



Psychoanalytical Study of Steppenwolf

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Abstract: The social science is dominated by the psychoanalytical study as it has become an important tool of understanding the human mind since the 20th century. The famous psychologist Sigmund Freud contributed significantly and provided a basis to set the psychoanalytical studies. He offered several terms that explained behavioural conditions of human minds. Psychoanalysis has helped the counsellor immensely to understand and treat the patients effectively. The present research paper undertakes an effort to humbly analyse the following psychoanalytical parameters such as alienation, ambivalence and despair in Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf*. Alienation is a psychosomatic disorder that makes an individual recluse and aloof. Individual suffering from alienation usually starts living a secluded life. Such individual may stop having social communication. Ambivalence is the possession of contrasting emotions or feelings towards the same object. The object in question could be a living entity or a non-living entity or situation. If an individual feels contrasting emotions towards the object, he is said to be ambivalent towards the object. Despair is the lack of hope. Despair is experienced commonly by human beings. Difficult and struggling periods of life often bring despair.

Key Words – Steppenwolf, alienation, ambivalence, despair, psychoanalysis.

Introduction

Psychoanalysis is a method of understanding our mind and its functioning. Psychoanalysis helps understand child psychology, human psychology, and social psychology. Psychoanalytic thinking enriches several academic fields. It is a tool for interpretation of psyche, which has been applied to further understanding of art, literature, and history.

Psychoanalysts work on developing a sophisticated methodology of understanding the brain and the human mind. Psychoanalysis is also helpful in therapy. Due to increasing stressful environments, the help of psychoanalysis is inevitable. Psychoanalysis delves deeper into the minds and tries to find the root cause of the problem. Hence its necessity cannot be undermined.

Steppenwolf was published in 1927. The protagonist of *Steppenwolf* is Harry Haller. Harry Haller is a self-despising, fifty-year-old intellectual who hates the bourgeois culture in which he resides. He indulges in sex and hallucinatory drugs as a means of fulfilment and self-discovery. He meets various people throughout the novel, including two prostitutes and a drug-dispensing saxophone player, and undertakes a search for spiritual understanding. The novel uses realistic as well as surrealistic techniques.

The present research paper analyses *Steppenwolf* through the psychoanalytical parameters of alienation, ambivalence, and despair. Alienation is a psychosomatic disorder that makes an individual recluse and aloof. An individual suffering from alienation usually starts living a secluded life. Such individuals may stop having social communication. There are high chances of alienation, leading to depression. Alienation is a significant problem in the world, which is a result of social and economic degradation, the constant breaking of social relationships, and stressful working conditions.

Ambivalence is the possession of contrasting emotions or feelings towards the same object. The object in question could be a living entity or a non-living entity or situation. If an individual feels contrasting emotions towards the object, he is said to be ambivalent towards the object. Such feelings could lead the individual to be torn apart because of the differing emotions.

Despair is a lack of hope. Human beings commonly experience despair. Painful and struggling periods of life often bring despair. Aspects such as income, marital life, family, security, finances, and love may generate despair. Despair usually yields in time. Nevertheless, when despair does not lessen rather intensifies, it diminishes hope in life while impairing regular day to day functions and hinders our attitude to move towards our goal and desires. Psychoanalysts consider such a stage as clinical despair.

Clinical despair is the complete absence of hope and faith. It is characterised by helplessness, pessimism, and an inactive state. Despair gives rise to discouragement and makes an individual struggle to find the meaning of one's life and happiness. It obscures an individual in creating a satisfying and happy life for oneself. Patients who suffer from clinical despair may need help from counselling and medication. Unattended clinical despair may lead to suicidal tendencies in patients.

Alienation in *Steppenwolf*

"He led a quiet life, keeping himself to himself... For the man was not sociable; indeed he was unsociable to a degree that I had never observed in anyone before" (Hesse 3). *Steppenwolf* begins with the narration of the nephew of the landlady. The nephew narrated the day he was introduced to Harry Haller. Harry was a fifty years old man who rented the attic room. He came with two suitcases and a book chest.

