

## UNRAVELING JEALOUSY AND SEXUAL PARANOIA IN *THE NOTHING* BY HANIF QURESHI: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

*The study seeks to examine the psychological dimensions of the multifaceted nature of jealousy and sexual paranoia as aspects of complexity in the novel The Nothing (2017) by Hanif Qureshi. The objectives are to interpret the way these emotional conditions are realized in the text, as well as the ways of their effects on the perception or behavior of the protagonist with others. As for framework is concerned, Freudian psychoanalysis (concepts of repression, libido, ego defenses) and Attachment theory (anxious attachment and fear of abandonment) have been employed to describe the inner world of the main character and his ties with others. The sample is comprised of major story events and interaction between characters of The Nothing, which brilliantly depict the appearances of jealousy and sexual paranoia. The results indicate that the jealousy of the main character is characterized by obsessive paranoia and feelings of insecurity, where obsessive paranoia is used as the driver of the controlling and invasive tendencies of covert monitoring and withdrawal. These mental disorders create an illusion of the main character and break the confidence needed in the relationships, which results in a collapse of his feelings. The analysis shows how the novel helps people know more about the psychological contexts of jealousy and paranoia and how a level of emotional sensitivity is important to sustain relationships.*

**Key Words:** Literature, Novel, Jealousy, Sexual Paranoia and Psychological Perspective.

### Introduction

Sexual paranoia and jealousy can be found in Pakistani literature time and again and at times in the sophistication of culture, religion and gender relations. These feelings, based on possessiveness, insecurity and moral anxieties reflect the patriarchal systems and taboos that ruled the South Asian societies. Jealousy is often used in Pakistani fiction when it comes to things such as marriage and honor or those relationships that normally control the people, all of which become more than a personal rival and a rivalry that is focused upon in terms of societal rather than social. Consider, e.g., the development of the main character, a hero in the story *Moth Smoke* by Mohsin Hamid, in the state of envy and sexual mania is the allegory to an even greater disintegration of the society and the gap between classes (Hamid, 2000). In the same way, in short stories written by Saadat Hasan Manto, namely *Khol Do* and *Thanda Gosht* are examples that sexual paranoia has been both the result and the commentary of the post-Partition trauma as well as the restrictions imposed by the moral norms on women (Jalal, 2013).

These stories do not just describe jealousy and sexual paranoia as personal diseases but a community relation established by colonial history, religious orthodox, and gender politics. The depicted themes question normative discourses and bring out the interrelations of sexuality, honor and power in the practical life. These feelings are still addressed by Pakistani contemporary writers

as the Pakistani literature is developing, trying to criticize the conservative norms, challenge the dominant position of masculinity, and show readers the emotional background of political conflicts (Shamsie, 2005; Asif, 2021).

### Statement of the Problem

The Nothing of Hanif Kureishi is a dig into the mind of a fading filmmaker with physical degeneration, envy, and sexual paranoia. The book gives an interesting though sickening account of mental degradation because of fear of betrayal and weakness. Nevertheless, what is obviously lacking is the consideration of these themes, albeit in a strictly psychological light. The paper is going to examine the role of jealousy and sexual paranoia in the mental life and actions of the main character and how Kureishi employs these psychological tensions to represent more basic existential anxieties. The issue treated is the unexamined psychological richness of these themes and their contribution to the study of aging processes, sexuality and identity in the modern literature.

### Research Objectives

1. To look at the way jealousy and sexual paranoia are portrayed in *The Nothing* through a psyche point of view.
2. In order to observe how these mental conditions shape the perception of the main character, his behavior and the relationships they have with other people.

### Research Questions

1. What is *The Nothing* like in picture of jealousy and sexual paranoia?
2. What are the psychological reasons of obsessive and paranoid character of the main character?

### Significance of the Study

This study has twofold value of contributions: literary and psychological. It contributes to the literary criticism of *The Nothing* through the interpretation of the psychological theories of jealousy and paranoia in these theories it explains the motivation of the character and the structure of the story. Psychologically, it provides the insights of how aging people may internalize the fear of infidelity, sexual failure and inadequacy through the help of literature as a mirror. The paper also helps in making critical contribution to the wider discussions about how contemporary fiction records complex conditions in psychology in a way that promotes the interdisciplinary conversation between the fields of literature and psychology.

