

**RESEARCH PAPER****The Kite Runner: A Psychological Analysis of Hassan****¹Ghulam Yaseen Magsi*, ²Suhail Ahmed Solangi and ³Kainat Soomro**

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the unconscious desires and internal conflicts shaping Hassan's behavior in *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. Hassan's character reflects repressed emotions, unspoken longings, and unconditional loyalty, influenced by socio-economic inferiority and a lack of maternal affection. Using Freud's psychoanalytic theory as a framework, this non-empirical study analyzed textual evidence from the novel, focusing on Hassan's dreams and expressions. Key concepts included the unconscious mind, reality, love, and dream interpretation. Findings revealed Hassan's deep yearning for emotional validation and acceptance, shaped by cultural and emotional voids. His loyalty to Amir stemmed from a longing for connection and was influenced by repressed desires and masochistic tendencies. To address similar issues in real-world contexts, fostering emotional support, promoting cultural sensitivity, and providing avenues for psychological resilience could help individuals navigate internal conflicts and unconscious desires.

Keywords: Emotional Attachment, Hassan, Psychoanalysis, Repressed Desires, The Kite Runner

Introduction

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) explores themes of friendship, betrayal, redemption, and social inequality. The story centers around two boys Amir and Hassan from different ethnic backgrounds in Afghanistan—Amir being a privileged Pashtun and Hassan a marginalized Hazara. Despite societal divisions, they share a deep bond; however, Amir struggles with jealousy and insecurity. A crucial moment occurs when Hassan is assaulted while retrieving a kite for Amir, who witnesses the incident but fails to intervene. Consumed by guilt, Amir distances himself from Hassan and orchestrates his expulsion from their home. Years later, Amir learns that Hassan was his half-brother and returns to war-torn Afghanistan to save Hassan's son, Sohrab, from the Taliban. Following a dangerous confrontation, Amir brings Sohrab to the United States (U.S.), hoping to rebuild a life of redemption and healing.

The novel highlights the complexities of love, forgiveness, and guilt while reflecting on the rigid social hierarchy in Afghanistan. Psychoanalysis offers insights into characters' motivations, making it a valuable lens for understanding *The Kite Runner*. However, studies specifically exploring Hassan's psychological complexity remain limited.

Psychoanalysis and Freud

Sigmund Freud introduced psychoanalysis in the 20th century to understand human behavior and the unconscious mind. This theory suggests that the unconscious harbors unpleasant memories, fears, traumatic experiences, and suppressed desires, which unknowingly influence a person's actions. The goal of psychoanalysis is to uncover

these hidden elements, helping individuals overcome mental health issues by bringing unconscious content into conscious awareness.

While initially developed as a therapeutic approach, psychoanalysis has recently gained prominence as a literary analytical tool. It enables critics to examine the concealed desires, fears, and motivations of both characters and authors by exploring their conscious and unconscious aspects. Freud's model highlights several crucial components: the unconscious mind, sublimation, repression, defense mechanisms, and dream interpretation, all of which are vital in comprehending character behavior.

The present study explores Hassan's unwavering loyalty and repressed desires through Freud's psychoanalytic lens, unveiling the hidden motivations behind relationships and actions in *The Kite Runner*. The analysis focuses on how suppressed desires, emotional bonds, and unconventional friendship dynamics shape Hassan's psyche. By analyzing the interplay between the pleasure and morality principles in Hassan's conduct, this study aims to uncover the psychological foundations underlying his unwavering to Amir.

Literature Review

Psychoanalysis in *The Kite Runner*

Cholifa (2019) applies Freud's concepts of the superego and defense mechanisms, focusing on Amir's jealousy toward Hassan, guilt, and his use of denial and displacement to cope. Wen (2019) highlights Amir's journey from sin to redemption, driven by the conflict between his id and superego, culminating in ego development when he discovers Hassan is his brother. Abdur Rahim (2019) examines Amir's oedipal complex, linking his desire for fatherly love to jealousy and his inability to intervene in Hassan's rape. The study compares Amir's guilt and passivity to Hamlet's hesitation, suggesting latent sexual desires influenced his actions. Furthermore, Rahim notes Amir's development through aggression, hopelessness, and eventual redemption via Hassan's son. While these studies offer a comprehensive understanding of Amir's psychological growth, they consistently overlook Hassan's internal struggles and depth. Despite Hassan's pivotal role in the text, this gap is significant as it leaves Hassan's motivations, loyalties, and emotional dynamics underexplored. The current study aims to address this oversight by shifting the focus to Hassan and providing a balanced analysis of the two characters' intertwined psychological journeys.

