
**PORTRAYAL OF A MENTAL JOURNEY THROUGH DEFENSE
MECHANISMS TO MATURITY: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL STUDY OF
CHADER AMABASYA BY SYED WALIULLAH**

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to look into the character of the protagonist, Aref Ali of the novel *Chader Amabasya (Night of No Moon)* from a psychoanalytical point of view and show how the novelist has embarked on different domains of the human psyche and availed defence mechanisms. The writer has successfully excavated deeper into the psyche of a cocooned young man who happens to be exposed to a stark reality he has never imagined. The novel is woven around one incident of killing of a marginal woman by a member of an affluent class. The writer concentrates primarily on how that unexpected exposure of the inexperienced young school teacher has set his composed, serene and protected psychosocial surroundings upside down and how he faces that tough time applying defence mechanisms. But the arguments and counterarguments he builds within and maturity he attains in the process are the points that deserve more attention and deeper analysis which gives space to a study of this nature. The study thus brings to fore the less explored aspects of *Chader Amabasya* which is commonly viewed as projections of reality by exploring the inner workings of the protagonist. This study will show the changes of the character from the psychoanalytical point of view with special reference to Freudian concepts of personality formation and defence mechanisms.

Keywords: the protagonist, psychoanalytical, personality, mechanism, killing

Introduction

Syed Waliullah is a foremost novelist of Bangladesh. He was born in Bangladesh in 1922 and died in Paris in 1971. Being a member of an educated family, he naturally got a sound education. In his childhood, he got the opportunities to have varied experiences of different locations of Bangladesh and enrich himself because of the transferable job of his magistrate father. This provided him with most of the ingredients for his fictional works. His masterpiece *Lalsalu* was written with one such experience of a Mazar he encountered in his childhood. Zaman (2016) informs us that the novel “was inspired by a shrine covered with red cloth that he would often pass when he lived with his father in Mymensingh.” He worked as a journalist at the initial stage of his career. Later he served in media and foreign services. As a patriotic soul, he had the deep love for his motherland and he contributed much in the Liberation War of Bangladesh though unfortunately, he died just before the victory. He wrote only four novels titled *Lalsalu (Tree Without Roots)* (1948), *Chander Amaboshay (Night of No Moon)* (1963), *Kando Nadi Kando (Cry, O River)* (1966) and *The Ugly Asian* (1959). He has three dramas to his credit. Besides, he penned two volumes of short stories. He got the prestigious Bangla Academy Award in 1961. He was also awarded the highest state-level award of Bangladesh Ekushey Padak posthumously in 1984.

Chander Amaboshay is his second novel published in 1963. This marks a shift in his narrative as he started to concentrate more and more on the psychological aspects of the characters from this novel onwards. Hasan (2017) observes, “Waliullah has portrayed the individuals through existential philosophy in the novels *Chander Amaboshay* and *Kando Nadi Kando*.” Aref Ali, the protagonist, is a school teacher dependent on Barobari. He happens to be by an incident of killing a woman. He finds Kader, the younger member of Barobari, standing near. He flees from the spot madly with a mad chase of his sense of guilt. He thinks of Kader's recognition as an ascetic at home and resorts to defence mechanisms to take himself to a safe side. Even when he finds it for sure that Kader is the confessed killer, he goes the length of believing Kader's version of the fact, and that is, he killed the woman by accident. Anwar (1996) thinks this is one among those fictions which are “very inward-looking psychological novels.” (117) To make it an acceptable explanation, he assigns the absolving ground to Kader's love for the woman. He also thinks of his poor condition, security at the Barobari, his old mother which hold him back from unveiling Kader's crime. Thus his ego availing defence mechanisms hold him back. He even realizes that in place of Kader, he will be proved criminal by the society.

Thus the struggles within for long and makes a threadbare analysis of all the probable consequences. Haq (1996) thinks that this novel clearly shows us “how Syed Waliullah himself pushes us to the realization that he is an existentialist and surveys man and the world in the light of the existentialism of Camus, not Sartre.” (pp.164-165) He, however, comes to a conclusion with all the risks and challenges on his head that he will tell Dadasahed the fact. He takes the trunk, leaves the house calmly and quietly. He goes to the police station, tells the truth unflinching, earns suspicion about his motif and faces contemplated threat from the police to think over the fact. Peter Barry (2002) puts, “Psychoanalytic criticism is a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of

literature.” (p. 96) This paper will draw on Freud's concepts of human psyche and defence mechanisms to analyze the text dealing with the mental journey of Aref Ali.

