

## **DICOTS OF MAGICAL REALISM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS IN SHEHAN KARUNATILAKA'S 'SEVEN MOONS OF MALI ALMEIDA'**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The novel's magical realist framework blurs the boundaries between life and the afterlife, portraying an intricate bureaucratic realm that reflects unresolved conflicts and suppressed emotions. It goes on to examine themes such as juvenile frustrations, sexual identity, and symbolism depicted in the dreams of the adolescent minds, which could be a result of historical trauma. This paper elucidates how Karunatilaka intertwines psychoanalytic theory with Sri Lankan history to create a layered narrative. The protagonist's journey through the seven moons reflects the unconscious mind's struggle for resolution, leading to self-acceptance and ultimate transcendence. Through an analytical approach, this study highlights Karunatilaka's success in intertwining personal, historical, and psychological realities, presenting a compelling commentary on repression, grief, and the search for truth.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Psyche, Psychoanalytical, ID, Ego, Super Ego, Shehan Karunatilaka, Maali Almeida, In Between and The Light.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Magic Realism is an astounding concept which deals with the unconscious mind, where it can be viewed as a representation of the unconscious mind, which gives shape to the suppressed thoughts, inner most desires and the unexplained fears. It even deals with dream like narratives, which again is a resemblance of dreams, a concept that Freud believed or perceived it as a window or gateway of the unconscious mind to relate to the outside world. It is also a major element of symbolism and metaphor. It enables the authors to explore complex psychological themes which are the basic elements of desires conflicts, traumas and the likes.

Psychoanalytical theme and character development explores the psyche, which enables the analysis of the character and its motivation desires and deep conflicts, thereby providing a canvas into the psychological makeup of the individual. Another concept is that trauma and repression, where the characters in the narratives most often grapple with unimaginable trauma, repression and varied unresolved conflicts, which make a character ornate.

A psychoanalytical theme in magic realism focuses more on three important factors which is a blend of both the elements. Firstly, we have trauma and repression, where the characters struggle with their rationality and that of the moral principles which can be viewed and analysed only through the structural model of psyche formulated by Freud. The second concept is that of ID, Ego and Super Ego, where the characters struggle with their desires their moral responsibility

adhering to the principles of life and the nationality which can be viewed only under the lens of Freud's view and should fall into the segregated concepts. The final concept is the defence mechanism where the characters takes up or option to employee, defence mechanism like repression, or strong denial or unexplained strength to cope with traumatic experiences or conflicts which are not true but abundantly flourishing in their minds.

Shehan Karunatilaka's novel "The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida" is a wondrous blend of magical realism and psychoanalysis there by exploring the complexities of the human mind in the midst of the brutal civil war that broke out in Srilanka. The novel with absolute ease weaves magical realism with that of historical facts there in creating a unique narrative perspective. The protagonist of the novel is Maali Almeida who navigates with ease an afterlife that's as bureaucratic as the world above, laden or rather suppressed with rules and red tape. Having this advantage, he is able to explore the intersection of trauma and resistance and the traumatic experiences of the protagonist and paints how well he is able to reset the oppressive forces that surround him. The second aspect is subverting traditional notions of the afterlife. In fact, an afterlife is depicted similar to that of the real world. Karunatilaka challenges the idea of a better after life also and tries to present a more nuanced and very complex exploration of morality.

The aspect of Psychoanalysis is very rich in the novel and explores aspects take identity crisis. In fact, Almeida grapples with this identity as a war photographer and a closeted gay man, reflecting the emotional turmoil and confusion that arises because of the pressure of the society. The second aspect is that of trauma, where the novel visibly portrays the traumatic experiences of Almeida and other characters thereby creating a lasting scar and deep trench because of the impact of violence and loss on that of individuals and their communities. The third aspect is that of symbolism and dreams. The life of Almeida is one that is filled with symbolism and makes an indelible mark in his life in that of aftermath. It does not let him lead a normal life as his memories of the past are very often triggered by dreams thereby highlighting the complexities of the human mind.