Jan Hajda describes alienation, "Alienation is an individual's feeling of uneasiness or discomfort which reflects his exclusion or self-exclusion from social and cultural participation. It is an expression of non-belonging or non-sharing, an uneasy awareness or perception of unwelcome contrast with others" (758-759).

The narrator narrated that Harry seemed alienated since the day he met him. Harry did not meet anyone, did not entertain any guests, and kept himself isolated throughout the day. The narrator only had a chance meeting with Harry on the staircase or in the corridor. Even during these meetings, Harry would seem alienated and isolated. The narrator confessed that he did not have any background of Harry.

"Every few yards there was a poster or billboard advertising an all-girl band, a variety show, a cinema, or a dance night, but none of this was for me. It was all for 'everybody', for normal people" (35). Harry Haller narrated how he used to wander through the streets aimlessly and lonely. He used to come across various advertisements about leisure activities and amusements. All these activities made Harry feel alienated.

Harry had forever lived an alienated life. He was not able to enjoy the pleasures that other people enjoyed. When Harry narrated the section, he addressed people as normal and 'everybody'. The reference itself states that Harry considered him different from the normal people. He forever saw a wedge between him and the people surrounding him. He considered them different from him.

Melvin Seeman writes in *Empirical Alienation Studies: An Overview*, "The idea of community comes to stand for the full collection of troubles (the unity of miseries) that modern society supposedly generates—not simply loneliness and social isolation, but also normlessness (deviance), self-estrangement (detachment from, and instrumental use of, others), and cultural estrangement (loss of common values)" (285).

Harry felt alienated by the leisure activities that people enjoyed. Somehow he was not able to appreciate them neither enjoy them. He felt that he was not meant to participate in the activities that made people happy. Harry felt it difficult to get emotionally attached to people. He remembered a few instances about his life that brought cheer to him. One such example was the musical piece that he had heard before several years.

Harry used to remember the musical piece, and the remembrance brought a little joy in the mind of Harry. Clinging to a few episodes of joy and difficulty in mingling with the people made Harry alienated. He deliberately chose to reside in a bourgeois locality to acquaint with the hustle and bustle of a bourgeois locality. However, he seemed alienated to the entertainment and leisure activities organised in a bourgeois locality.

"There was no doubt I had come with the best of intentions, but I just couldn't get into the right party mood. The deafening roars of enjoyment, the laughter, all the high jinks going on around me struck me as stupid and forced" (177). Harry was invited by Hermione to attend the masque ball. She had taught most of the dance moves to Harry and forced him to make himself available there.

Harry was feeling anxious about attending the ball. He tried to postpone attending the ball as much as he can. He walked around in pubs that evening so that he would not have to attend the whole event. He even watched a film in order to be late for the event. Harry always felt apprehensions towards large crowd gatherings and noisy atmosphere. However, soon Harry realised that he was late for the ball and also that the ball would be in full swing.

When Harry arrived at the ball, the ballroom was full of overcrowded masked people, and Harry had to squeeze to enter the room. Masked girls were requesting his company, and the clowns clapped towards him. Harry was provided with a token number in case if he felt to get away from the ball. He kept the token number carefully in his pocket. He deliberated that he might have to make use of the token number sooner than later.

The revellers were dancing on all floors of the building. They were even dancing in the basement and on the stairs. Different bands were playing different kinds of music all around. Harry encountered Pablo in a band. Harry went on searching from one room to another to have the company of either Maria or Hermione. Nevertheless, the whole building was full of people, and it was practically impossible for him to find either of them.

Feeling tired, he sat on the nearest empty chair, surrounded by strangers, and ordered some wine. He deduced that such a noisy atmosphere was not his cup of tea. Several women wanted to have his company, but he rejected them all. Some girls also presented their desires to sit on his lap, but Harry was tired of the masque ball. He was not able to enjoy his wine, and he decided that he would leave the masque ball.

He laboriously made his way out of the crowded rooms and reached the exit counter. The man waited for Harry to give his token number. Harry checked his pockets but was not able to find his token. Harry again tried to search for both Hermione and Maria. However, he could not find them. Countless people were dancing all around him. Even though Harry was prepared by Hermione to dance, he could not muster up the courage to enjoy the revelry. His mind, again and again, went back on the grim realities of life, and he could not immerse himself fully in the hedonistic pleasures.

