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Finding Anxiety: A Theoretical Analysis in Nadia Hashimi's *When the Moon is Low*

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Abstract

This study aims to bring to limelight the psychological perspective of anxiety in Nadia Hashimi's select novel *When the Moon is Low*. Anxiety is a major health challenge nowadays faced by women war-torn Taliban Afghanistan. Anxiety refers to a state of mind. In this fiction, the author attempts to jog the reader's memory to be aware of the aspects of anxiety problems and their symptoms faced by families under Taliban rule and the prevalent Afghan culture. Nadia Hashimi is a noteworthy writer, and her famous work is *When the Moon is Low*. In this fiction, the author has portrayed the subject of the psychological tendency of anxiety. Fereiba is the protagonist, in this novel, who faces many struggles and feels anxiety due to her husband's denial and throughout her displacement from

Kabul to London. Finally, she overcomes all the suffering and aspires to live her dream life in London. The contemporary study is based on the qualitative study that adopted the psychoanalytic theory proposed by Sigmund Freud. It analyzes the text that represents the elements related to anxiety through the protagonist's family. This study's results are compared and discussed with other studies concerning anxiety. The findings show that anxiety is applicable in Hashimi's *When the Moon is Low*. Also, the author has projected the aspect of anxiety in her work through her writing, especially narration, both fiction and reality. She has explored reality in the form of writing and attempts to voice out concerning the plight of Afghan women and children.

Keywords: Anxiety, Fear, Loneliness, Displacement, Dream

Introduction

Anxiety is about interdependent relationships and is the ingesting of literature that is counterproductive (Duplessis, 2008) ^[11]. Anxiety shares topographies of extreme fear and anxiety and interrelated behavioral activities that causes disturbances. Fear is the emotional (Gottesfeld, 1979) ^[15] response to a actual threat or perceived forthcoming threat, whereas anxiety is an anticipation of forthcoming threats (Craske & Stein, 2016) ^[10]. In particular, anxiety is related to fear. It varies from normal fear or anxiety by being extreme or continuing beyond the suitable period (Amodio & Hamilton, 2012) ^[2]. Anxiety is diagnosed only when the symptoms does not chalk up to the physiological effects of a substance (Hasni, Dewi & Darmadali, 2023) ^[17]. The Symptoms of fear or anxiety may be seen when the victim articulated their feelings by crying, freezing, clinging, shrinking, or failing to address in social situations.

Anxiety refers to a state of mind. Anxiety and depression are typical complicated and many-sided disorders affected by reciprocally biological and social-psychological factors (Zou *et al.*, 2021) ^[35]. In the book *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Anxiety disorders enclosure of disorders that share features of extreme fear and anxiety (McNally, 2012) ^[24]. Anxiety disorder differs in changing situations. In this study, the situations that persuade fear, anxiety, or avoidance behavior, and the associated creative process of generating, developing and communicating new ideas (Lydiard, 1998) ^[21]. Anxiety disorder differs from normal element of fear or anxiety by being extreme or persisting beyond the normal time quantum leading to disturbance in the normal lifestyle (Firdaus, 2022) ^[13]. Anxiety disorder increases the jeopardy of suicide. The present study adopted Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. In this theory, he mentioned that the feeling of anxiety is regulated somatically. According to him, anxiety is subjugated to support the fulfillment in the form of dreams, subconsciously explored as repressed desires (Freud, 1953, 256) ^[14].

Nadia Hashimi was born on December 12, 1977. She is a famous novelist, pediatrician, and a former Democratic

Congressional candidate for the US. She has written many works. The notable novels are *A House Without Windows*, *When the Moon is Low*, and *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell*. These three novels are international best-selling novels. To know something about her academic side, she acquired her undergraduate degree in subjects Middle Eastern Studies and Biology. Further, she added another feather to her cap by completing medical degree at SUNY Downstate. She started her medical career at Children's National Medical Center in Washington. She has also published two children's books. She released another book, *Sparks Like Stars*, in 2021.

Literature Review

This section describes other studies related to anxiety in different novels. The study of Charlotte Brunsdon (1998) [8] abbreviates anxiety in television shows such as 'The Bull', 'Inspector Morse', 'Spender', and 'The Chief'. These are related to the police station base and anxiety. The ideas of anxiety are explored in 'Prime Suspect' and 'The Silence of the Lambs'. The author mentioned 1984 to 1992, known as the age of anxiety.

Susan Bernstein's study (2001) [5] abbreviates anxiety in sensation fiction. Wilkie Collins is a famous writer and known for the book, *The Woman in White*, published in Charles Dickens's Magazine. The author divides anxiety into two types. They are anxiety of assimilation and anxiety of simianation. Firstly, the anxiety (Norma, 2021) [25] of assimilation deals with anguish over the fusing of divisions. Secondly, the anxiety of simianation deals with distress over evolutionary ties between humans and other primate species. In this study, the author utilized Darwin's evolutionary theory. The work, *The Woman in White*, deals with cultural anxiety about classification in the face of undecided or hybrid types.

