

## **Examining “Un-Consciousness” and “Anxiety” among the Leading Characters in the Novel “The Scarlet Letter” by “Nathaniel Hawthorne”:**

By

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### **Abstract:**

*The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne is a masterwork which highlights adultery, love, consciousness and unconsciousness of characters. Hawthorne tried to examine the strict society of New England which belongs to puritans. He explored the punishment of those who committed the sin of adultery in the novel. Hawthorne tried to seek the feeling of sin, hatred, guilt, love, regret and how these things control the mind of major characters throughout the novel. He also showed us that how these characters suffered and how did they face extreme pain. Loss of ego and mental stability are also the part of this novel. All these aspects come under the psyche of the person and it relate to psychoanalysis theory of Sigmund Freud. His psychoanalysis theory helps us to analyze the mind of characters of this novel which are based on mental stability, consciousness and unconsciousness and also the anxiety of an individual. Freud’s psychoanalysis theory taught us that how can we equitable our personality and how we should maintain our ego id ego and super ego, so that we can grow our personality in a healthy environment. it also shows that how can we ignore our broken desires and past bitter memories. In short, the aim of this study is to examine and explore the characters of scarlet letter in the light of Freud’s psychoanalysis theory and how these characters live after affected by their ego, id ego and superego. This study will improve our knowledge about the psyche of leading characters in the novel.*

**Keywords:** Un-consciousness, Anxiety, Freud, Adultery, Psyche.

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## **Introduction:**

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) a famous American writer belongs to romanticism. He portrayed sin and punishment of puritan society and its strong impact on individuals. He expressed the repressed desires of his characters in the novel. It is dependable to compare Hawthorn's novel *The Scarlet Letter* and Freud's Psychoanalytical theory. In many of his novels, he deals with consciousness and unconsciousness and their impact on human mind he shows character's id, ego and super ego's growth. Psychoanalytical theory states that "our subdued desires, wants, needs and memories are controlled from the social and sexual desires." Although Freud's theory came after a century but it is practicable to apply his idea on this novel. Social taboos issues effect the mind of individual and causes repression in their unconsciousness. "Terence Martin book" tells the details about Hawthorn's understanding of unconscious mind. "The problem of creating fiction in the 'broad and simple daylight' of his native land inspiration Hawthorn to promote the resources of the haunted mind which gave him contact to a frightening world of separated experience" (John. & Terence, 2004). It can be perceived that Hawthorne writes on the complex mind of individuals and their psyche. Salem states "the society of his own land their culture and norms and social rules". These observations persuaded him to go inside the mind of human and relate all the repressed memories which effects them. James Mallard utter that "The *Scarlet Letter* is a connection between the letter and identity" (Hannah, 2018 June 1). The letter 'A' and its meaning give reference to "Derrida's deconstruction theory". Psychoanalytic theory gives the understanding of the conscious and unconscious mind. The *scarlet letter* (1850) is a popular novel of Nathaniel Hawthorn in American literature. In this novel Hawthorne explains the psychological conditions of his characters. This novel basically focuses on the psychological transformation and psychological facts on the minds of characters due to religious society. *The Scarlet Letter* starts with "the description of unknown narrator who is works in custom house, at work he finds a number of papers and finds a piece of cloth on which there is a symbol like the letter 'A' (Hawthorne, p. 61)." In the beginning of 17<sup>th</sup> century the story takes place in Boston. Boston is a small area or town where puritans live, the religious community. Hester Prynne, the leading character of the novel is a very young and beautiful girl. She gave birth to her illegitimate baby named Pearl. There is notable letter 'A' on her shirt which is embroidered and was not ashamed of it. The community decided to punish her as she committed the sin of adultery even though she was married already. "Her husband was older then her and sent her to America and never came back again (Hawthorne, p. 89)." Meanwhile, Hester commits a sin of adultery with the person whose identity was unknown, and she never discloses his lover name. She was forced to a wear letter 'A' on her chest as a symbol for her crime throughout her life. When Roger her husband, returned to American he came to know that his wife has committed a sin of adultery. Due to her sufferings and cruel treatment of society she became a changed lady. She lives with Pearl in a small wooden house outside the town as they were isolated from the society. Hester wanted to give her daughter the good