Rahel Jaeggi writes in *Alienation*,

Alienation means indifference and internal division, but also powerlessness and relationlessness with respect to oneself and to a world experienced as indifferent and alien. Alienation is the inability to establish a relation to other human beings, to things, to social institutions and thereby to oneself. An alienated world presents itself to individuals as insignificant and meaningless, as rigidified or impoverished, as a world that is not one's own, which is to say, a world in which one is not "at home" and over which one can have no influence. The alienated subject becomes a stranger to itself; it no longer experiences itself as an "actively effective subject" but a "passive object" at the mercy of unknown forces. (3)

Harry felt alienated amongst the surge of crowds. Even though he was invited by women to join them in dancing, he could not oblige them. He tried his best to look for Hermione and Maria but could not find them. Harry felt socially alienated in the masque ball. He had tried his best to postpone attending the ball. Furthermore, once he reached the ball, he tried to leave the ball. He could not join in the revelry and enjoy himself. His conflicts and anxieties did not allow him to forget himself in the hedonistic pleasures.

Ambivalence in *Steppenwolf*

"He appeared to like everything, yet at the same time find it somehow laughable. In general, everything about the man suggested that he was a visitor from an alien world, from some lands overseas, say: and though he found everything here attractive, it all struck him as a bit comical too" (5). The nephew of the landlady, where Harry Haller rented a room, served as the first narrator of *Steppenwolf*. The nephew described Harry as isolated and alienated.

Harry would not mingle with anyone and hardly met any guests. The nephew narrated how the first meeting with Harry took place. He narrated the day when Harry arrived to reside in his rented room. Harry oddly entered, and when the nephew's aunt asked Harry what he wanted, Harry with indifference remarked that the air smelt good there. The nephew then observed Harry climbing the stairs and walking to his room with a sense of abhorrence.

David Engle and Hal Arkowitz write in *Ambivalence in Psychotherapy*, "In ambivalence, movement toward change is accompanied or followed by movement away from change and toward the status quo. Whether or not change occurs, the degree of change, and how well the change is maintained depends on the balance of the pros and cons of change" (2).

Harry reflected the emotion of both loving as well as hating the place. He experienced contradictory emotions towards the room and the setting. The nephew noted that though Harry seemed to like the place, he also observed him mocking the place. The quality of experiencing both love as well as hate proves the presence of ambivalence in this section of the novel. Harry seemed to accept as well as feel repulsive to the middle-class setting and environment.

"I also like the contrast between my life – my solitary, loveless, hectic, utterly disordered way of life – and this bourgeois, family milieu. I like to savour the smell of peace and quiet, of cleanliness, decency and domesticity on these stairs. It never fails to move me, despite my hatred of the bourgeoisie" (30). Harry Haller shifted to the new bourgeois locality. The bourgeois locality with its tidiness, peace, orderliness appealed Harry Haller.

Harry, however, was apprehensive of the bourgeois sentimentality. Even though he was attracted to the orderliness of the bourgeois, deep down, Harry felt contempt for it. The middle-class settlement was abhorred by Harry. Harry himself was a loner and lonely person. The family milieu of the middle class did not appeal to Harry Haller. Even the cleanliness and orderliness of the middle-class did not appeal to Harry.

His room bore a stark contrast to the surrounding bourgeois locality. His room was untidy and dishevelled. It negated the sanity and balance that the bourgeois locality provided. Even though Harry was a loner, he was attracted to the family values that the bourgeois reflected. His life was solitary, without love and companionship, emotional attachment, and sentimentality. The bourgeois life, in contrast, was full of life, family bonding, and emotional attachment. This made Harry conflicted, as he felt attracted towards the bourgeois life, but seemed to fail miserably to adapt to bourgeois culture.

Harry seems to have an unresolved conflict in his heart, which made him unable to reciprocate the bourgeois culture healthily. It has not been made explicit until now if Harry experienced anxiety during his childhood, or unstable parent-child relationship, or unhealthy and unstable emotional bonding with his parents. Nevertheless, Harry fails to adhere to the bourgeois culture of harmony, peace, and emotional stability. His conflict to accept the bourgeois culture reflects ambivalence in him.