"The mind is like an iceberg; it floats with one-seventh of its bulk above water." (Freud 147). The aim of this research paper is to discuss and analyse how Shehan Karunatilaka, a Sri Lankan Writer has blended the Freudian concepts of Psychoanalysis and Magic Realism in his 2022 Booker prize winning novel "Seven Moons of Mali Almeida". He has carved a niche as he has brilliantly fused the elements of magical realism in the construction of his protagonist as a lost spirit and simultaneously displaying the complexities of his mind. The novel was released in 2015 under the title 'Chats with the Dead' and later he re-edited and published the same in 2022 which brought him accolades. The novelist's repressed emotions witnessing the brutal murders as a teenager during the Srilankan Civil Wars had a great impact on his mind and has been the driving force to write the novel. He has effectively used the protagonist as his mouthpiece. His very thought 'What if the dead could talk?' which has been etched in his mind had paved way for his characters in the novel. The narrative is in second person portraying the brutal massacre of Tamils in 1983 in his native land thereby voicing out his agony and his helplessness as a silent spectator. Karunatilaka has infused the autobiographical elements into his novel voicing out for the murder of Richard Manik de Zoysa, a Sri Lankan journalist which he had witnessed and which he considers to be a dark memory in his life. Maali Almeida is an intricately crafted protagonist and this paper would elucidate various themes in the novel like identity crisis, trauma, sexual perversions, symbolism and dreams by unravelling the different shades of the protagonist's mind both in the real world and in his afterlife sojourn. The protagonist is thus shaped as a war photographer and as a closet gay bearing the similarities of the homicide victim. The different aspects of magical realism and psychoanalysis are intertwined in the novel truthfully reflecting the sufferings of the Tamils in Sri Lanka and about the unsolved murders.

When the mind is scarred and scathed with grief the emotional trauma one endures has no limit. When traumatized, undoubtedly, an individual's life takes its toll. The excruciating pain in the mind slowly alienates the individual from reality and blinds the crevices of hope that is lingering around. Silence and frustration engulf them and they are pushed to the depths of darkness. They wander in the physical world lifeless with mounting grief day after day. Repressing their emotions leads to traumatic nightmares. The intensity of an individual's traumatic experience has an enormous impact on their personality and their behaviour is influenced by their conscious and unconscious mind according to Sigmund Freud. According to him "The only person with whom you have to compare yourself is you in the past" in regard with self-development and personal growth.

The story unfolds with the heightened mystery of the protagonist's journey between the supernatural realm and his familiar world as a war photographer, gambler and closet gay. The narratives of the dead character clearly depict the conflicts between the id, ego and super ego through a series of phases from which he discovers the truth ultimately in the liminal space. Witnessing the horrors of war and capturing them as his professional demands is the working of the id. Not merely being a silent spectator but his urge to publish the incriminating photos of the mass massacre and make the invisible visible works by his super ego. His spirit in after life sojourn is where his ego forces him to decide the path, he has to travel to investigate his murder and avenge his death or to follow the rules and enter light within seven moons which symbolizes seven days. Refusing to travel in either of these paths Maali Almeida travels to earth and struggles hard to connect with his close friend Jaki and her cousin DD to help them recover the hidden photos and publish them to bring the atrocities and Minister of Justice's hypocrisies to limelight. "Do one thing and do it well," said a man whose 'one thing' did not include being a father." ( Karunatilaka 101)

Maali Almeida's childhood days had been chaotic due to his parents' tumultuous marriage. Hence from his early life of innocence he has been subjected to frustration as his father deserted him and his mother betrayed him by hiding the letters he had received from his father. His mind had been in conflict holding grudge against his absent father and later hate for his mother inflicting distress. His numbness caused due to loneliness and frustrations made him take up photo journalism and become a war photographer. His profession as a war photographer witnessing the outbursts of violence deeply traumatizes him and documentation of it with detachment reveals his attempt to mask his despair.

As a young man he is further subjected to psychological turmoil as he identifies himself as homosexual and is on quest for acceptance as a closeted gay. Fear of rejection, loneliness had engulfed him and initially the dominance of super ego pushes him to labyrinth of darkness. But later he acts on his basic instincts in satisfying his desires through his encounter with beautiful boys as id the pleasure principle reigns his mind. His sexual affair with DD brings his life to a closure when DD's father discovers the truth. Maali is brutally killed by his men and the saddest part is he has no memory of his death and with great difficulty he accepts that he is in his afterlife as a spirit burdened with unresolved traumas and guilt. The impact of his involvement in documenting the civil war instils feeling of regret and guilt as he unfortunately dies not exposing the atrocities of the warriors of his native land.