education and moral life, she teaches her that women are not supposed to be quiet. Minister Arthur Dimmesdale who is known for his good heart and was appreciated by the religious community was the victim of his conscience burden. There was the secret hidden in the heart of Dimmesdale which causes pain and create difficulties to his soul. When Chilling Worth as Physician becomes his friend, doubts came in his mind about Dimmesdale's mental and health conditions, he took him in his confidence and took his revenge and recognizes that Dimmesdale is the secrete lover of Hester and what he expected was right, Chillingworth also found a letter 'A' on his chest same as of Hester. Dimmesdale psychological condition becomes worse day by day, because of that hidden secret which he keeps in his heart destroys him. Hester and Dimmesdale decide to go to Europe in the ending of the novel. Before leaving Dimmesdale gives his last sermon in church. After his confession Dimmesdale dies as he was not as brave as Hester was to face the society. Just after one-year Chillingworth also dies because of the guilt he did to Hester. Hester and pearl leave American and spent their lives alone, so nobody can contact them. After many years Hester came back to American without Pearl and was still wearing the Scarlet Letter 'A'. Pearl gets married. Hester also dies and was buried next to her lover, Arthur Dimmesdale. They both shared the letter 'A' which was molded by their gravestone.

### **Literature Review:**

Brodhead (1973) explores the dual nature of Hawthorne in the scarlet letter. Hawthorne's skill narrative exposition has been examined by mixing the drama personal insight and history, which sets for Hester Prynne's history about life and character in the beginning chapters of novel. Especially impressive to Brodhead is Hawthorne's capability to together the external and internal spheres in all these chapters. Hawthorne goes from one perspective to another and thus presents a mix-up of pre-novel events in one scene. Brodhead then looks at the "realistic" versus "romantic" traits of the story. By examining the play between these two genres within the text Brodhead gives us a little description for the importance of the facts, figures and symbols highlighted within it "It is not enough to describe it as economical or compact in fluid interrelatedness of parts and its supersaturating with significant patterns give it the quality of over determination that Freud ascribes to dreams" (Brodhead, 1973). Brodhead shows how this dream-like quality informs the characters repressed desires. Brodhead mentions that after he has provided the reader with the appropriate patterns and symbols to create an informed opinion Hawthorne leaves the interpretation open to the onlooker. Diehl (1991) says" a traditional psychoanalytic reading of Hawthorne's novel, with the slight twist of a deeper explanation of the function of the scarlet "A." Diehl suggests that this novel is a part of Hawthorne's mourning process for his mother, and an expression of his repressed feelings for her". According to Diehl, "Hester combines the qualities of beloved and mother. Arthur Dimmesdale plays the role of the son who cannot bring to fruition the relationship he desires with his mother because of the dangerous father

figure, Robert Chillingworth. Diehl links the sexual symbolism of the Scarlet Letter into this argument, and submits that it symbolizes Hester's own female sexuality, especially through a comparison of the shape and ornamentation of the letter to the immature female reproductive organs. In her conclusion Diehl states that the fetishistic scarlet "A" both points to and breaks the silence surrounding the incestuous obsessions of the son, the woman is silenced in her maternal identity while protected by it" (Diehl, p. 51). Weiss, Daniel (1985) in his book "The Black Art of Psychoanalytic Criticism" presents an overview of psychoanalytic practice, "its relevance to literature" and its "association" with "reality," "the artist and the creative process" (p, 33). Weiss begins by illustrating the long history of the associations of the artist's work with a purging of emotion. Weiss draws the development of this association from the classic Greek poets up to the time of Freud and William James. Weiss suggests that these two minds helped to guide thoughts about the human mind away from the purely biological or chemical notions which arose after Darwin's publication, back into the realm of conscious control. Weiss describes Freud's theories on the developmental stages of the child, and the unconsciousness into which much of our childish knowledge falls. Weiss then explores how these repressed emotions help to spur the drive of the artist, and helps the artist to gather the real and the imagined to form art which can tell the underlying desires of a whole culture. Weiss concludes by stating that psychoanalytic critics are not merely interested in pointing out the neurosis of the artist, rather these critics "become experts in the natural history of the mind" (Weiss, p. 54).

### **Problem Statement:**

Un-conscious repressed desires which causes anxiety in the main characters of the novel *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. This paper shows sufferings of leading characters who suffered due to their unconscious repressed desires and were not able to control it till the end of the novel.

### **Research Objectives:**

1. To explain the ways to control unconsciousness (ID) in the three main characters of Novel *the Scarlet Letter*.
2. To explore Anxiety in the character of Arthur Dimmesdale in the Novel *the Scarlet Letter*.

### **Research Questions:**

1. How unconsciousness could be controlled by the three main characters of Novel *the Scarlet Letter*.
2. In what ways Anxiety is reflected in the character of Arthur Dimmesdale in the novel *the Scarlet Letter*.

