

Contextualizing Amir's Journey towards Individuation in Khaled Hossieni's *The Kite Runner: A Jungian Interpretation*

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Abstract

*This study aims to analyze Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner* from a Jungian perspective, which focuses on the dual aspects of human personality. By adopting this viewpoint, the novel sheds light on several pressing social issues, such as sectarian violence and ethnic superiority. These issues often compel individuals to blindly conform to societal expectations, disregarding the undeveloped aspects of their own personality. Rather than placing blame on others for our troubles and miseries, this study encourages self-evaluation as a means of personal growth and soul development. The study's key findings highlight how psychological imbalance and lopsidedness arise from the blocking of energy flow between the conscious and unconscious mind. The objective of this research is to emphasize the lifelong process of individuation, which aims to integrate the fragmented aspects of our personality and facilitate positive and productive change. Through textual analysis, the study examines the negative effects of an imbalanced personality, specifically shadow projection and the development of a strong persona. These analyses are conducted from both psychological and Jungian perspectives.*

Keywords: *The Kite Runner, Individuation, Shadow Projection, Transformation, Lopsidedness*



Introduction

This study symbolically harmonizes the traumatic components in the main character of *The Kite Runner*, Amir's psyche, a vessel which contains the ebb and flow of his life. His childhood's transgression leads him to go through a dramatic denouement. He betrays Hassan, his childhood friend, and goes through a process of projections for twenty-six years by wearing various masks. From a Jungian perspective, Amir's journey to enlightenment involves shocks and aftershocks which eventually open his eyes to the path of integration. Jung (1981), and Jungians would explain the process an "individuation", the process of "incomparable uniqueness" (p. 171), and coming to terms with one's true self. The proceeding paragraphs focus on his sequential process of individuation.

Amir's haughty disposition prompts him to think too high of himself. He behaves arrogantly in terms of ethnicity, denomination and wealth. His upper-class snobbery, ethnic superiority, and denominational prejudice propel him to appear too proud to be conceited. The racial discrimination is an apt example of class-difference in the novel. He treats Hassan as a "servant" and a "cook" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 30) and mocks at him for his ethnic inferiority. He asks himself "what does he [Hassan] know, that illiterate Hazara." He views his ego in terms of individuality and self-importance. He uses the personal pronoun "I" for his superior ethnic background by saying, "I was a Pashtun and he [Hassan] was a Hazara" (Hosseini 2003, p. 22).

Amir's racial, sectarian and social superiority demonstrate his conflict with his conscious and the unconscious. In the words of Jung (1916), he denies and represses "the dangerous aspect of the unrecognized dark half of the [his] personality" (p. 94). Amir starts splitting off his evils, and in the words of Sharp (1987), his shadow is "less civilized, more primitive, cares little for social propriety" (p. 95). He dominates his ego over his shadow to the extent that he enters into the world of repressions.

From a Jungian perspective, Amir is stuck between the two poles in his psyche: the conscious and the unconscious. Hassan represents his ego while Assef represents his shadow. One is his conscious/civilized/unobjectionable and controllable tendencies while the other is his primitive/repressed/unacknowledged/underdeveloped/ part. He is juxtaposed between the civilized and the uncivilized sides of personality. He remains unaware of his barbaric desires of hurting the Hazaras, and ignores/represses keeping balance between the primitive (Assef) and civilized (Hassan) aspects of his personality.

Hassan is sodomized by Assef, which symbolizes cruelty, lust, chaos and dark sides of humans. Amir witnesses Hassan's rape but fails to save him from Assef's atrocity. Afterwards, he denies taking responsibility for his betrayal of Hassan. He holds other people responsible for his own primitive sides. He starts treating Hassan like an object by devaluing his human existence in Afghanistan. He projects his own animistic-dehumanized treatment of Hassan onto the other Pashtuns that how they call the Hazaras as "mice-eating, flat nosed, load carrying donkeys" (Hosseini 2003, p. 8). He agrees with Assef's estimate of Hassan as "a disrespectful donkey" (Hosseini 2003, p. 66). Unconsciously, he joins in Assef's guilt and gives ways to his other uncivilized impulses by aspiring to "cowardice" (Hosseini 2003, p. 68), which he projects onto Hassan by calling him "a goddamn coward" (Hosseini 2003, p. 81). Stuhr (2009) says that "a power dynamic makes it possible for Amir to treat Hassan as an inferior, and that allows him to humiliate Hassan without fearing retribution" (p. 42).

