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Personality Traits of Amir in *The Kite Runner*: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyze Amir's triple personality in the novel, *The Kite Runner* towards his father (Baba) and his friend (Hassan) by applying Freud's personality theory. His jealousy toward Hassan brings his dominance over Id, so he feels guilty for his past mistakes and redeems by rescuing Hassan's son Sohrab from Assef by completing it. Finally, he becomes a good man again. All the personality traits of Amir have been identified but his personality traits vary significantly depending on the perceived presence of his social context.

Keywords: Jealousy, Personality, Id, Ego, Superego, redemption

Introduction

Khaled Hosseini is a novelist and short-story writer of Afghanistan origin. He is now an American citizen and lives in Northern California. He is currently a goodwill envoy for United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Through the Khaled Hosseini Foundation, he provides humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. He was inspired to initiate this foundation when he visited Afghanistan in 2007. He has enchanted the literary world with gems like *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *The Mountain Echoed* etc. His novels *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* were international bestsellers, published in more than thirty countries. He was awarded the 'South African Book Prize' for his debut novel *The Kite Runner* in 2006 and 2007.

This paper sheds light on the novel *The Kite Runner* which tells the story of a boy named Amir who is an immigrant of Afghan and lives in America. He has committed a mistake in his childhood and makes redemption of his fault by sacrificing his ego, from the first-person point of view. The paper also analyses the three different types of the personality of Amir by using Freud's triple personality theory which are **id**, **ego**, and **superego**. By using Freud's Personality Theory, he creates a clear understanding of Amir. How he lost, how he formed a powerful self and finally completed the sublimation of personality to be a good man who have been discussed with great clarity. Meanwhile, it aims to analyse how Amir forms his own ego, by friendship, loyalty, cruelty, longing for acceptance, redemptions and survival.

Id

Id is the earliest part of Freud's personality theory. It is present at the time of birth and runs on pure instinct, desire and need. It is entirely unconscious and basically works on the pleasure principle. Amir is the protagonist in the novel *The Kite Runner*. He is a boy who lives with his father, Baba, in an estate in Kabul, Afghanistan. As far as Amir's father is concerned, Amir is a coward, lacking the ability of self-defence and prefers burying his head in books to doing sports vigorously as his father wishes him to do. He always dies for his father's love and affection but his father gives the same love and affection

to his half-brother, Hassan by paying extra attention to him. This fact gets reflected in the following lines:

“On Hassan’s birthday, Baba summoned him to the house as usual to collect his present. Hassan, Amir and Ali were shocked, baba had hired a plastic surgeon to correct Hassan’s harelip. Amir was jealous that baba has given Hassan such special attention.” (Hosseini 2013: 41-43)

From the above quotation, it is clear that Amir is jealous of Hassan. However, Hassan really loves and cares for him. Amir’s jealousy towards his best friend is unreasonable because his jealousy is all about wanting his father’s love and affection. He wishes that he is the only special person in his father’s life and he also wants that his father doesn’t divide his love and affection with anyone except him. He also thinks that his father will do everything for the kite because Hassan was a good kite player whereas Amir was not.

Unfortunately, his father gives him and Hassan the same thing. Amir really doesn’t like this because his Id is dominant. His jealousy is all about pleasure principle. So, Amir’s Id is reflected in his desire to play with Hassan and continually trick him.

Ego

In the theory of Personality, the Ego operates from the reality principle which works to satisfy the Id’s desire in the most reasonable and realistic ways. Amir’s ego is reflected in his decision to avoid an unpleasant experience, and his effort to be a proud son by going to win the kite fighting competition, as is seen in the quotation below:

“You’re almost there, Amir agha! Almost there!” Hassan panting. Then the comment came. I closed my eyes and loosened my grip on the string. It sliced my fingers again as the wind dragged it. And then...I didn’t need to hear the crowd’s roar to know. I didn’t need to see either. Hassan was screaming and his arm was wrapped around my neck.

“Bravo! Bravo, Amir agha!”