"Although I said this with considerable force, it did not come from the heart. I could not imagine a contraption like that, for which I had absolutely no liking, in my study with its books, and there were lots of things about dancing that I also objected to" (124-125). Harry was delighted to meet the unnamed girl again for the date. He was unnerved for some days about the meeting with the girl.

When they met, the girl asked Harry if he had learned to dance. Harry replied negatively. Then Harry asked her name. The girl in reply asked Harry to guess her name. She hinted that she does look like a boy. Harry contemplated about the boyhood friend that he had whose name was Hermann. Harry guessed if the girl's name was Hermione. The girl nodded, beaming with joy at Harry for correctly guessing her name.

Then Hermione discussed with Harry that the moment he arrived at the Black Eagle pub, she was appealed to talk to him. She also informed Harry that she was aware that Harry was fond of her. However, she wanted to take the relationship a step further. She wanted to make Harry fall in love with her. She said that making Harry fall in love with her, she would be able to give a final order to him, which was to kill her.

Harry was taken aback by what Hermione said. Nevertheless, Hermione said that there was time for the last order. She was hungry, and she expressed her desire to eat green salad. Harry noted about Hermione that she was unpredictable. Harry felt that Hermione knew everything about him. How she carried out orders on him and the way how she forced Harry to behave according to her wishes, made him feel that she knew Harry threadbare.

Harry then initiated to discuss the strange pamphlet that he had received from the man titled "On Steppenwolf: A Tract". He described that all the things mentioned in the pamphlet correctly apply to him. He matched all the descriptions of a Steppenwolf. Hermione reiterated that during the first meeting between them at the Black Eagle pub, she had observed him possessing animal traits. However, she did not want to talk about animals tonight.

Hermione instead changed the topic to dancing. She asked Harry if the place that he rented had a room where they could practice dancing. Hermione clarified that she would not like to have any interference from the owner of the house while the dancing session was going on. Hermione said that she would personally teach him to dance. She asked Harry to buy a gramophone and a few records along with it.

Harry then replied that if she were successful in teaching him to dance, then he would gift her the gramophone that he was going to buy. In reality, Harry was not interested in purchasing a gramophone and keeping it in his room. He kept important books and prized possessions in his room, and he did not want to make his room inferior by bringing a gramophone. He hated to have a gramophone in his room where he had kept philosophical treatises.

Hili Razinsky writes in "Conscious Ambivalence",

People are ambivalent. There is nothing unusual in having opposed attitudes towards a single person or thing. People want things that are repelling or frightening to them, hold beliefs that they simultaneously doubt, and are both happy and unhappy about one and the same event. Ambivalence is often revealed in one's long-term bearing—in the dynamic array of conscious and behavioural life. (366)

Harry feels ambivalent to the idea of Hermione. Although he wanted to spend time with Hermione, he was apprehensive about dancing. He was also apprehensive about keeping the gramophone. Hence when Hermione proposed the idea of dancing together at Harry's room on a gramophone, Harry instinctively replied that he would gift her the gramophone if she succeeded him to dance.

Harry felt ambivalence towards the gramophone. Although the gramophone was going to be the reason for Hermione spending time with Harry, he was aversive to the idea of keeping the gramophone in his room along with essential memorabilia. Harry felt contrasting emotions towards the gramophone. The scene reflects the presence of ambivalence.

"I was now often experiencing an odd mixture of the old and the new, of pain and pleasure, of fear and joy. One moment I was in heaven, the next in hell; mostly in both at once" (144). Harry's life transformed after he became friends with Hermione. Hermione brought a change in the lifestyle and mindset of Harry. She instilled in him a new life that Harry did not live. Her presence had a profound effect on Harry's life.

Hermione warmly accepted Harry since the first day that they met. She discussed with him about different topics that haunted Harry. She provided secure solutions to Harry about his disposition. She helped him overcome his aversion of the bourgeois as well as the hovering warlike situation. She urged Harry to dance with her, and even though Harry was a stranger to dancing, she taught him steps to dance.