After Amir's betrayal of Hassan, he is unable to confront Hassan and stops playing with him. He disconnects himself from his own darkness, and enters into a world of isolation/repression. Jung says, "Projections change the world into the replica of one's own unknown face" (p. 17). Amir's unknown face of guilt/betrayal/selfishness is casted upon others. Hassan's presence is a constant reminder; he plans to get rid of Hassan that "one of us had to go" in order to lessen the impact of his suffering and "long lines of shameful lies" (Hosseini 2003, p. 91). He represents Hassan as a thief and a liar before Baba. He hides his own watch and money beneath Hassan's mattress and blames him for stealing them, and eventually sends him to Hazarajat. He projects Hassan's exile to Hazarajat onto Assef that he has fulfilled Assef's "vision...To rid Afghanistan of all the dirty...Hazaras" (Hosseini 2003, p. 36).

Amir expects some resistance from Hassan against his own false accusations. Hassan knew that if he would tell Baba the truth, Amir will not be forgiven for his cheating by Baba. Hence, he sacrifices his own dignity for Amir's sake and owns up the theft he has not committed. Amir is shocked by Hassan's another sacrifice for him, and he confesses shamefully, "I wanted to tell them all that I was the snake in the grass, the monster in the lake. I wasn't worthy of this sacrifice; I was a liar, a cheat and a thief" (Hosseini 2003, p. 92). In this way, by feathering his own nest, Amir makes not only his own life miserable but also ruins the lives of others. In a similar situation, Guerin (2005) quotes Jung:

It is often tragic to see how blatantly a man bungles his own life and the lives of others yet remains totally incapable of seeing how much of a whole tragedy originates in him, and how he continually feeds it and keeps it going (p. 209).

Eventually, Amir gets the attention of Baba and leaves for America after Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan. He buries his dreadful past, marries Soraya, and becomes a successful writer. However, even in California, he loses his self-satisfaction, constantly being haunted in his dreams, but he does not pay attention to the symbolic implications of his dreams. He loves Hassan, but he derides him. His shadow dominates his ego, and he is governed by his extroverted thinking. The primitive his shadow becomes, the larger the projections occur. The more he projects his evils onto others, the brighter/ luminous his public face grows. His unacknowledged, repressed and undeveloped side remains hidden under the inflated and stronger personas for twenty six years, when suddenly his unconscious haunts him for his betrayals.

Amir receives a call from Rahim Khan, his Baba's business partner, at the age of thirty eight that the latter is severely ill and wants to see the former before death. Amir decides to come to Pakistan and learns about Hassan's and his wife's brutal killings by the extremists. Rahim Khan further tells him that Hassan sacrifices himself once again for saving Amir's mansion in Jalalabad from the extremists. Rahim Khan requests Amir to go to Kabul for saving Sohrab, Hassan's son from the extremists' brutal treatment. Amir feels reluctant at Rahim Khan's request and replies to him, "I have a wife in America, a home, a career, and a family. Kabul is a dangerous place, you know that, and you'd have me risk everything for" (Hosseini 2003, p. 194).

The above quote shows Amir's constant fight with his ego and self when Rahim Khan, an archetypal Wise Old Man, his mentor, who tests his feeling faculty in another way by disclosing Baba's illegal relations with Sanauber, Ali's wife. He unlocks the secret that a brotherly relationship between him and Hassan exists as Hassan was Baba's illegitimate child from Sanauber. He recalls how Baba tells him once in California, "I wish Hassan had been with us today." He further recalls how Baba gave him moral lessons about theft and lie and he realizes

that “Baba had been a thief” (Hosseini 2003, p.197). He thinks that there is no difference between him and Baba. He says, “Baba and I were more alike than I’d ever known. We had both betrayed the people who would have given their lives for us. And with that came this realization: that Rahim Khan summoned me here to atone not just for my sins but for Baba’s too” (Hosseini 2003, p. 197).

With the above thought, a sense of redemption/integration takes place in Amir. Rinjie argues about such a process of transformation in him that, “One of the prominent changes observed in Amir is his transformation from a boy filled with guilt to a man blessed by redemption” (p. 30). His process of individuation manifests itself in Hassan’s above powerful dreams and memories, which prepare him for his first phase of individuation, i.e. the acknowledgment of his evil-sidedness. He gets the courage to take the collective responsibility for both his and Baba’s sins. He asks for redemption not only for his betrayals but also for Baba’s sins. Maruna quotes Neumann (2004), who says, “The individual assumes personal responsibility for part of the burden of the collective, and he decontaminates this evil by integrating it into his own inner process of transformation...which in part at least is redeemed from this evil” (p. 294). Amir realizes that he “had always been too hard on [himself]” (p. 198).