### **Significance of the Study:**

The significance of this study is to shed light on the characters of *Scarlet letter* from psychoanalytical perspective and to analyze characters based on Freud's psychoanalytical approach, our study is hoped to enrich knowledge and experience of Nathaniel Hawthorne who was interested with literary study of this novel from psychoanalytical theory. Psychoanalysis in terms of un-consciousness and anxiety of the characters provides the reader and critics the opportunity to analyze the characters of novel and find out main causes of their faults and weaknesses. It explains how mind works in relations of psychology and the treatment of those who affected by their un-consciousness (weakness) and suffered throughout the novel and how they can control their repressed desires and needs in un-consciousness. Nathaniel Hawthorne is one of the finest novelist who portrayed realistic and penetrating mind through characters of novel.

### **Methodology:**

#### **Research Design:**

This research is based on Qualitative design. Basically, qualitative research is based on to design and disclosed the topics and problems which referred to an attitude, opinion and way of thinking of ideas of reader. This study can be used by different people who belongs to different groups it can help in the making of hypotheses. Descriptive and predictive research can be obtained by the result of qualitative research. (Mason, 2002)

#### **Primary Sources:**

The book *Scarlet Letter* (1850), Paperback 2000, Published by Rupa & Co. Rekhta Printers Pvt. Ltd. Written by Nathaniel Hawthorne has been used as the primary source of data in the research.

#### **Secondary Sources:**

All the articles and research papers by different Authors are the secondary source of the research. Besides, other sources from internet also served as secondary data to support the research.

#### **Content Analysis:**

This study uses content analysis as a method for analyzing data. This procedure can be used by making coding text material for replicable and valid inferences material. It is the research technique that helps to analyze the actual content whether it is a text, word, theme or word (Kimberley, 2016). In this research, the entire text of the "*The Scarlet letter*" was read. The text was coded according to the themes of unconscious and anxiety. Later the discussion was made on the related themes under Freud's psychoanalytic theory.

#### **Conceptual Framework:**

This conceptual framework is designed to analyze the unconscious in the characters of the novel “The scarlet letter”. Besides, this conceptual framework also aims to explore and analyze anxiety in the characters of the novel “The scarlet letter”. The novel is about individualism and self-reliance of puritan community and conformity roots. Novel talks about the social oppression and psychological repression. This novel is a master work and simple exemplification between feelings and intellect of the human conflict. The three leading characters of the novel suffered, because they are driven by their strong id to satisfy their physical desires which were in their unconsciousness. This framework aimed at highlighting the flaws of major characters; exploring the anxiety which occurs when the gratification of un-wanted desires were not fulfilled. Characters suffered both from physical and mental sickness, due to their repressed unconscious desires as they were not able to control them in their consciousness.

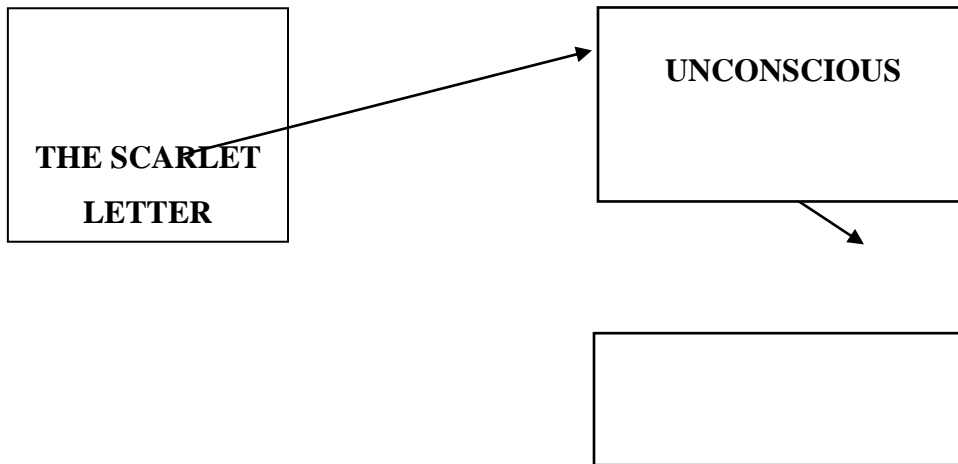


Fig 1.1 Conceptual framework of this study.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical theory is utilized as the theoretical framework of this research. Freud has frequently talked about conscious and unconscious. These both responsible for human mind in the decision making and it forces the ambitions that makes decision. Unconscious feelings drive people to act like they are coquet. The id ego and the super ego are three main important aspects of the person’s mind, Freud tried to construct a personality of person. For Freud “people are simply actors in the drama of their own minds which are pulled by chance and pushed by desire.” Psychoanalysis, as a technique in literature became enormously popular. In Psychology, Psychoanalysis labels alongside three things. Firstly, a process of mind which deducts investigation and most of above

the unconscious mind, secondly a neurosis therapy and finally a discipline which stands alone in a discipline which is investigates method and clinical experiences by applying and acquired knowledge. For Sigmund Freud, “psychoanalysis is a specific mind investigation technique and a therapy inspired from this investigation.”