Chelva Kanaganayakam (2003) [19] states that anxiety in postcolonial studies especially mentions anxiety in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*. It is the first novel and talks about political aspects. This fiction received a reprisal from the government. Anxiety refers to the state of mind (Manuland, 2020). He compares Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* with Roy's *The God of Small Things*. These two works have a more political message. The author says, 'the notion of anxiety is not peculiar to writing in English'.

Nicole Duplessis's study (2008) [11] manifest the elements of 'modernist anxiety' of characters in the fictions, Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers* who grapple with stifled desires in D.H. Lawrence, Rhoda in *The Waves* deep-seated unease about fragmented identity in Virginia Woolf, Dr. Aziz expressions the tension of Urbanization in *A Passage to India*, E.M. Forster, and John the savage's in *Brave New World* undergo diaspora anxiety leading to his death in Aldous Huxley. In the famous novels of Louisa May Alcott like *Little Women*, *Good Wives* and *Old-Fashioned Women* and Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* also, anxiety is prevalent which is shown through the fragmented narratives. The narration of anxiety portrays both the cognitive and social functions of literate acts. Anxiety is about interdependent relationships and is the consumption of literature that is counterproductive (Suhandoko et al, 2023) [29]. Modernists perceive anxiety in the reading of the new readers of literature or literary works. In this study, the author utilized literacy theory and analyzed written language and the social consequences of literate acts.

Marta Figlerouicz's study (2011) [12] mentions anxiety in Samuel Beckett's fiction and analyzes Beckett's fiction in the aspects of ethics, anxiety (Kalin, 2020) [18], and territories of personhood. This study scrutinizes Beckett's characters, such as Estragon and Molloy. Estragon is the character in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. And Molloy in *Murphy*. She is the protagonist of this fiction.

David Brauner's study (2012) [6] states the religious, cultural and historical performance called Jewish identity or Jewishness, is investigated with the character "The Jewish Hunter" through the novel *A Gate at the Stairs*. This study highlights the role of anxiety in this novel and compares this novel with Woody Allen's *Schlemiels* regarding Jewish stereotypes. The author points out the protagonist's shift between black and Jewish subject position. Brauner lists out a few novels, for example, such as Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* (1998), and Rebecca Walker's *Black, White, and Jewish* (2001). Both are the memoirs. Moore's *A Gate at the Stairs* is a famous work having a plenty of reviews and which mirrors the difficulties faced by the white parents, who are anxious to bringing up the adopted black children.

The study by Elen Turner (2012) [31] states anxiety in contemporary Indian popular fiction. He mentions that anxieties caused by globalization and social change of the popular culture echoes upon Indian middle-class of those time. This study analyzes Shruti Saxena's *Stiletos in the Boardroom* and Chetan Bhagat's *One Night at the Call Centre*. These two works reconnoiter young workers embracing and enjoying freedom, highlighting the tension that exists between individualism and traditional social practices in the families (Nuraeni, 2010) [26]. These two novels sensationalize the anxieties that several Indians are experiencing to redefine the middle-class societal framework and gender expectations in the milieu of worldwide Integration.

Stacey Litzler (2013) [20] explores the theme of fear and anxiety, in gothic postmodern fiction, particularly it surfaces through the secret histories in Donna Tartt's works. The fiction, *The Secret History*, explicates the state of emptiness, deficiency and sense of lack or disconnection that are reflected in a group of six students in a private college in the east. This novel serves as a guide to mastering and cope with, the fears and anxieties inherent in postmodern society. Litzler compares this work with John Knowles' *A Separate Peace* and John Irving's *A Prayer for Owen Meany*. These two novels' characters involvement good crises via paranoid fear and anxiety. This gothic idea creates fear and anxiety (Yemez, 2021) [33]. This novel, point out the anxiety and fear of expectancy. Murders occur as an authentic event. Anxiety occurs during Bunny's murder. Francis feels and experiences anxiety after Francis's murder.

Beth Widmaier Capo's study (2018) [9] examines the representation of violence and globalized anxiety in contemporary Tokyo fiction. More than thirty works of Japanese fiction are translated into English every year. This study focuses on translation and a subset of works sent to Tokyo. It demonstrates both genres of postmodern literary fiction that express anxiety over the violence (Briere, 2023) [7]. Japanese culture creates awareness of anxiety about violence. Japanese writers express cultural anxiety.