### Literature Review

Naseer, Khan, and Malik (2021) carried out a comparative study that included jealousy as a variable among first and second wives within a Pakistan polygynous family as a variable. Mental health and marital satisfaction are additional variables. According to their results, emotional, behavioral and possessive jealousy was measured to be higher in the first wives than the second ones and that there were also higher instances of psychological distress among the former. The research article emphasized the strong contribution of marital satisfaction to the mediating relationship between jealousy and mental health as it showed the complex nature of polygamous marriages.

Yosuf and Farhan (2021) discussed the contribution to the relationship between sexual dysfunction and mental health of married Pakistani women with depression and bipolar disorder diagnoses. The themes of past abusive experience and current relational processes were found by their qualitative study to have been major contributors of sexual dysfunction. These factors were

identified as connected to one another and contributing to sexual paranoia and, as such, an additional complication of the mental health problem.

In studying the short story of Rukhsana Ahmad (2017), entitled *The Nightmare*, Zainab (2017) has applied a psychoanalytic feminist approach. This paper presented and analyzed that the main character of the story, Fariha was already showing elements of paranoia due to the constrictive and isolating relationship with her husband. The study was focused on the effect of childhood experiences of repression on complete psychological disorders of the adults that imply that unresolved traumatic events of the past affect the development and the formation of paranoia in apparently sound domestic environments.

Ahmad, (2012) wrote about the works of Saadat Hassan Manto, especially about such topics as jealous and sexual paranoia. Manto's stories, such as "Thanda Gosht," depict intense emotional conflicts and societal taboos, reflecting the psychological undercurrents present in post-partition Pakistan. Ahmad's analysis underscores how Manto's narratives serve as a mirror to the societal and psychological complexities of the time.

### Methodology

Qualitative, interpretive research using literary analysis combined with psychological theory. Close reading of *The Nothing* with a focus on language, tone, narrative voice, and character development to identify representations of jealousy and paranoia. Primary text (*The Nothing*) and secondary sources including scholarly articles, psychological texts, and critical essays on Hanif Kureishi's work. As for framework is concerned, Freudian psychoanalysis (concepts of repression, libido, ego defenses). Attachment theory (anxious attachment and fear of abandonment) and Cognitive-behavioral perspectives on paranoia. Existential have been employed.

### Data Analysis

"I am old, sick, right out of semen" (Qureshi, 2017, P. 6).

This line from *The Nothing* by Hanif Kureishi is rich with psychological and symbolic meaning. The narrator Waldo is openly owning up to his physical deterioration because of age and sickness. Usage of the term right out of semen is tactless in implying loss of sexual power and ability. Sexual potency in most of the psychological and cultural systems is strongly associated with masculinity, power, and identity. This is already a crisis of deep self in that Waldo no longer considers himself as virile, nor desirable, thus leading to a jealousy coupled with a feeling of not being adequate.

The statement does not only mean sexuality but also the coming death and deprivation of energy. There is no more semen, as symbol of life, of creating, so this goes to show that Waldo thinks that he is not generating anymore, and he is not useful to the world anymore.

The overall feeling he has of deterioration in his physical body is important on driving his mania concerning his wife Zee and her faithfulness and sex-wise surrounds. Waldo attributes his fear of becoming obsolete to her relationships and especially the relationship with Eddie, a young man. This preconditions his being spied, feared and troubled.

"She believes I am not watching but I am always watching" (Qureshi, 2017, P. 12).

This line summarizes the psychological conflict of obsession, mistrust and control within *The Nothing* by Hanif Kureishi.

What Waldo is telling here is that although Zee thinks that he is not conscious of her doings, he is actually always spying on her either physically or by placing surveillance devices which he surreptitiously places into their household.