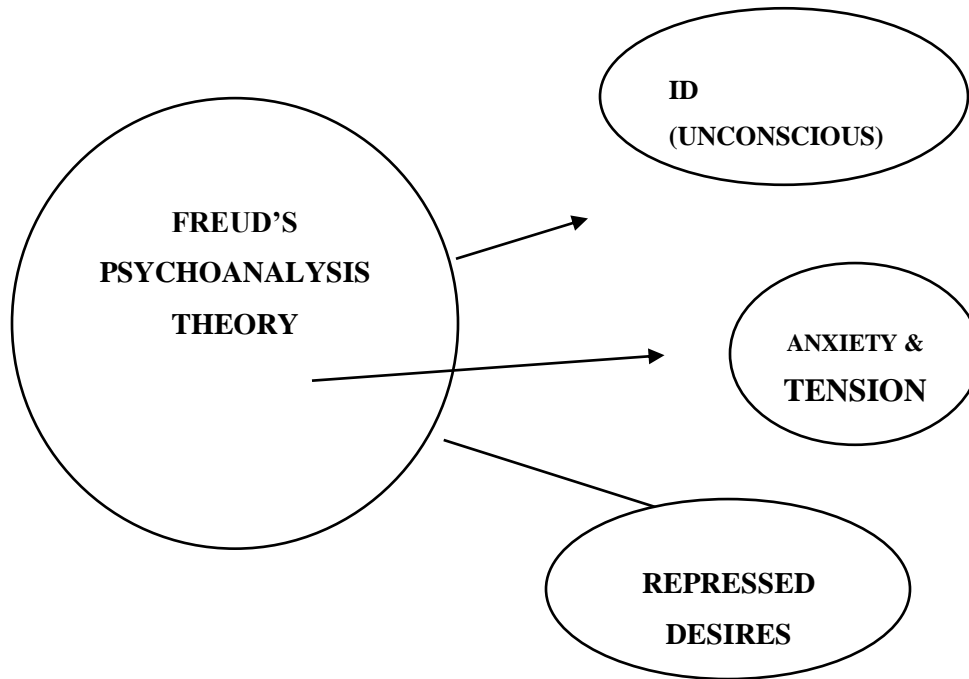


Fig 1:2 Theoretical frameworks of this study.

### **Discussion:**

The psychoanalytic approach in the light and leadership of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) has a valid place in literature. Psychology is known as an important part of literature. Freud states “the ego, id ego and super ego causes inconsistency in human psyche and also make some repression and conflict”. If anyone experiences the clash in these three parts of the psyche, it is not possible to form a normal, stable and healthy personality. In the novel *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, the central character’s experiences revolutions in their personalities. They are under the influence of their id. Id is primary component of human personality and unconscious part of human psyche. It includes instinctive and primitive behavior. It deals with pleasure principle if gratification of all desires and wants are not fulfilled it will result in anxiety and tension. Ego deals with reality principle and all rational thinking’s. It develops from id and is decision making component of personality, as it works by reason. Super ego is adopted moral standards and acquires from both society and parents. It deals with all moral principles like sense of virtue and vice and provides guidelines for making judgements. Unconscious basically tells us that repression is the kind of mechanism which helps unconscious impulses in which drives are forbidden go ahead to conscious life.