The study by Lyons et al. (2018) [22] scrutinizes spatial skills and includes spatial tasks in an evaluative context. This study highlights the role of individuals and their capability to succeed in science, engineering, technology, and math

fields. It is known as STEM and mentions spatial ability, which is spatial anxiety. It is defined as fear and uneasiness towards spatial processing. It incorporates a spatial anxiety scale (Stearns, 2023) [28] to investigate the evidence. In this study, the authors conducted a spatial anxiety survey. Spatial anxiety corresponds to three a priori categories (Abulof, 2015) [3]. They are spatial mental manipulation, spatial navigation, and spatial imagery. This study is based on combining theory and data-driven techniques.

Zou *et al.* (2021) [35] mention the major challenging health issues in recent days are anxiety and depression. Microbial dysbiosis affects the pathogenesis of mood disorders. A psychobiotic approach for treating mood disorders syndrome is revealed. This study is conducted and treatment is given based on pre-clinical and clinical studies. The concepts of anxiety (Barlow, 2000) [4] and depression are prototypical complex conditions, shaped by an interplay of biological and socio-psychological influences.

From the above review of literature, it is proven that no one had anxiety in Nadia Hashimi's *When the Moon is Low*. So, the literature gap is identified. Anxiety has been explored in so many works through different characters using different theories. The present study considers only Sigmund Freud's 'psychoanalytic theory'.

Methodology

A close reading of the text has been adopted to investigate. The present study is based on qualitative research, especially the content analysis method. Sigmund Freud is a notable theorist in the psychoanalytic method. In this method, he points out anxiety as "anxiety that we feel in a dream is only *apparently* explained by the dream's content...we find that the anxiety in the dream is no better justified by the dream's content...the anxiety in a phobia is an idea. It is a kind of phobia, to which it relates. It becomes the reason for exercising caution in the neighborhood. For the neighbors will overhear or smell through the window about the person's phobia which they wish to hide from others. One thing we can't understand about this anxiety is, we cannot perceive why the anxiety felt in a phobia on this subject is so great and hunts the patient far beyond its occasion" (Freud, 1953, p. 184) [14]. In *When the Moon is Low*, she says that when Kabul is crumbled and see the starry-eyed dreams of her generation. They cannot see Europe's frill and they cannot barely see beyond their streets. She and her husband decides to flee our homeland (Hashimi, 2015, p. 1) [16]. She feels anxiety that Europe is filled with only suffering and war. The Taliban shatters the dream of the next generation, and they destroyed everything. Hereafter, there is no happiness and frills in Europe.

Freud explained the dream content. Likewise, Hashimi has explored Fereiba's dream content and prays to god to help everyone in her home. She tells that god works hard and bows to god to save everyone from the obstacles. She prays for her daughter and padar-jan (Hashimi, 2015, p. 55) [16]. She prays to god to save her family from the Taliban. God is the only hope to rescue her family.

Freud explores, the challenges in understanding this process are not really about dreams themselves. Instead, they stem from two deeper issues like, how anxiety is produced and how repression works. In one scenario, the mental content and its sexual arousal remain repressed; in another, once this content is released from repression, which triggers anxiety. The repressed material can then be easily transformed into

physical sensations that match the feeling of anxiety. (Freud, 1953, p. 256) [14]. He mentions that ideational content accompanies sexual-related repression. This content is suppressed and interpreted as anxiety. Likewise, Hashimi mentions that in Afghanistan, it was more common practice for men to take on multiple wives. As it was the period of sky rockets and war due to soviet invasion in 1979. Embracing uncertainty at times of war, this practice of marrying multiple wives stemmed for the need to provide for widows. This Afghan culture, created a certain undercurrent of tension among the wives. The status quo of the first wife could not be matched by those who followed. KokoGul is the stepmother of the protagonist Fereiba, who was robbed of the opportunity to be the first wife by a woman she never met here means Fereiba's mother, a woman she could not challenge, because (she gave birth to four daughters) she couldn't beget any boy child to the Padar-jan. She was forced to rear the first wife's children Fereiba. After decades, Fereiba married Mahmoud and they had children Saleem (elder son) and Sameera (daughter) decides to leave Kabul and go to London, in aspiration to live their dream life. All Fereiba wanted is to have a job, good education to children and a peaceful home for her family. The cruel Taliban rule and the on and off government made her undertake a crucial journey (displacement) through the dark coastal frontiers, lonely roads, deserts and seashores. They traveled illegally through anonymous places, with strangers with gloom, fear and anxiety (Hashimi, 2015, p. 12) [16]. Here, according to Freud's ideational content is matched with Hashimi's ideational content related to sexual repression. During this happening, males like Fereiba's father in Afghanistan, were given in remarriage to meet their emotional and sexual needs. Were as Fereiba's repressed urges creates anxiety. The novel brings to light, her desire for freedom, longing for home the motherly love and yearning for motherhood.

