

Mechanisms of smooth defense in the character of Sudabah in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh

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Psychologists believe that certain psychological knots are the driving force behind many human behaviors. In the face of various stresses, individuals employ defense mechanisms to prevent psychological collapse. Freud and his colleagues termed these mechanisms "psychological defense mechanisms."

Anxiety and feelings of inferiority are the primary causes of psychological disintegration, and defense mechanisms are activated when deep-seated anxiety overwhelms the psyche. Rationalization, projection, compensation, denial, repression, and many other such mechanisms are defensive reactions to stress.

This paper aims to examine the motivations behind Sudaba's abnormal behaviors in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh from the perspective of psychological defense mechanisms. Her betrayal of her husband is rooted in the defense mechanism of splitting, while her false accusations against Siavash exemplify projection. Rationalization is her primary defense mechanism about Siavash. Invalidation and aggression are also defense mechanisms that manifest in Sudaba when she experiences psychological stress.

The findings of this study suggest that Sudaba's abnormal behaviors stem from deep-rooted personality complexes. These complexes can be analyzed and addressed through the lens of psychology.

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Introduction

The intersection of literature and psychology offers profound insights into the complex motivations of fictional characters. In the *Shahnameh*, Ferdowsi masterfully crafts characters whose internal struggles drive the narrative. Among these, Sudabeh stands out as one of the most controversial figures, notorious for her betrayal and illicit desires. While previous studies have examined Sudabeh's character through the lens of personality disorders (such as anti-social personality disorder), this research shifts the focus to Freudian psychoanalysis. Specifically, it investigates how Sudabeh's deviant behaviors—such as her betrayal of Kay Kavus and her false accusations against Siavash—are not merely expressions of malice, but are symptomatic of a psyche struggling to cope with deep-seated complexes and anxieties through the use of defense mechanisms.

Method

This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach grounded in Freudian psychoanalytic theory. The researchers conducted a library-based analysis of the *Shahnameh*, specifically focusing on the narrative arc involving Sudabeh and Siavash. The methodology centers on identifying and categorizing Sudabeh's behaviors within the framework of Freudian defense mechanisms, including rationalization, projection, undoing, displacement (aggression), and unconscious protest. By treating the text as a psychological case study, the authors mapped specific narrative actions to psychological manifestations of internal tension.

Results

The analysis reveals that Sudabeh's behavior is consistently driven by unconscious mechanisms designed to maintain psychological stability amidst intense internal conflict:

- **Rationalization:** Sudabeh utilizes rationalization to mask her illicit intentions. When she invites Siavash to the harem, she claims to be looking for a wife for him, providing a socially acceptable excuse for her true, clandestine motives.
- **Undoing:** To negate the anxiety caused by her failed attempts to seduce Siavash, Sudabeh employs “undoing.” When Siavash

rejects her, she attempts to rewrite reality by accusing him of the very behavior she initiated, thereby nullifying her own guilt and the perceived threat to her reputation.

- **Projection:** Faced with the threat of exposure, Sudabeh uses projection to offload her “unacceptable” desires onto Siavash. By accusing Siavash of aggression and illicit intent, she unconsciously externalizes her own inner turmoil and guilt.
- **Aggression and Displacement:** Sudabeh’s frequent outbursts—tearing her clothes and scratching her face—serve as a form of displacement. These aggressive acts against herself and others act as a release valve for the frustration and humiliation born from her repeated failures to control Siavash.
- **Unconscious Protest:** The study interprets Sudabeh’s apparent “loyalty” to Kay Kavus (particularly during his imprisonment) as a displaced form of unconscious protest against her father. Her contradictory behavior highlights a fractured psyche, where acts of defiance against her father are manifested through manipulation of her husband and stepson.

Conclusion

The research concludes that Sudabeh is not simply a “villain” in a binary moral sense, but a character suffering from significant psychological instability. Her actions represent a perpetual struggle to avoid psychological collapse under the weight of her own impulses and social constraints. The study demonstrates that her most egregious acts—the false accusations and betrayal—are the result of a mind desperately utilizing defensive strategies to manage deep-seated complexes. Ultimately, the authors argue that Sudabeh’s character in *Shahnameh* can be scientifically analyzed and understood as a product of an unstable psyche, where deviant behavior serves as a desperate, albeit maladaptive, defense against internal collapse.