Unconscious stores the past memories and tragic childhood events because it has the function, and it leaves an impact on our unconscious thoughts and behavior. Feelings which are repressed, memories, undone desires are basically connected to sexual harassment. These kinds of issues are kept in the level of unconscious and after they might have serious effects on human mental conditions and behavior. Feelings which are repressed can lead to twists and disorders and abnormal in human personality, so it should be controlled. The protagonist of the novel Hester Prynne is effected by her id to comfort her physical desires which were in her unconscious. Sex is also in mind it can be controlled but she could not have controlled that and suffer throughout the novel by wearing Scarlet letter "A" for the crime of adultery which she knows that it is forbidden. Roger Chillingworth is another important character of the novel who was also under the influence of his weakness actually id. Roger Chillingworth, the husband of Hester and was elder than her and knows all differences between them but he was not able to control his id in front of beautiful and young Hester. He wants to fulfill his id, the repressed desire by marrying Hester. Both the characters listen to their unconsciousness in consciousness. It seems like their unconscious is controlling them rather consciousness. It is scientific we cannot consent our unconscious as it is a part of human psyche and usually works when we sleep in the form of dreams, but it should be limited to dreams only. In present time, in consciousness it should not control us or if it is controlling then we should try to stop it by controlling it in our mind and by not recalling it again and again. Past cannot be forgotten easily but by not remembering and recalling it we can control our repressed unconscious feelings which are destroying the present time as in the novel both characters suffered till the end just because they could not have the control on their id. All the desires feelings and emotions should be kept in conscious mind. As I have mentioned above if we will listen to our unconscious again and again and if gratification of all desires and passions which are repressed and present in unconscious are not fulfilled it will result in anxiety. We see the character of Arthur Dimmesdale a secret lover of Hester is in an ongoing fight with his id. Like Hester he also became slave of his physical desires and committed a sin, adultery. He was a coward man and not courageous enough to reveal his sin in front of all Puritan community. When he was under the influence of his id he decided to stand up to all difficulties and fight for them but he choices to repress his unwanted and un needy ideas and desires in the depts. of his unconsciousness. He was not able to control his id though he was aware of the result of his repressed feelings it results into his anxiety throughout the novel. We find Dimmesdale as anxious character which ends with his self-torture and burden life. He was suffering from both mental and physical sickness and anxieties. His anxiety occurs when Dimmesdale wants to skip with society which is not supposed to be belonged to. He feels anxiety when visited Hester in her home, because he is identified by the people. Dimmesdale appears to be wasting away and suffers from mysterious heart trouble caused by psychological distress. It is clear that "The Scarlet Letter" shows the anxiety in the main character of the novel. The psychoanalytic approach



by Sigmund Freud is suitable to analyze this novel through the major character Arthur Dimmesdale.

**Conclusion:**

This study is mainly based on psychoanalysis of the characters in the novel "The scarlet letter". One of the characters is affected by half done or broken desires. Besides, the unconscious of the character (Arthur Dimmesdale) also includes anxiety. Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis is a very relevant way to find these characters from the novel and this theory is also a suitable ground for Scarlet letter. The novel shows that how major characters of the novel suffering and fighting because of their id, ego and super ego, because of this they could not find any happiness in their lives. They were always in difficulties and mess and these difficulties cause them to face broken aspects of their personality. This study highlighted the secret desires and repressed desires of the characters and how they kept these things in their un-consciousness. The story behind this also reflect the life of Hawthorne because Hawthorne's mother also faced all these things which Hester faced. Hawthorne and his mother both faced same difficulties and harsh times. This study teaches us to find ways to bring our desires from unconscious to conscious. When we observe that our normal behavior changes into something unacceptable, how can we control by following the steps of ego super ego and id ego. Freud's theory says that these changes occur due to the traumas of childhood. When we kept our feelings, wishes and memories in our unconsciousness so they somehow, in the future come out and it also develops anxiety. According to Freud the ego super ego and id ego are the model of the psyche. The id ego works for principle of pleasure, gratification is also there, and ego shows something that is it good for us or not and then there is super ego it makes a relation between ego and id ego, that how society imposed ethical values and morals. Conflicts occurs when it gives birth to disagreement among these three parts. Then here comes a self-mechanism in order to get over these conflicts. When repressed desires and unwanted dreams affects un-consciousness of an individual so we can escape from these problems by developing self-mechanism. In the novel there is also a reference of puritan society in puritan society females and males both live under the strict conditions they supposed to repress their desires specially the sexual desires for each other. In the novel we have seen that characters of this novel couldn't balance the ego model in harmony neither they are able to balance their personality. They stuck between id ego and super ego. Puritan society and their strict rules serves as super ego and sometimes they were effected by id ego. The dual nature and confusion of the characters we can see throughout the novel. But when we see these situations which are mainly un-consciousness and anxiety in the light of Freud's perspective on psychoanalysis, so we come to know about the human mind and making of personality under the strict society. The only way to get rid of abnormal behavior we must change our conscious and un-conscious as well as we have to learn to make balance between ego model which Freud has given

to us in order to make our personality simple and easy in every environment in which we live just we need some practice and time.

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