Freud's Structures of Human Psyche and Defense Mechanisms

Freud in his *The Ego and the Id* (1962) suggested to map out the structure of human psyche which consists of the id implying the pleasure principle, the instinctual feature of human activities, the ego referring to the reality principle negotiating with the realities and mediating between the id and superego and the superego holding morality principle highlighting the socially and ideally accepted standards. (Strachey, 1985, p.21) This psychic continuum places the ego as a balance maker between the superego, the moralizing actor and the id, the impulsive one. However, these domains are not exclusive rather often they are inclusive in nature. As Lasswell (1935) put,

The terms id, superego, and ego are roughly equivalent to impulse, conscience, and reason...The three main personality structures are not to be thought of as rigidly separated from one another; the superego and the ego are not categorically cut off from the impulses of the id... The id and superego aspects of reaction go on without conscious awareness on the part of the person. (p.63)

In human personality, the ego acts to maintain a secure and rational course of life for an individual by carefully assessing and monitoring the individual's internal and external environment. It acts like an executive mediating or balancing between the id and the superego. (Schwartz et al, 1974, p.491). So the aggressive motives are represented by the 'id' and this is neutralized by the 'superego' placing the 'ego' in a dialectical position in-between them. The superego is a type of internalized conscience, a moralizing agent which, according to psychoanalytic theory, can be subdivided into two parts: the punitive and the ego-ideal aspect. (Schwartz, 1974, p.492). The punitive aspect develops out of the norms that prohibit and punish in case of violation. Freud (1985c) wrote,

It is in keeping with the course of human development that external coercion gradually becomes internalized; for a special mental agency, man's super-ego takes it over and includes it among its commandments... This is also true of what is known as the moral demands of civilization, which likewise apply to everyone. (pp. 190-191)

The ego-ideal refers to conscience that represents those norms, values and objects which earn respect and are upheld by the role models or the peers. (Freud, 1985b, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, pp. 147, 161) This ideal conscience makes one advanced in both internal and external strength. Freud summarizes, "A strengthening of the super-ego is a most precious cultural asset in the psychological field. Those in whom it takes place are turned from being opponents of civilization into being its vehicles." (Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, 1985c, p. 190). According to Freud, the punitive domain of superego develops through its exposure to external coercive forces existing in the society in various forms. In this process, social cooperation strengthens as a result of the threats or punishment from external agents. (Freud 1985a, pp. 329-334)

Defence mechanisms propounded by Sigmund Freud and developed by later psychologists are the mechanisms availed by ego and dictated by the reality principle. They refer to psychological strategies that are put to use unconsciously by ego for protecting a person from anxiety that arises from socially or mentally unacceptable feelings or thoughts. The basic obsession is with the strategies how an individual can be guilt-free, safe, sound and protected. As the ego is primarily concerned with time and place, it works for an adaptive approach and develops loops to take one in the safe side by the principle of avoiding, hiding, neglecting, shifting and unethically prioritizing.

It is prone to shift reality standard depending on situations. The meanest possible clues are often given the highest importance and the faintest possibility has embodied the attire of surety. Thus it is an instinct centred round self-interest, and to be in the safe side is the sole motto. In his works, Sigmund Freud dispersedly marked several ego defences. His daughter Anna Freud worked on that and developed the ideas by organizing them in a list. She listed ten defence mechanisms from her father's works: 1. Repression, 2. Regression, 3. Reaction formation, 4. Isolation, 5. Undoing, 6. Projection, 7. Introjection, 8. Turning against one's own person, 9. Reversal into the opposite and 10. Sublimation or displacement. Later on, the list has been elongated by many psychoanalysts. However, defence mechanisms are the normal and natural outcome. But the dominance of ego through defence mechanisms is not the final stage. Rather one can have his elevation and then the morality principle guides him and gives him a sense of satisfaction and completion. In that stage, defence mechanisms no longer intervene in his working of the mind, and can't budge him from his doing. This self-actualization according to Maslow and superego stage according to Freud is an achievement.