It is a line that has the aberration of sexual paranoia in it Waldo is paranoid about his wife being unfaithful. His eye-watching is a symptom of hypervigilance, which tends to appear when the person develops severe feelings of mistrust or anxiety.

Waldo spends time and energy following Zee in order to exercise his power and regain control of a situation that he realizes he lacks it: through aging, his illness, and even in bed.

Spying on his wife and doing it without her knowing about it is representative of the failure of trust and closeness. He began to spy as opposed to an open communication which just continues to alienate him.

This has a voyeuristic aspect, which is a psychological twisting where looking is a substitute to having an actual connection. It also speaks of the way Waldo does not get close to Zee but becomes obsessed with her sexual activities.

“I can see, how she touches him. It is not the same as she touches me”

(Qureshi, 2017, P. 20).

The speaker is witnessing someone they have an emotional connection with—likely a romantic partner or someone they desire—interacting physically with another person.

This isn’t just about physical contact; it’s about the intent and emotion behind that contact. The way she touches “him” suggests affection, comfort, care, or love.

The act of watching implies distance—both physical and emotional. The speaker is outside the moment, not part of it.

Here lies the emotional core of the sentence. The speaker is comparing two experiences: how she interacts with “him” versus how she interacts with them.

The word “different” suggests a lack—perhaps her touch with the speaker is colder, more restrained, less genuine.

It reveals the speaker’s realization that her feelings for the other person may be deeper or more authentic than those she has for the speaker.

“She was my last comfort, my final passion. Now she is slipping away from me”

(Qureshi, 2017, P. 27).

This line expresses a profound sense of loss and emotional desperation. The speaker refers to a woman who once embodied both comfort and passion—the two elements that brought warmth and meaning to their life. Calling her the “last” of these suggests that the speaker has already endured other losses or heartbreaks, and she was the only remaining source of emotional sustenance. Now, as she begins to “slip away,” the speaker feels powerless, watching the fading of something deeply cherished. The choice of the expression such as slipping away creates a soft numb feeling almost unbearable but not lost at once just drifting away. It does not only signify the departure of an individual, but the failure of hope, intimacy, and emotional stability as well.

“They believe that I am asleep when I am listening. Always listening”

(Qureshi, 2017, P. 32).

There is a secrecy behind this line and that of being emotionally or psychologically separated with others. The speaker identifies him or herself as a passive person by appearing to be asleep, yet in the real sense, he/she is very conscious and observant. It is repeated twice and stresses the silent but possibly obsessive eavesdropping of the conversations, or activities that take place around them, possibly in search of secrets, lies, or the truth that should not be spoken. It implies a

suspicious or an outsider attitude because the speaker believes that she has to hide in order to really know people. This secret knowledge means that there is a bigger emotional scarring to consider- maybe they were hurt or betrayed previously- and that the use of silence and pretense is used now as defense or protection over them.

“He is an energetic one. I am rotten”(Qureshi, 2017, P. 40).

This line makes the strong painful contrast between two people, one living, one rotting up. When the person says, he has vitality, what he means is that he recognizes the energy of the other person, youthful vitality or presence what are all linked with hope, endurance and being. We have on the contrary, namely, the “I have decay” which betrays the profound feeling of rottenness, of whatever order. It is not so much that they are aging or sick; it is a broken identity, and may be that of regret, grief or time itself. This contrast throws light on the emotions of the speaker who feels he is poor or useless in contrast to a fresh and energetic person. It presents an impression of being abandoned, not only by somebody, but by the life itself. It is also an accent to deep sense of self-difference and emotional desolation, which contributes to deeper paranoia and jealousy. These sentiments create a loop of insecurity creating controlling behaviors, which establishes isolation and mistrust behavior.

Behaviourally, this control tendency of the protagonist, which is manifested in the form of monitoring other people, can be explained by the desire to control anxiety, fear of emotional upheaval. The given behavior, on the contrary, in its turn, repels other people and aggravates the gloomy solitude of the protagonist. The verse runneth: She my last relief, my last addiction. Now she is walking out of my life,” as this period of mental conflicts becomes a tragic reality: a slow decline of emotional and interpersonal existence.