Other Psychological Theories in *The Kite Runner*

Kai-fu (2019) applies Erikson's psychosocial theory, explaining Amir's mistrust and identity crisis as a result of his father's emotional neglect. Amir's guilt over not meeting his father's expectations leads to jealousy and inferiority, which later transform into heroism through redemption. Du (2017) explores Amir's self-actualization, following Goldstein's concept, showing how Amir's internal conflict drives him toward spiritual enlightenment. Mulyono (2010) uses psychosocial theory to illustrate Amir's struggle between external expectations and internal desires, highlighting the complexity of his personality.

Relationships in *The Kite Runner*

Neupane (2018) identifies Amir's ethical anxiety stemming from his betrayal of Hassan, viewing his guilt as a punishment from the superego. The guilt manifests in insomnia, regret, and self-condemnation, intensified after Hassan's death. Chodratillah's study focuses on the impact of Amir's absent mother, suggesting that his yearning for fatherly love led to betrayal and guilt. Amir's emotional development is traced through

Freud's personality theory, showing the gradual balance between his id, ego, and superego. Kalpakli (2017) interprets natural elements in the novel, like the pomegranate tree, rain, and kites, as reflections of characters' psychology. For example, Amir's infertility mirrors the barren tree, while the Taliban's rule symbolizes the cancer devouring Afghanistan, echoing Baba's illness.

Material and Methods

This study employs a non-empirical, conceptual analysis of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, utilizing psychoanalytic theory as a lens for interpretation. Conceptual analysis involves the systematic exploration and interpretation of the novel's characters, themes, and narrative through the framework of psychoanalytic theory, aiming to unveil deeper psychological and emotional dimensions. By conducting textual analysis on existing data, the research aims to uncover the psychological motivations of characters, particularly focusing on Hassan's unconditional love for Amir. This study, rooted in Sigmund Freud's work, explores the dynamics between the conscious and unconscious mind, focusing on how repressed memories and desires shape behavior.

Key concepts such as repression, defense mechanisms, and the interplay of the id, ego, and superego will guide the analysis of character motivations and relational dynamics within the narrative. This psychoanalytic framework serves as an effective means to understand the complexities of characters' intentions and fears, revealing the unconscious motivations that drive their actions and shaping their relationships while providing insights into the broader themes of the novel.

Results and Discussion

Hassan loved Amir selflessly

Psychoanalysis explores the depth of sexuality to its unconscious roots and consequences. Freud argued that sex is the basic instinct of humans. The obvious reason is pleasure. Psychoanalysis links emotional love with sensual love, both are destined for a similar purpose. Love in psychoanalysis is called as object-cathexis which involves emotional attachment to someone with the ultimate aim of sexual satisfaction. The cathexis ceases when the aim is achieved. Object-cathexis follows multiple phases. The initial phase is when the child considers his parents as objects of his love. The aim of this love is sexual satisfaction, which never gets fulfilled.

The unfulfilled desires get settled in the storehouse of mind resulting in repression of sexual desires for a parent. The infantile sexual tendency is always tender. The shift occurs when a child overcomes the parental love and steps into puberty. The tendency becomes stronger with the explicit urge for sexual satisfaction (Freud, 1921). In Hassan's case, he had no mother with him since his birth therefore due to the absence of his mother, Hassan's object cathexis happened to be Amir, consequently, Hassan loved Amir. The first word Hassan ever uttered was Amir's name.

Table 1
Hassan's Attachment to Amir: Object Cathexis in The Kite Runner

Line from the Text	Context in the Story	Psychoanalytic Theme
"Hassan and I fed from the same breasts. We took our first steps on the same lawn in the same yard. And, under the same roof, we spoke our first words. Mine was Baba His was Amir. My name." Hosseini, 2007, p.10	This reflects Hassan's first spoken word and shows the connection he forms with Amir from birth, symbolizing his attachment	Object Cathexis: Unconscious choice of attachment

The choice of a beloved is always unconscious. The reason that justifies the choice is never a real reason. Reality is always concealed in the unconscious. According to

psychoanalysis, love demands a void, with the beloved existing to complete the lover. Psychoanalysis renders love as something that is an unconscious decision to select a person who shares the attributes that are missing in us. The void is mandatory to love and Hassan's life was filled with voids. He lacked and missed his mother's love, he was not financially well off and his social status was considered low whereas Amir's status as a shia was higher. All his voids were filled by Amir. All these desires of getting impeccable through finding someone who is perfect and one who fills all the incomplete and imperfect aspects of ours are driven by the unconscious mind. Hassan never knew the actual reality of loving Amir.