Amir recalls Rahim Khan’s prophetic statement that “there is a way to be good again...A way to end the cycle” (p. 198). Jung (1981) rightly says in this connection that the “nearer we approach to the middle of life, and the better we have succeeded in entrenching ourselves in our personal attitudes and social positions, the more it appears as if we had discovered the right course and the right ideals, principles and behaviors” (p. 77). The process of transformation takes place in him at the age of thirty eight when he reaches at the zenith of maturity. He finds himself facing a sectarian and ethnic violence, broken relationship and an unforeseen upheaval which prepare him for discovering the positive change in his personality. Bloom (2009) quotes Kipen who says that Amir’s journey is symbolic of a “reflexive self-examination” of his personality (p. 51). It is pertinent to quote Jung who views the overall process of individuation in his “Stages of Life” that:

Fear of self-sacrifice lurks deep in every ego, and this fear is often only [of] the precariously controlled demand of the unconscious forces to burst out in full strength. No one who strives for selfhood (individuation) is spared this dangerous passage... and then only partially, for the sake of a more or less illusory freedom. This liberation is certainly a very necessary and very heroic undertaking... This at first sight, would appear to be the world, which is swelled out with projections for that very purpose. Here we seek and find our difficulties, here we seek and find our enemy, here we seek and find what is dear and precious to us; and it is comforting to know that all evil and all good is to be found out there, in the visible object, where it can be conquered, punished, destroyed, or enjoyed... There are, and always have been, those who cannot help but see that the world and its experiences are in the nature of a symbol, and that it really reflects something that lies hidden in the subject himself, in his own trans-subjective reality (p. 849).

Following Jung’s above quote, we can look at the different stages of individuation. At the very outset, an infant lives entirely in the world of unconscious. By and by, the ego starts emerging and solidifies itself, and thus the child strengthens his/her ego. The more the ego develops, the less the unconscious grows. In adulthood, the ego develops to the extent that it tries to set the setbacks of life which is a very difficult task and needs heroic efforts. The process of self-

realization occurs in the mid of our life, where we encounter a variety of difficulties: confronting our enemies, dominating our ego, developing our unconscious, and meeting the inner reflections of our psychological landscapes. We spend a lot of energy in distinguishing between good and evil, and conquering the conscious-self which we constantly repress in our young age and try to bring transformation in our personality.

The First Phase of Individuation

The preceding process of integration is symbolically seen in the actions of Amir. His mother dies while giving birth to him which makes his anima underdeveloped. He looks for Baba's love, and lives by ignoring his unconscious world. He is caught between good and evil, helping him in the development of his psychological landscapes. He faces a myriad of difficulties in the process of his psychological wholeness. His journey to Kabul symbolizes the fight between good and evil, thinking and feelings, shadow and ego, ego and self and above all shadow and integration.

After searching Sohrab in various orphanages in Kabul, the climax of the novel occurs suddenly when Amir goes to a "Taliban official" and finds himself between the devil and the deep sea as the man is Assef. He is stuck between his ego and unconscious, and thinks about his safety on the one hand and Sohrab's security on another. He asks himself in confusion, "This isn't you Amir', part of me said. 'You're gutless.' It's how you were made...Nothing wrong with cowardice as long as it comes with prudence. But when a coward stops remembering who he is" (Hosseini 2003, pp. 240-241). He confronts his past cowardice and thinks that throughout his journey toward integration, his real enemy was his fear of Assef. He finds himself not among those people who commit guilt but never accuse themselves of their guilty conscience. He accepts his past guilt and comes across his first test of transformation, overcoming his fear of Assef by acting with honor and courage.

Amir utters the words to himself, "My face was burning... My past like that, always turning up. His name rose from the deep and I didn't want to say it, as if uttering it, it might conjure him" (Hosseini 2003, p. 243). He finds out Assef in his "element" (p. 243), symbolizing Assef's evil-sidedness, and representing him as a devil figure. Assef tells Amir about his mission, "Afghanistan is like a beautiful mansion littered with garbage, and someone has to take out the garbage" (Hosseini 2003, p. 249). Assef's mission is to make Afghanistan free of the Hazara Muslims and to bring about their final annihilation, and for this purpose he has enslaved Sohrab.

Amir gets ready that now it is his turn to be punished by his shadow (Assef) for his disloyalty with Hassan. During the whole process of fight in which Amir is badly injured by Assef, he suddenly gets healed by expressing his feelings, "But I was laughing and laughing. And the harder I laughed, the harder he kicked me, punched me, scratched me" (Hosseini 2003, p. 252). Amir's laughing makes Assef infuriated and he asks Amir the reason of his laughter. Amir thinks that since the winter of 1975, when Hassan had been raped, he had been searching for his mental peace. He recalls the memory that how he invoked Hassan for pelting Amir with the pomegranate twenty six years ago but Hassan "crushed it against his forehead" to make him satisfied.