On the interpersonal level, jealousy and paranoia lead to an obstruction to the real intimacy and communication. The hero is too occupied with his inner problems so that he excludes possible assistance because of the lack of trust. The psychological impact of these emotions on the health of the relationship is demonstrated by the fact that relationships become a battleground of some sort and suspicions win in place of relational connections.

“ Zee does not know the fact that I am as sharp as ever, though I have lost my body”  
(Qureshi, 2017, P. 52)

This is an extremely eloquent contrast between the fall of the physical state and the steadfastness of spirit. The speaker admits the loss or degradation of his or her body (maybe as a result of age or illness or injury), but he or she makes it clear that his or her intellect is intact, even increased. The additional aspect of emotion comes through reference to the fact that Zee was unaware of this, indicating that others could be influenced by allowing the speaker to be underestimated or forgotten due to his/her physical appearance. It is a remark upon the irritation that misunderstanding connections and sceneries of opinion, it is a silent pride that inner braces remain. At its end, however, the line represents a rebellious identification of self and ability even in the physical helplessness.

“ It has a violence to love, you know. The wish to own” (Qureshi, 2017, P. 67).

The whole line reveals the gloomy complexion of love and the power to lapse in obsession or control. The speaker answers that love can be violent, by saying, There is a violence to love so she is suggesting that all that is gentle or selfless is not always love and that love can be born out of desire, need and the fear of being deprived. The expression, the desire to possess, indicates how love, in its most obsessive form, can turn into ownership over someone and an interest to possess



something or someone in its most full-fledged state, to make it a part of oneself. The view here is that boundaries can easily be broken with intimate relationships in that they may become tender, as well as oppressive, with the depth of emotion. This is ultimately echoed in the line, the two-sidedness of love its power to inspire and also the ability to destroy.

### Findings and Discussion

Critical examination of *The Nothing* shows that jealousy as well as sexual paranoia has been well intertwined into the psychological nature of the main character, not only since it is a part of his inner world, but also in terms of his relations with other people. Psychologically, in the novel, jealousy is a cognitive and emotional obsession to the perceived danger to the protagonist in the relationship with the typical symptoms of romantic jealousy observed in psychological canon; this includes, suspicion, insecurity, hypervigilance, etc. The universal character in his sexual paranoia (obsession to scrutinise the conduct of his partner and to be able to control them) is a seal of his deeper-felt anxiety over being left behind and the subject of loss of control which are expectations in theories of jealousy attachment.

These mental conditions bear heavy responsibility in decisively changing the way the main character understands the world, which causes him to ascertain to himself that other people are cheating. This increased distrust causes a vicious cycle of invasive surveillance, in the case of him rigging the room with cameras or spying on him so that he can be heard, causing him to be paranoid instead of being cured. In turn his behavior gets more controlling and isolating and there is a self-fulfilling prophecy in play since his actions lead his partner to dynamically avoid him and emotionally pull away.

In interpersonal relationships, jealousy and sexual paranoia are anti-thesis of trust and intimacy that is key to healthy relationships. The fact that the protagonist fails to reconcile the fear with the reality of how her partner feels leads to a poor communication, alienation of emotions and the eventual disintegration of the relationship. At the psychological level, this implies the consequences that unresolved jealousy may have in the development of a relationship, resulting in maladaptive dynamics, including possessiveness and dependency in the emotional states, which tends to result in impairing relationships.

In addition, the presentation of the novel correlates with the psychological understanding of the roots and products of jealousy and sexual paranoia, that of fleeting vulnerability, namely low self-esteem and insecure attachments, among others. The psychological situation of the main character implies that it is the contradiction of his need of contact and fear of being vulnerable that can be seen in the form of defense mechanisms through which he tries to save himself against the feeling of being hurt.

Overall, *The Nothing* offers an interesting literary example of jealousy and sexual paranoia used not just as emotion but as complicated psychological processes, which significantly affect thought, action, and relationship. In this narrative, the destructive nature of these feelings rearing their head goes a long way in demonstrating how critical psychological awareness and trust are towards maintaining a meaning relationship.

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