Amir was financially and socially superior to him. Amir's narrative about Hassan's hut highlights Hassan's poverty and the difference in his and Hassan's life. There happens to be a difference as clear as daylight in the lives of both kids, which translates to the financial conditions of both kids. Hassan used to live in a mud hut and he was destined to live there for his entire life, Amir always knew this. Amir's narrative makes us realize the fact that Hassan was a servant and he, therefore, lived such a life. The description of Hassan's hut is very significant, "I remember it was spare, clean, dimly lit by a pair of kerosene lamps. There were two mattresses on opposite sides of the room, a worn Herati rug with frayed edges in between, a three-legged stool, and a wooden table in the corner where Hassan did his drawings. (Hosseini, 2007, p. 05). After the end of the day when they had to part ways, the scenes of Amir heading towards his mansion and Hassan to his hut display a strong distinction in the lifestyles of both kids.

Sexual overestimation occurs when the loved is idealized without criticism. All the negative shades are concealed and neglected with over importance of positive attributes. Hassan blindly admires Amir to the extreme and that is all done without any criticism.

The above statements are backed up by the words from Amir.

Table 2

Hassan's Idealization of Amir: Sexual Over-Estimation in Psychoanalysis

Line from the Text	Context in the Story	Psychoanalytic Theme
"I talked Hassan into firing walnuts... but if I asked, really asked, he wouldn't deny me. Hassan never denied me anything." (Hosseini, 2007, p. 3)	Demonstrates Hassan's willingness to go against his own nature to please Amir	Sexual Over-Estimation: Unquestioning admiration

Hassan rated Amir very high and he was willing to do anything for the sake of Amir's happiness. The unconditional love prevailed resulting in him becoming obedient and loyal to Amir. Hassan would never try to hurt any animal but once Amir asked him to do so he would not think twice, he never denied him.

Table 3

Hassan's Devotion: Sublimation of Repressed Desires

Line from the Text	Context in the Story	Psychoanalytic Theme
"For you a thousand times over" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 67)	Hassan says this as he runs to retrieve the kite for Amir, showcasing his devotion	Sublimation: Repressed desires manifested socially

The aforementioned phrase is very important, it shows that if a fallen kite brings happiness to Amir, he would surely run for it a thousand times. Amir's happiness seemed to be his priority. Hassan's unattended desires nagged for their socially acceptable manifestation. Sublimation serves as the best source of doing so, for it renders the desires, conflicts, and trauma of the unconscious in a positive socially acceptable shape. Hassan wanted desperately to bring the last fallen kite of the tournament home to show that he had achieved something significant for Amir and more importantly winning the last kite would unconsciously channel all his desires which were sexual into something

conventional and accepted by society. The last fallen kite that was brought back successfully was an achievement.

Over-estimation leads to submissiveness. It takes control when sexual overestimation increases further. The picture and the character of the beloved get more unmistakable and infallible. The sexual tendency now gets repressed by the beloved.

"Traits of humility, of the limitation of narcissism, and self-injury occur in every case of being in love; in the extreme case they are only intensified, and as a result of the withdrawal of the sensual claims they remain in solitary supremacy" (Freud, 1921, p.81) When Hassan ran after a fallen kite and Amir followed him, Hassan ran in the opposite direction, he always knew where the kite would fall but throughout the scene, their conversation is important because it shows Hassan's obedience and loyalty to Amir. Amir questioned his surety about where the kite would fall and Hassan answered that why would he ever lie to Amir? Amir showed his doubts again and Hassan replied that he would eat dirt if he ever lied. Amir again wanted to make sure that if he ever asked, would Hassan eat dirt and Hassan replied with an affirmation. Hassan's submissiveness was at such extreme that he would not mind eating dirt if Amir asked, the critical thought and objection to the absurd request is not seen anymore in him, he seems to be fully inclined towards Amir. Hassan has fallen in love with Amir and has surrendered himself to him.

Table 4
Hassan's Obedience and Loyalty: Manifestation of Submissiveness

Line from the Text	Context in the Story	Psychoanalytic Theme
<i>"He went near and smashed a pomegranate on his own head and asked Amir if he was satisfied yet." (Hosseini, 2007, p. 93)</i>	After Amir provokes Hassan by throwing pomegranates at him, Hassan refuses to retaliate, symbolizing his complete surrender to Amir	Submissiveness: Over-estimation of the beloved

Furthermore, the above incident illustrates Hassan's deep-seated need to satisfy Amir, even when faced with humiliation or physical pain, revealing his self-sacrificial love and loyalty.