Freud states, "The 'examination anxiety' of neurotics owes its intensification to these same childhood fears. After we have ceased to be school-children, our punishments are no longer inflicted on us by our parents or by those who brought us up, or later by our schoolmasters" (Freud, 1953, p. 291) [14]. Freud mentions anxiety as a childhood fear. After the fear, unfortunately, the student is unable to go to school. Likewise, Hashimi explores through the words of Fereiba, She says one day, they would not look over their shoulders in fear or sleep on borrowed land with one eye open or shudder at the sight of a policeman. One day they would have a place to call as their home. And, Fereiba would carry her own children. She expresses Saleem, Sameera and Aziz to be her children born for Fereiba and her Mahmoud. She came on exile from Kabul to London. She was pregnant during her exile. So Fereiba is determined pray as far as she could, she hopes that they would reach Najiba's house in London, in the quiet of their slumber and rest. There they would have a different life style: children could go to school, they will have a safe home without war. These words are uttered by Fereiba to Saleem in her dream. This dream recurrently appears while she is awake or asleep. These lines express Fereiba's fear about her elder son Saleem who is held back in Afghanistan and her motherly anxiety for her children's better future. Hashimi voices out, her wish for a changed lifestyle for the women and children of her ancestral Afghanistan (Hashimi, 2015, p. 2) [16]. Fereiba suffers anxiety like the school-children who has

nobody (mother or father) to impose any punishment or guidance. The husband of Fereiba also, let them go. Finally, the elements of anxiety are rendered in Hashimi's *When the Moon is Low* through the protagonist, Fereiba. It is proved by Freud's 'psychoanalytic theory'.

Discussion

This section discusses previous studies with Hashimi's text related to the elements of anxiety. The study of Stacey Litzler states Donna Tartt's fiction *The Secret Thing* (1992), which explains the condition of anomie. This story explored the concepts of fear and anxieties in postmodern society (Yang, 2023) ^[32]. The author compares this work with John Knowles' *A Separate Peace* and John Irving's *A Prayer for Owen Meany*. The characters in these two novels' characters experienced paranoid fear (Triwi, 2017) ^[30] and anxiety (Litzler, 2013) ^[20]. Likewise, Fereiba feels that her room is filled with dark and smells like rotted meat because she thinks about the cholera person. Finally, she worries and feels lonely (Hashimi, 2015) ^[16].

The study by Elen Turner states anxiety in contemporary Indian popular fiction. This study analyzes Chetan Bhagat's *One Night at the Call Centre* and Shruti Saxena's *Stiletos in the Boardroom*. These two works explore young workers embracing and enjoying freedom, highlighting a tension (Yilmaz, 2022) ^[34] that occurs between individuality and outmoded social and familial practices (Paterson, 2009) ^[27]. These two novels embellish the anxieties that many Indians are feeling over the redefinition of middle-class social edifices and gender norms in the framework of globalization (Turner, 2012) ^[31]. Similarly, Hashimi has explored the individualism of Fereiba in *When the Moon is Low*.

The study of Marta Figlerouicz mentions anxiety in Samuel Beckett's fiction and analyzes Beckett's fiction in the aspects of ethics, anxiety, and territories of personhood. This study scrutinizes Beckett's characters, such as Estragon and Molloy. Estragon is the character in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, and Molloy in *Murphy*. She is the protagonist of this fiction (Figlerouicz, 2011) ^[12]. Likewise, anxiety is explored through the protagonist, Fereiba.

The study by David Brauner states the presentation of Jewish identity and analyzes the representation of Jewishness in "The Jewish Hunter" through the novel *A Gate at the Stairs*. This study highlights the role of anxiety in this novel and compares this novel with Woody Allen's *Schlemiels* regarding Jewish stereotypes. The author mentions the protagonist's shift between black and Jewish subject positions. Brauner lists out a few novels, for example, such as Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* (1998), and Rebecca Walker's *Black, White, and Jewish* (2001). It is a memoir. Moore's *A Gate at the Stairs* has many reviews and represents the difficulties faced by white parents bringing up adopted black children (Brauner, 2012) ^[6]. Similarly, Hashimi has explored Afghan identity and their sufferings through the character of Fereiba.

Lastly, the issues of anxiety are compared and discussed with other studies. It projects that anxiety is portrayed in Hashimi's text through the character of Fereiba.

Conclusion

The present study draws attention to anxiety disorders. It is infrequent to discover in literature. This aspect has been rendered in some studies and texts. The present study spotlights anxiety in Nadia Hashimi's *When the Moon is*

Low. This novel is analyzed through Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Finally, the elements of anxiety are explored in the selected text of Hashimi through her writing. The limitations of the study are that most of the studies related to anxiety are in psychology, not in literature. It is rare to find in literature. Many theorists are related to psychoanalytic theorists, but the present study focuses on only one theorist, Sigmund Freud. Finally, the elements of anxiety are exhibited in Nadia Hashimi's *When the Moon is Low*.

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