As a summation the novel adopts the main features of magical realism where the protagonist is depicted as a lost spirit who narrates the chaotic plot with time shifts co existing plots leading to occurrences of flashbacks and flash-forwards. The protagonist Maali Almeida is subjected to personal introspection as a lost spirit exhibits his experience in two realistic situations in the same place but two different periods. The continuous struggle between id, ego and superego of the protagonist as a ghost is vividly described as the spirit of the protagonist Maali Almeida is stuck in the In Between

and The Light. In Between is symbolic of entrapment and his quest in solving the mystery of his death and traveling into The Light is symbolic of clarity and revelation. The realization that dawn on him at the end of his quest is that his friendship for Jaki and love for Devaka De Silva (DD) are his prized possessions that had added meaning to his life. With that contentment Maali Almeida enters 'The Light' as he becomes conscious that his unconscious desire for love and affection has been fulfilled in his life. By integrating magical realism with psychoanalytic theory, Shehan Karunatilaka has presented the psychological realities of the characters exploring complex internal and external landscapes.

Maali Almeida's journey in the ghostly realm through the seven moons and his encounter with the other spirits vividly describes his psychological battle. Through a psychoanalytic lens, thus the protagonist's quest for justice and his confrontation with the truth about his murder are nothing but a reflection of his primal urge for contentment and gratification. While id being the driving force sets him on his quest of unravelling the truths his ego balances his desire and the realities he confronts in his afterlife journey. His determination to expose the wrong doings is worked upon by his super ego and is reflection of his guilt. By examining the various aspects of defence mechanisms, conflict between id, ego, and super ego, repressed memories of the protagonist intersecting with the elements of magical realism such as supernatural elements, emphasis on symbolism, cultural context; Shehan Karunatilaka has undoubtedly been successful in presenting them as dicots layering the societal issues as well.

The protagonist, Maali Almeida, exists in a liminal space between life and death, where cannot be a visual demarcating line, and he goes on to mirror mirroring Freud's idea that the unconscious mind operates well beyond rational control. His journey that he chooses beyond the bureaucratic afterlife is shaped by mixed memories and irreversible regrets, many of which stem from unresolved conflicts or conflicts that did not have solutions. The protagonist's inability to recall his death reflects repression, a kind of *Défense* mechanism, a topic which Freud theorized as a method of burying distressing experiences deep within the cataleptic. The chaotic bureaucracy and haunting figures in the protagonist's afterlife symbolize Almeida's suppressed uncertainties and culpability, thereby reinforcing Freud's view that unanswered emotions manifest in distorted procedures.

Dream is always a getaway to the unconscious as it finds a solution or goes in search of a solution in the unconscious state. Almeida's afterlife experience can be interpreted as a dream-like state, where time shifts, flashbacks, and surreal encounters resemble dream symbolism. The struggle that is forever rampant with the protagonist along with his identity both as a war photojournalist and cloistered gay man most often surfaces in dream-like hallucinations, reflecting the demonstrated and covert content again which Freud described in his interpretations of dream. His unending haunting memories and scrappy reminiscences bear a resemblance to Freud's theory that dreams reconstruct unresolved past skirmishes in symbolic ways.

The novel uses magical realism to blur reality and fantasy, echoing Freud's view that dreams are layered with symbolism, as symbolism and dreamscape helps the protagonist paint a large canvas and search for what he is searching for rather the world of reality which is absolutely hazy and lands him in a more confused state. The journey that the protagonist embarks on in search of uncovering hidden photographs can be viewed as a metaphor for unearthing repressed truths just as Freud believed dreams reveal hidden aspects of the psyche. Similar to Freud's idea that the unconscious mind gradually processes trauma, "The Seven Moons" aptly symbolises the passage of time and transformation. By intrinsically blending symbolism, dream and its logic and psychological depth the author beautifully crafts a narrative that aligns with Freud's theory on Unconscious.

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