Hassan's Id reveals his masochism; An Analysis of Hassan's psych

Hassan's Id and Masochism

Hassan's psychology, viewed through Freud's model of Id, Ego, and Superego, suggests that his actions are deeply influenced by the unconscious mind's interplay with repressed trauma and unfulfilled desires. Freud's personality theory explains that the Id operates on the pleasure principle, seeking instant gratification of desires, often without moral constraints. The Superego, by contrast, embodies cultural and moral expectations, while the Ego balances the two, mediating impulses with the realities of the external world.

Impact of the Absent Mother

The trauma of Hassan's abandonment by his mother has a profound impact on his psyche. Freud's theory suggests that early childhood experiences, especially those involving love and attachment, can create deep-seated fears and desires that unconsciously shape one's future relationships. In Hassan's case, the absence of maternal love leaves a void, setting up a foundational Id desire for connection and security, which he later transfers to Amir.

Table 5
Hassan's Id and Masochism: Unveiling His Subconscious Desires

Lines from text

"Hassan never talked about his mother, as if she'd never existed. I always wondered if he dreamed about her, about what she looked like, where she was. I wondered if he longed to meet her. Did he ache for her, the way I ached for the mother I had never met?" (Hosseini, 2007, p.6)

Here, Hassan's repression of his longing for his mother manifests as an intense loyalty to Amir, filling the emotional gap his mother left behind. This unconscious transfer of affection is a classic case of Freud's object-cathexis, where Hassan's unmet need for maternal affection is redirected toward Amir, fulfilling his need for attachment in a socially acceptable way.

Masochism and Submission of the Id

Freud's view of masochism, where one's pleasure is derived from suffering, can be seen in Hassan's submissive behavior, especially in traumatic situations. In moments of extreme violation, Hassan's reaction reflects a complex dynamic where his Id seems to resign to suffering as a form of acceptance or fulfillment of his repressed feelings.

Table 6
Impact of Maternal Absence: Hassan's Unconscious Transfer of Affection

Lines from text

"Assef knelt behind Hassan...Hassan didn't struggle. Didn't even whimper. He moved his head slightly and I caught a glimpse of his face. Saw the resignation in it. It was a look I had seen before. It was the look of the lamb." (Hosseini, 2007, p.66)

This act of submission and lack of resistance can be seen as Hassan's Id unconsciously accepting the role of a masochist, manifesting his deep-seated guilt and unworthiness, internalized since childhood. Freud theorizes that when tender love persists beyond childhood attachments, repressed guilt can drive one towards scenarios of pain or humiliation, as a form of unconscious self-punishment.

Superego's Influence and Guilt

Following the traumatic incident, Hassan's actions indicate a strong guilt response driven by the Superego. His avoidance of Amir and concentration on routine activities suggest coping mechanisms of denial and suppression. Freud's view on the Superego elucidates this behavior as a consequence of internalized societal and moral standards, with Hassan's shame and guilt predominating, leading him to shun confrontation with his anguish and seek comfort in service.

The narrative describes, *"For a week, [Amir] did not see Hassan... [he] found his breakfast on the dining table ready, his uniform and clothes ironed. When [Amir] inquired, [he] knew from Ali that Hassan just wanted to sleep after he does his chores. He hides himself under the blanket, which shows his escapism."*

Hassan's extreme submissiveness and guilt demonstrate Freud's notion of Superego dominance, where moral conscience overpowers the Ego, resulting in self-sacrifice and guilt-driven behaviors. His daily routines become a method to manage his guilt and evade further psychological distress, illustrating the Freudian concept of repression and defensive mechanisms employed to cope with traumatic memories. This nuanced analysis of Hassan reveals how his Id's masochistic inclinations, coupled with the domineering Superego, shape his submissive and self-sacrificing nature, reflecting the profound impact of unconscious desires, societal morals, and early childhood traumas on his psyche.

Interpretation of Hassan's Dream and Hidden Desires

Dreams, as Freud theorizes, allow repressed content from the unconscious mind to manifest in disguised forms, revealing latent desires and conflicts. Hassan's dream, therefore, serves as a gateway to understanding his unexpressed feelings and societal conflicts.

The Dream's Manifest and Latent Content

The apparent content, or literal events, of Hassan's dream describe him and Amir at Lake Ghargha. A supposed monster prevents people from swimming, but Amir bravely dives in, followed by Hassan. They reach the middle of the lake, proving that there are no monsters, and the lake is named in their honor. This image sets the stage for the latent content - the hidden meaning of Hassan's dream.