“We won! We won!” was all I could say. ...Then I saw Baba on our roof. He was standing on the edge, pumping both of his fists. Hollering and clapping. And that night seeing Baba on that roof, proud of me at last. (Hosseini, 2013: 62-63)

From the above quote, his bravery appears due to his father who will be proud of him. Amir is happier because he wins the kite tournament and brings home the trophy. It is witnessed in the following lines:

...I opened the door to the smoky study and stepped in. Baba and Rahim Khan were drinking tea and listening to the news crackling on the radio. Their heads turned. Then a smile played on my father’s lips. He opened his arms. I put the kite down and walked into his thick hairy arms. I buried my face in the warmth of his chest and wept. Baba held me close to him rocking me back and forth. (Hosseini, 2013: 74)

The quote above explains that Amir owns the ego. He wants to boast Baba by bringing home the kite tournament. Seeing Baba’s smile is a sign that Amir is no longer a disappointing son. Amir’s ego can also be seen from his efforts to get himself rid of guilt against Hassan as mentioned in the following quotation:

.... An hour later, I still couldn’t sleep. I kept tossing and turning as my relatives grunted, sighed and snored in their sleep. I sat up. A wedge of moonlight streamed in through the window.

“I watched Hassan get raped,” I said to no one. Baba stirred in his sleep. Kaka Homayoun grunted. A part of me was hoping someone would wake up and hear, so I wouldn’t live with this lie anymore. But no one woke up and in the silence that followed. I understood the nature of my new course: I was going to get away with it. (Hosseini, 2011: 80)

From the illustration above Amir tries to free himself of his guilt by confessing aloud that Hassan had the sexual abuse when everyone was asleep. He wishes someone wakes up and hears the word and thus he does not have to undergo the misery and suffering which no longer burdens him. Apparently, this does not make Amir free from guilt. Amir tries another way. He accuses Hassan that he stole his money and his watches. He wants Baba to expel Hassan. Thereby Amir no longer sees Hassan and his guilt disappears by itself. This situation has been elaborated in the following paragraphs:

Then I took a couple of the envelopes of cash from the pile of gifts and my watch, and tiptoed out. I lifted Hassan's mattress and put my new watch and a handful of Afghani bill under it. I waited another thirty minutes. Then I knocked on Baba's door and told what I hoped would be the last in a long line of shameful lies. ..Baba came right out and asked "Did you steal that money? Did delivered in a thin, raspy voice: "Yes." (Hosseini, 2013: 97)

He has done this to satisfy his ego in an improper way. This is due to Amir who wants to be free from the anxiety earlier. Amir success to expel Hassan finally. This success is only a redirection of his desire to be free from guilt.

The fact is Amir has been suffering from this guilt for many years of his life. This guilt surfaces in the following lines too:

... One day last summer, my friend Rahim Khan called from Pakistan. He asked me to come to see him. Standing in the kitchen with the receiver to my ear, I knew it wasn't just Rahim Khan on the line. It was my past of unatoned sins. (Hosseini, 2013: 01)

Amir doesn't know how to atone for his sin towards Hassan so he tries for his redemption. Amir is willing to see Rahim Khan. Rahim Khan says that he knows the way for Amir to be good again and finds another reason to go back to Afghanistan. Amir hopes that he will correct the things that lingered four years ago. Amir has found out the truth about Hassan that Amir is his biological brother by another mother. Furthermore, Rahim Khan told a good way to redeem all his mistakes in the past by rescuing Hassan's son, Sohrab.

"...Amir jan, I summoned you here because I wanted to see you before I die, but that's not at all." I said nothing, I think already knew what he was going to say. I want you to go to kabul. I want you to bring Sohrab here," he said. (Hosseini, 2013: 203)

From this passage, it can be seen that the purpose of Rahim Khan is to rescue Shorab. Amir's effort to rescue Sohrab turns out to be in the hands of Assef. Although Amir had to fight very hard with Assef, eventually Amir brings Sohrab and gives him a better life.