Aref Ali's Defense Mechanisms and Development of Superego

Reticent Aref Ali is an inexperienced young teacher of twenty-two/three living in a village. His own village is three miles away to the south and has only a small piece of land like the palm of the hand. He passed HSC through hardship staying in town and got back home being incapable of affording expenses for higher education. He gets a job in the school established by the Barobari and has got shelter there. The guardian of the house is Dadasaheb, a retired man obsessed with a tradition of the landed gentry. He is a strict follower of majhab and makes the members of the family follow Islamic rules. His younger brother Kader is a completely idle, extremely reticent and unsocial man, rough and tough from early life, but all on a sudden at eighteen/nineteen, he got radically changed and secluded. Dadasaheb believes, his brother is an ascetic. And "Aref Ali has no reason to be dissatisfied with his current job."(p.40) Still, he has adolescence and the dreams and faiths of that age. He loves the moonlit night. One night, he happens to see Kader and "he decides he will follow him."(p.22) He loses the trace of Kader at a crossroad having four directions. He takes one which reminds us of Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken",

"I took the one less travelled by
And that made the difference." (lines19-20)

He walks towards his house, but suddenly “leaves the straight path for a clandestine one” (p.24) and starts walking towards the river. Beyond the village boundary, there are trees, shrubs and bamboo thickets. He hears sound from within the bamboo shrubs. He goes close and hears a sudden but frightened female voice which disappears in no time. He finds “a half-naked body with a bit of moonlight near her feet.”(p.26) Confounded Aref comes out with reluctant gait and finds Kader standing there. He feels gnawing of conscience and flees from the spot fast. “The faster he runs, the more his fright grows.” (p.20) While fleeing, he even feels a wild dog jumps at him and the dead body blocks his way.

Aref gets home after a tormenting journey of infinitely unbearable time. He has been living in the house for two years but he never has had a talk with Kader. “He is an isolated man.” (p.43) Kader comes to his room at the last part of the night and asks him why he has fled from the spot. Aref can hardly answer. Before leaving, Kader makes him encounter another question, “What were you doing in the bamboo shrubs” (p.28) forcing him to be in perpetual tensions and torments. Next day at dead of night, Kader comes to his room quite unusually and tells him coldly, “Let's go...It is still lying in the bamboo shrubs. None got any trace.” (p.43) Aref accompanies him without having any control over his self. They two take the dead body to the river. The teacher sweats, tension shrouds him. He helps Kader without being mentally involved and, anxiety and tensions blind him. So he says, “I can't see anything.” (p.48) “He feels as if he were a thing of hatred under Kader's feet, a spineless, impotent insect-like something.” (p.48) Kader does the needful alone, stares at him with no response and disappears. The isolated teacher feels a strong sense of guilt and washes clean his hand before starting for home.

He passes the day with innumerable questions creeping inside regarding the murder. He waits for something to happen. “But nothing happens.” (p.49) He also garners courage by remembering Dadasaheb who may help him. His mind, however, remains boggled with darkness and unrest as he is haunted by several questions like why Kader was wandering alone at that time and whether Kader suspects him as the murderer. To him, “Kader appears as the heartless, cruel murderer.” (p.52) He wants to flee from the reality by building some defence mechanisms in favour of his inaction. He doesn't inform the police because as a dependent, he can't do that. Moreover, he has a deep veneration for the guardian of the house, Dadasaheb. He can't bring harm to Dadasaheb's dear ones. He also defends his inaction by thinking, “The incident of the bamboo shrub can't be revealed. That is the secret of Kader and his mind. Like a secret wound in the private part of the body.” (p.52) He even gets carried away by his emotion and feels extremely helpless. It seems to him, “He is a tender aged poor teacher and he has never seen any dead body in the bamboo shrubs. Is it surprising that he has delusion? He understands nothing, he knows nothing.” (p.52) Thus he avails denial and repression to take him to a safe side. But he gets entangled in some recurrent questions regarding this.

His dependence on the house makes him grow some arguments in Kader's favour. It is perhaps to show the deprived lady some respect that he removed the dead body. “Maybe, she was not fortunate enough in a lifetime to enjoy happiness and peace, assets and wealth, love and