Amir thinks that in spite of Assef's beating, "I hadn't been happy and I hadn't felt better, not at all. But I did now. My body was broken – just how badly I wouldn't find out until later – but I felt healed. Healed at last. I laughed" (Hosseini 2003, pp. 252-253). Suddenly, Sohrab takes out his slingshot which he always "tucks in the waist of his pants everywhere he goes" (p. 253). He puts out Assef's eye with a slingshot, and thus Assef gets the punishment which he deserves.

Amir brings Sohrab to Pakistan which brings moral awareness in his personality. This awareness enables him to adapt himself to the outer world. While journeying into the unconscious, he faces his stronger persona, the second phase toward integration. He does not want to leave a gap between what he is and what he appears to be. He accepts his weaknesses, throwing away the masks of an honest and truthful friend, husband and a son. After succeeding in the first task of persona confrontation, he develops an introverted-feeling attitude which was previously the extraverted-thinking attitude. The third one is the development of a pre-dominant function among the four psychological functions of thinking, feeling, intuition, and sensation.

The Second Phase of Amir's Individuation

The second phase of individuation in Amir is further developed when he gets himself admitted in a hospital in Peshawar: a phase of emotional discovery and physical recovery. He notices himself converted from an ego-dominant and extraverted person into an emotional and introverted man. His beaten body mends in the hospital, symbolizing his emotional maturation. He sees many faces in his symbolic dreams resembling his past guilt and collaboration to his unconscious. Jung (1981) says about such collaboration that "The collaboration of the unconscious is intelligent and purposive, and even when it acts in opposition to consciousness its expression is still compensatory in an intelligent way, as if it were trying to restore the lost balance" (para. 505).

He sees Assef in his dream who tells him, "we're the same, you and I...You nursed with him but you're my twin" (p. 268). Assef looks into his eyes and says that both of them are the same as both hurt Hassan; Assef hurts him physically while Amir teases him spiritually. He reminds him that though Amir has nursed with Hassan; he is of Assef's twin. This realization of Amir's shadow prepares him for the recognition of his intrinsic deformity and spiritual maturity. Amir discovers in the hospital that he has got a scar on his face after being beaten by Assef. He now resembles Hassan by getting "Raptured spleen. Broken teeth, punctured lung. Busted eye socket" (Hosseini 2003, p. 260). Like Hassan, he gets emotional maturity at the cost of his physical deformity.

Rahim Khan leaves a letter for Amir, and reminds him of his childhood betrayal of Hassan, and encourages him for redemption. He tells him that he has become too hard on himself because of his distant relations with his father. He focuses on Amir's evil-sidedness in his childhood until he becomes a mature man of thirty eight. He is hopeful that Amir's moral awareness would wash away the stains of his past betrayal with his journey to Afghanistan. Further he reveals to him the strength of power-struggle in the form of his and Baba's evil-sidedness.

Both Amir and Baba dominate the persons who are weaker than them. Both commit evils and both find out their ways of amendments. Baba betrays his servant and childhood friend Ali by keeping illicit relations with his wife, while Amir betrays his loyal friend, Hassan. Amir betrays Hassan because of his distant relationship with Baba as he yearns for achieving Baba's affection and does not want Baba to love Hassan. Baba is unable to keep a balanced relation with his two sons: Amir and Hassan. He does not love Hassan the way he loves Amir; he gets even harder on Amir as well. However, Rahim Khan states that Baba have tried to love both his sons equally but differently.

Baba builds an orphanage, gives money to the needy people and feeds the poverty-stricken people in Kabul, which in views of Rahim Khan is "all his way of redeeming himself." Rahim Khan highlights the significance of true redemption. He delineates that "true redemption is, Amir Jan,

when guilt leads to good” (Hosseini 2003, p. 263). Amir confesses after Rahim Khan’s letter that he has made a scapegoat of Hassan for the achievement of his own selfish motives. He asks himself, “What had I done, other than take my guilt out on the very same people I had betrayed, and then try to forget it all? What had I done other than become an insomniac” (Hosseini 2003, p. 264)?

The above quote reveals the effect of the positive change in Amir’s personality, encouraging him for adopting Sohrab as a son. With this thought, another phase of individuation occurs where his persona is shaken, shadow is acknowledged and his ego is dispersed. The development of his personality proceeds and “the psychic differentiation” and “integration of personality” (p. 162) takes place in him in the words of Jung-Kee (2007). Through psychic differentiation the negative and neglected pole in his personality is brought into consciousness.