Unconscious Desire: The Lake as a Symbol for Marriage

The lake in Hassan's dream symbolizes a marriage or union, with the "monster" embodying the societal and moral barriers surrounding homosexuality. Freud's concept of displacement suggests that Hassan's wish to marry Amir is too taboo for direct expression. Therefore, the dream displaces this desire onto an abstract journey across a lake, a metaphor for overcoming societal prohibitions on same-sex love. Hassan imagines himself following Amir's lead, hinting at his unconscious desire for Amir to be the one to initiate or accept their union, as he feels vulnerable in doing so himself.

Table 7

Hassan's Dream: A Realm Beyond Societal Constraints

"It's a dream, Amir agha, you can do anything," Hassan laughs, indicating his awareness of the dream's limitless realm where societal constraints disappear, and his desire can take shape without judgment.

Overcoming Social Fear: The Monster as Moral Opposition

In the latent content, the monster represents the social taboo against same-gender relationships, more specifically, in a conservative Afghan society. According to Freud's theory, Hassan's mind uses condensation—where several emotions and ideas are combined into a single symbol—to condense cultural traditions, social prejudice, and fear of shame into the monster. In the dream, Amir bravely challenges the monster by diving into the lake, reflecting Hassan's unconscious desire for Amir to overcome social barriers with him.

Reaching the Other Side: Freedom from Social Constraint

Swimming to the center of the lake, Amir and Hassan looked back to see people who once feared the lake reduced to tiny figures, showing how, in fulfilling Hassan's wish, restrictions and social pressures seem trivial. This illustration reflects Hassan's desire to be free from judgment and his hope that, once his desire is granted, societal disapproval will no longer have power over him. Freud's theory posits that the sense of triumph over these "little" people presents Hassan's desire for liberation from the burden of cultural and moral restrictions. In essence, Hassan's dream reflects his repressed desire for a deeper connection with Amir, forbidden by the cultural and moral norms of their society. The journey across the lake serves as a symbolic exploration of overcoming societal and personal fears, with Hassan projecting his desire for connection and acceptance through the dream's disguised imagery.

Conclusion

This study of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* provides a comprehensive psychoanalytic exploration of the character Hassan, delving into the complex interplay of friendship and betrayal while highlighting themes of unconditional love and masochism. Employing psychoanalytic literary criticism, the study uncovers the hidden desires, anxieties, conflicts, and traumas that mold Hassan's persona. The present study demonstrates how Hassan's psychological challenges arise from the lack of maternal affection and the consequences of his father's impairment, contributing to his internal struggles. His idealization of Amir, driven by feelings of cultural and economic inferiority, reflects a deep emotional vacuum he attempts to fill through unwavering loyalty.

Furthermore, Hassan's devotion and submissiveness, exemplified by his acceptance of Amir's behavior and his iconic phrase, "For you, a thousand times over," showcase the intricacies of love as described in Freudian theory, where emotional bonds often intertwine with the pursuit of sexual gratification. Despite his profound affection for Amir, Hassan's masochistic tendencies are evident in his inability to express his sexual desires, resulting in a painful contradiction. His rape serves as a striking illustration of his submissive nature, where his id governs his actions, leaving him defenseless.

Moreover, the analysis of Hassan's dreams reveals his unacknowledged yearning for a legitimate and unconditional connection with Amir, symbolized by the river and the monster, emphasizing the societal restrictions surrounding same-sex unions in Afghan culture. The present study concludes, that Hassan's unconditional love for Amir, shaped by his masochism and repressed desire, offer a complex insight into his psyche. This exploration provides a deeper understanding of Hassan's psychological complexities and the lasting impact of love, loss, and loyalty in *The Kite Runner*.

Recommendations

This study offers several recommendations for further exploration and application. Educators and psychologists can use literary works like *The Kite Runner* to explore themes of repressed emotions, trauma, and unconscious desires, fostering empathy and critical analysis. Future research should extend psychoanalytic frameworks to other characters and texts, deepening insights into the interplay of individual psyche and societal norms. Hassan's struggles highlight the need to address social barriers, particularly regarding gender roles and same-sex relationships. Awareness campaigns and inclusive education can challenge these taboos, while schools and communities should provide safe spaces for discussing identity, relationships, and mental health.

Finally, insights from Hassan's psychological complexity can inform research on loyalty, repression, and masochism in real-world contexts, guiding the development of emotional support systems and interventions. These recommendations aim to bridge literary analysis with practical strategies for personal and societal growth.

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