Hermione would often tease and taught Harry. She would try to introduce Harry to new women who would help Harry to overcome his inhibitions. She also introduced Harry to her friend Pablo. The friendship of Hermione had a stimulating effect on Harry. Initially, Harry used to feel jitters, and he was also apprehensive about society's perception of him. However, he still swayed according to the waves.

Klaus Jonas et al. write in "Attitudinal Ambivalence", "Ambivalence over emotional expression refers to the experience of conflict over one's style of emotional expression, regardless of the style and irrespective of the emotion. Individuals who are ambivalent experience intense and opposing emotional feelings toward their own emotional expressions" (38).

Internally Harry was feeling ambivalent towards the present life with Hermione. He felt dual emotions towards his life. He loved as well as hated his life. He experienced dual and contrasting emotions in his life. He could not wholly move ahead with one way of life wholeheartedly. His mind was conflicted about the new developments happening in his life. His attitude towards his life is of both love and hate. Harry feels ambivalent about his life.

Despair in Steppenwolf

"At the same time I realised that his pessimism was not based on contempt for the world but self-contempt, for however ruthlessly critical he could be when condemning institutions or individuals, he never spared himself" (11). After Harry Haller rented the room in the landlady's house, he became a person of particular interest to the nephew of the landlady. The nephew perceived Herman as a man who was ill.

The nephew felt that Herman was facing problems with his mental state as well as his temperament. The nephew felt that Herman was suffering unduly. The nephew witnessed the isolation as well as emotional decay that was taking place in Herman Haller. The nephew felt sympathy for Herman. However, the nephew felt that the suffering and pain that Harry was experiencing was due to his depression.

Rick Ingram writes in *The International Encyclopedia of Depression*, "Depression is commonly used to refer to emotional states of sadness, despair, numbness/emptiness/deadness/hopelessness, and related "down" or "blue" moods that often involve a depletion of normal levels of energy, interest, mental focus, pleasure, social engagement, and appetite" (205).

The nephew observed that Harry was critical, pessimistic, and cynical about himself. He would rebuke himself at the slightest possibility. Harry lacked self-confidence and self-appraisal. The nephew perceived Harry as having lost all hope of life. He felt that Harry was just living life for the sake of it. He lacked any enthusiasm and vitality and always seemed depressed.

It had not exactly been a delightful or particularly glorious day, a day of happiness or joy. Instead, just one of those normal, routine days which for a long time now had been my lot: moderately pleasant, perfectly tolerable, reasonable, lukewarm days in the life of an elderly discontented gentleman; days without exceptional pain, without exceptional worries, devoid of actual grief or despair. Days when, without getting upset or feeling anxious, it is even possible objectively and calmly to consider whether the time might not have come to follow the example of Adalbert Stifter by having an accident while shaving. (27-28)

Steppenwolf has three narrators. The narration of Harry Haller begins with the section of "Harry Haller's Notebooks: For mad people only". Harry narrated about a typical day that he had. There was no level of excitement in his life. It was a routine day for him. Harry described himself as walking and consuming medicine to overcome the pain that he suffered. Harry received three posts, but none of them was of any importance.

Harry then did his breathing exercises but skipped the mental exercises as he was too lazy to do them that day. He then went for a walk and noted the patterns of the cloud in the sky. His life of boredom and unexcited life yielded no results. Harry thought about the day and contemplated suicide. He narrated how Adalbert Stifter had an accident with the razor. In reality, Adalbert Stifter was an Austrian writer and a poet. During his time of despair and distress, Stifter committed suicide by slashing his throat with a razor.

Matthew Nock et al. write in "Measuring the Suicidal Mind",

The decision to end one's own life is perhaps an essential determination a person can make; however, suicidal thoughts often are held privately and are not detectable by others or even by oneself, creating a deep epistemological quandary. A person's implicit cognition may guide which behaviour he or she chooses to cope with extreme distress. (515)

Harry felt bored and unenthusiastic in his life. His long unfruitful day leads him to suicidal thoughts. Harry struggled to give and find meaning in his life, and hence the usual day that he experienced made him contemplate suicide like Adalbert Stifter. Harry felt despaired as he was not able to find hope in his life. His mental condition deteriorated with each passing day. According to Matthew Nock et al., Harry was affected by his implicit cognition, i.e., his unconsciousness.