Amir brings Sohrab to Islamabad, doing arrangement for their visas back to California. In Islamabad, he tries to bring back Sohrab to a normal life who has been traumatized by Assef’s abusive treatment of him. He consoles him by saying that he will not be punished by God for hurting Assef, a devil figure, because “what [Sohrab] did to that man is what [Amir] should have done to him all those years ago. You gave him what he deserved, and he deserved even more” (Hosseini 2003, p. 278). Amir throws the strong persona and gathers the courage to tell Sohrab that he is his nephew, his half-brother’s son, a secret which Baba has not told them because Baba was “ashamed of himself” (p. 281).

The next day, Amir and Sohrab go to the US embassy and meet the lawyer for adopting Sohrab as a son, legally. The lawyer asks him to put Sohrab in an orphanage for sometimes. The news of going back to orphanage makes Sohrab traumatized as he is going to be abandoned once again. This thought terrifies Sohrab and he tries to free himself of his past trauma by attempting suicide, which puts Amir in another test in his process toward individuation. Amir starts “screaming through clenched teeth” (Hosseini 2003, p. 299), and once again makes himself responsible for ruining Hassan’s family. At this juncture, he thinks about the existence of Allah, and accepts Islam as the supreme religion and healing power in the world.

For twenty six years, he remains uncertain about the existence and blessings of Allah, and now he realizes the falsity of Baba’s belief and thinks “I see now that Baba was wrong that there is no God, there always had been I see him here, in the eyes of the people in this corridor of desperation” (Hosseini 2003, p. 301). He asks for forgiveness from Allah for his sins by promising to Allah, “I will pray that He forgive that I have neglected Him all of those years, forgive that I have betrayed, lied and sinned” (p. 302). He sees God in himself and everywhere in his surroundings. It is pertinent to quote Jung who says that “God must be born in man forever...the creator sees himself through the eyes of man’s consciousness” (Hosseini 2003, p. 142). He becomes conscious of Allah and His rights when the doctor informs him that Sohrab is alive and will be alright.

Amir owes his gratitude to Allah for His mercy, and hence takes Sohrab to America, where Soraya, his wife and positive anima, gives them warm welcome. Amir continues his struggle to defend Sohrab from the aggressions of other Pashtuns. When Soraya’s father asks him, “why [he has] brought back this boy with [him]?” as his social community will ask him why a Hazara boy is living with them. Amir throws his strong social mask and boldly responds that his Baba “slept with his servant’s wife. She bore him a son named Hassan. Hassan is dead now... [Sohrab] is Hassan’s son. He is my nephew.” He further directs Soraya’s father not to refer to Sohrab as a “Hazara boy in his presence” (Hosseini 2003, p. 315).

In California, both Amir and Soraya give familial love to Sohrab. Though Sohrab still lives in a traumatic past; they play with him, read stories from *The Shahnama* to him, and strive to bring him back to a normal life. He does not speak for almost a year, when one day Amir encourages him for fighting the kite. He notices a glimpse of hope and life in Sohrab's smile when he asks if he can run the kite for him. Amir becomes hilarious and starts shouting, "For you a thousand times over" (Hosseini 2003, p. 323), the way Hassan used to yell. He thinks that though it is "only a smile, a tiny smile... But I'll take it...Because when spring comes, it melts the snow" (Hosseini 2003, p. 324). Sohrab's smile, symbolically gives hope to Amir that one day he will make things right.

What we infer from the above discussion is how to bring productive changes in one's personality. Amir succeeds in transforming himself, eventually. The fragmented sides of his unconscious strive to be united. His broken relationships in the past now yearn for completeness, and his neglected sides are brought forth for soul making. Ultimately, his center of personality shifts from ego to self, keeping balance in the flow of energy between the conscious and the unconscious for productive transformation. Eventually, his sorrow is converted into laughter; shade into sun and inner darkness into light, as Jacoby says that "shadow is converted into light; where there is light, there is shadow as well" (p. 7).

Conclusion

This whole study indicates that individuation is a complex process, hedging about with struggle and suffering. Hence, our lopsidedness can be corrected through proper guidance and self-evaluation. What we need to see in ourselves, the same we search and criticize in others. We ourselves are responsible for flaming the fire of ethnic and denominational war and project this war onto others. We are responsible for our wrong doings and evils. We charge others with the evils we ourselves are afraid and unaware of acknowledging. We have to accept our inner evils, rather blaming others for our weaknesses and miseries, and in this way we will be able to individuate and purge ourselves from evils.

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