Superego

The **superego** is the moral compass of the personality, upholding a sense of right or wrong. These values are initially learned from our parents. However, the superego grows with time. Superego prefers perfection rather than pleasure and is regarded as the moral aspect of personality. Superego aspect of Amir can be seen when he decides to leave Hassan for the blue kite even though Amir learns that Hassan is a very faithful servant. Hassan has fulfilled his promise to Amir that he will get that blue kite for Amir's victory. Amir also knows that Hassan even prefers to bring home the kite rather than hand it over to someone else. This situation gets life and sustenance in the following paragraph:

... Even from where I was standing, I could see the fear creeping into Hassan's eyes, but he shook his head. "Amir agha won the tournament and I ran this kite for him. I ran it fairly. This is his kite" (Hosseini, 2013: 68)

In this text, Hassan still defends Amir even though he feels frightened and retains the kite for Amir. Instead, Amir sacrifices Hassan for the blue kite, a trophy for the winner. Amir realises that all his dreams and aspirations exist on the blue kite. The blue kite holds Baba's heart:

....I had one last chance to make a decision. One final opportunity to decide who I was going to be. I could step into that alley, stand up for Hassan-the way he'd stood up for me all those times in the past and accept whatever would happen to me. Or I could run. In the end, I run." (Hosseini, 2013: 72)

When Assef rapes Hassan and Amir witnesses the situation but can't do anything, he says, "I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me. I was afraid of getting hurt" (Hosseini, 2013: 72)

The paragraph above shows that the ego prefers to follow the id rather than the superego. Amir's decision to run and leave Hassan shows that his superego is weak. This is due to the over-dominance of id. The ego becomes unrealistic in making decisions. The ego will break the rules or norms. Besides, Amir's superego also becomes weak. Furthermore, after the rape incident, Amir decides he is unable to handle the pain of dealing with Hassan every day. Rather than admitting that he does not stand up for Hassan, he hides his money and watch under Hassan's mattress in an attempt to get him and Ali is dismissed. This shows Amir has a weak superego and a strong id. Amir knows that hiding his money with Hassan will get Hassan in trouble, but he does it anyway for his own good.

Amir's decision to leave Hassan and his accusation that he has stolen his money do not conform with moral values. It turns out that his actions leave a very deep sense of guilt. Guilt perceived by Amir shows that the superego within Amir punishes him for his action which does not conform with ethics or morality as is seen in the quotation below:

"I watched Hassan get raped," I said to no one...A part of me was hoping someone would wake up and hear, so I wouldn't live with this lie anymore. But no one woke up and in the silence that followed. I understood the nature of my new curse: I was going to get away with it. (Hosseini, 2013: 80)

Yet Amir's superego can be strong. It can be seen when he follows Baba's desire to become a member of the football team:

...He signed me up for soccer teams to stir the same passion on me. But I was pathetic, a blundering liability to my own team, always in the way of an opportune pass or unwittingly blocking an open lane. (Hosseini, 2013: 19)

The above text confirms that Amir tries to please Baba by playing soccer, Baba's favourite sport. Amir's superego looks strong because he fulfils Baba's wishes although Amir knows he is a terrible player. Amir's action to obey his father is one of the characteristics of the superego. In addition, Amir's superego also looks strong when Amir does his best to save Sohrab from the sadistic man, Assef, and from a very critical situation for committing suicide:

....He says the boy had cut himself deeply and had lost a great deal of blood and my mouth begins to mutter that prayer again: La illaha il Allah, Muhammad rasul ullah. They had to transfuse several units of red cells. How will I tell Soraya? Twice, they have to revive him I will do Namaz, I will do Zakat. They would have lost him if his heart hadn't been young and strong, I will fast. He is alive. (Hosseini, 2013: 319)

The above text shows that Amir feels responsible for Sohrab's suicide and he feels that he is punished for his sins once again. He asks God to forgive him for his neglect and betrayal. He promises to pray every day, pay zakat and do fast if only God will save Sohrab's life. The **superego** in Amir has been strong since it can act in accordance with the rules or religious norms. The action taken by the **ego** is also influenced by the **superego** when Amir promises to take care of Sohrab.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to analyse the protagonist (Amir) of the novel, *The Kite Runner* by using Freud's personality theory. Also I analyse the way how Amir has committed things with Hassan for his inner pleasure only, but later his ego and superego turn him to get off his guilt and make a redemption.

So, the protagonist's personality changes at different stages of his life. This fact clarifies that the personality of a person will change in every stage of his life if he is willing to adapt and change and live a life of joy and fulfilment.

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