Harry is not conscious of the parameters that affect his unconscious. His thoughts and perceptions about life lead him to suicidal thoughts. The day described was one such day that Harry experienced. Harry acknowledged several such days that he had experienced. During such regular days, Harry contemplated committing suicide. The normalcy and boredom of such days affected Harry unconsciously and made him contemplate suicide. Harry experienced a deep level of despair.

"This Steppenwolf had to die, he had to put an end to his detestable existence by his own hand. Either that, or he must undergo the deadly flames of further self-scrutiny till melting point, then transform himself, tear off his mask and enter upon a new stage of self-development" (72). Harry Haller came across two portraits of the Steppenwolf. While one portrait described a Steppenwolf in the form of a subjective poem, the other portrait objectively described Steppenwolf.

The portraits of Steppenwolf described the Steppenwolf as a lonely, isolated, and traumatised individual. The Steppenwolf was timid and in internal conflict. The descriptions of the pamphlet that Harry came across as well as the poem that he had composed, both described Harry Haller. Harry's descriptions in both the portraits caused him pain. Both the portraits drew a picture of his desperate existence.

The portraits created despair in Harry Haller. Both of them reflected an accurate account of the existence of Harry, and it made Harry depressed and sad to encounter them. Harry was not able to give meaning to his life as he used to wander. Even though he lived in a bourgeois locality, internally, he abhorred the bourgeois setting. Both portraits give rise to dread in Harry Haller. They made him contemplate bringing an end to his miserable existence by committing suicide.

"What a miserable, shameful, vile day it had been from morning to evening, from the cemetery to the scene at the professor's! To what end? Why go on? Was there any point in saddling myself with even more days like this, . . . Harry, take yourself home and cut your throat! You've been putting it off for long enough" (90). Harry had a disastrous evening with the professor and his wife.

Harry left the home of the professor abruptly as he was feeling uncomfortable. Harry was undergoing internal conflict before he arrived at the house of the professor. His internal conflict, along with his apprehension of the bourgeois locality, eventually led him to a forgettable evening at the professor's house. Harry inadvertently insulted the professor's wife by using vulgar words for her favourite portrait.

Richard Lazarus writes in "Hope: An Emotion and a Vital Coping Resource Against Despair", "In despair, there can be a powerful but dysfunctional mobilisation, leading to what is called an agitated depression and even efforts at suicide in contrast with passive withdrawal and disengaged depression" (665). Harry was feeling miserable, and he started to walk away from the house of the professor. His thoughts about his day and felt contempt for it. Coming out of the house of the professor, Harry contemplated committing suicide. His

despair led him to think about ending his life. Harry lost hope to lead a meaningful life. He was facing intense frustrations and conflicts to lead a healthy life.

Conclusion

From the beginning of the novel, Harry Haller is reflected as alienated. It is difficult for him to adjust to the bourgeois setting. Harry used to wander the streets aimlessly/ He came across several advertisements of leisure activities, but none of these activities appealed to him. Even when Hermione had taught him dancing steps, he felt alienated at the ball. He despised the large gathering at the ball and tried his best to get out of the ball. When the narrator of the novel comes across Harry Haller, he perceives Harry's ambivalence. Harry is ambivalent towards the bourgeois community. His alienation, as well as his ambivalence, stems out of his inability to adjust to his surroundings.

Harry also experiences ambivalence towards dancing. Even though he persuades himself to learn dancing, he only does so in order to be in the company of Hermione. Throughout the novel, Harry experiences despair. His despondency and hopelessness lead him to the feelings of despair. He also contemplates suicide several times throughout the novel. His inability to pursue leisure activities like ordinary people; his failure in relationships as well his perception of being a misfit in the society always forced him to contemplate suicide. The present research paper analyses the presence of alienation, ambivalence and despair in *Steppenwolf*.

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