution", as noted by Lois Tyson (26).

Kurup's poem's examination of the connection between creativity and destruction is among its most striking features. Envy, insecurity, and fear are all fuelled by the same passion that propels artistic excellence. Kurup implies through the carpenter's tragedy that creativity can become morally hazardous when it is motivated only by pride and ego. This paradox is clarified by Freud's theory. The psychic energy required for creativity is supplied by the Id, but it is easily capable of becoming destructive in the absence of the Superego's moral guidance and the Ego's moderating influence (Freud 22).

Placing the poem in its cultural context also gives it depth. Indian philosophical traditions have long cautioned against attachment to selfhood and excessive ego. The idea of *ahamkara* highlights the delusion of self-importance and the pain it causes. This risk is personified by Kurup's master carpenter. His devotion to his art becomes so strong that it overshadows his humanity. Despite having its roots in Western philosophy, Freud's psychoanalytic framework highlights the universality of psychological conflict through its application to an Indian legend. People from all walks of life struggle with moral responsibility, pride, guilt, and envy.

Kurup produces a work that is both culturally grounded and universally relatable by fusing Indian mythology with Freudian psychology. From a didactic story, the legend of Perumthachan is transformed into a sophisticated analysis of internal collapse. In addition to the son's physical harm, the poem's real tragedy is the father's moral and psychological integrity being irreparably harmed. The very identity that the carpenter aimed to maintain is shattered by the act.

In conclusion, *The Master Carpenter (Perumthachan)* emerges as a profound psychological tragedy when read through the lens of Freud's tripartite theory of personality. The unchecked impulses of the Id, the inadequate mediation of the Ego, and the relentless judgment of the Superego together shape the carpenter's fate. What stands out is how deeply inner conflict drives the story. A worker's hands shape wood, yet something deeper fractures beneath control. His urges surge without brake, pushed further by silent expectations others place upon him. Instead of balance, tension grows between desire and duty, between instinct and inherited duty. Guilt echoes not from harm done, but from mere striving toward perfection. The mind does not mediate; it either condemns or acquiesces. Tragedy unfolds not because of evil intent, but because of fragmented restraint. Structure appears solid until pressure cracks it open. Excellence becomes its own undoing when unattended by peace. What stands out is how Kurup peels back the thinnest lines between inspiration and duty, turning them into something quiet yet profound about what people are made of. The poem ultimately reminds readers that true mastery, whether in art or in life, requires not only skill and passion but also humility, ethical awareness, and psychological balance.

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