affection, dignity and respect. Would her death be such ugly too?" (p.54) His inferior position pushes him into complexes. He thinks, "There was no doubt in Kader that the young teacher is the murderer. So he decides that he would compel the man who killed the young lady to rescue her from the last disgrace." (p.54) Aref, as usual, attends school, but can't keep normal. He comes to know from the discussion of his colleagues that the dead body has been discerned by a string of a steamer. It has got swelled up and deformed. They talk about her body, age, character, class which makes him sick. His colleagues' mean manner makes him think favourably of Kader. To him, "His colleagues in comparison to a man of good character, kind, affectionate like Kader are very mean-minded, corrupt." (p.61) He, however, can't forget the incident. He goes to bed and asks himself, "Is the whole incident a strange bad dream?" (p.64) He thinks over his hatred for his colleagues to divert the incident and feels, "The atrocity in the death of the young lady is not merely atrocity, the essence of the incident lies in terrible inhuman works which have made him deeply moved." (p.66) He goes on for general argument in favour of Kader, "Though human fate is whimsical and cruel, human beings are not devoid of love and affection, even to an utmost dispassionate person, other's life is not without value." (p.67)

Kader comes to his room that night too. In his presence, Aref feels confounded, frightened and finds the time awkward. He, however, overcomes his fear imposing an explanation sympathetically on Kader's coming and feels satisfied thinking, "Perhaps in Kader's mind to has the hunger for solace from a friend. Hasn't he too suffered mental afflictions these days? Both need friendship badly. They are owners of a secret." (p.69) At one stage, he bursts out, "What's your motive?" (p.71). Aref falls in sheer discomfort. "The question seems like bolt from the blue." (p.71) Kader comes forward to divulge the secret, the half-known truth, saying, "Human life is extremely brittle. It gets twisted even at a soft touch. An accident happened, what can be done? What's the benefit of calling?" (p.72) The secret is divulged. Everything is clear. Still, he wants to slip by defence mechanisms. "The young teacher realizes everything. He could understand everything from the beginning, but mind didn't agree." (p.73) He occasionally bounces back. He overcomes his weakness, wins fear, can't accept his position as if he were "a mere insect" (p.73) and voices his suppressed self and poses a protest against Kader saying, "Your courage knows no limit." (p.73) This is the first protest pronounced by the teacher. He even says with a commanding voice, "Go, go inside your house." (p.74) Kader rather composes himself and tells him about his meeting with the woman. This earns stronger protest from Aref, "Go, go away." (p.75)

On Sunday morning, at 9 am, Dadasaheb calls the young teacher and he gets shaken fearing that he might have neglected his duty. He asks him of his encounter with Kader and he expresses his satisfaction over the matter as Kader is a lonely man with ascetic nature and needs good company. Aref feels the need to divulge the secret. He comes to a conclusion, "It is his duty to unveil the secret about Kader's crime." (p.79) But again he tries to develop a defence a mechanism and delays thinking, "He knows who the criminal is, but he is yet to know the meaning of the crime." (p.79) So he takes leave of Dadasaheb apologetically thinking he can't say anything as that will be just the opposite of Dadasaheb's expectation.

Despite Kader's confession, he is chased by the question why Kader ditched the body in the river. Here he wants a void where Kader can be absolved and he can be free of the sense of guilt. But his conscience leads him otherwise. He gets boosted and feels cheated by Kader and feels that his knowledge has been gained. He feels enlighten, "He can understand, his search has come out successful, he has got his answer." (p.81) Again he oscillates. Kader ditched the dead body into the river. "The reason is love and affection." (p.82) He recollects that Kader told him to be careful so that no scratch fell on the body. So it indicates that he had the love for the lady. Here too he can't stand, rather a question creeps in his mind, "Kader has confessed a serious thing like killing, but he has not even implied to his love for the lady." (p.82) So he can't be absolved. Again he budes from the stand thinking, "The pure people confess faults and crimes unhesitatingly, but they don't unveil their beauty of heart easily." (p.82) To support that proposition, he visualizes a romantic time and situation where Kader and the wife of the boatman met in the month of Ashwin where Kader with a fishing nail sat to fish and she was having the bath. Their eyes met and grew a love relation. Kader had affection for the lady and so it is not a cruel killing. The killing was just an accident and Kader has been punished enough. "His extreme punishment is: To be bereaved till death.

The extremity of that unbearable affliction will never diminish." (p.85) He takes the decision, "As Kader has been proved guilt free in his eyes, so there is no question of revealing the incident of the bamboo shrub." (p.85) Kader again comes to his room. He wants his position cemented. So he wants to know, "You have not said anything about your love for the young lady." (p.89) To Kader, it is an irrelevant question and so he finds this absurd. Finally, Aref can understand that "It is not possible for Kader to have affection for the wife of a poor boatman" (p.92) Aref's religious consideration intervenes in his thought, "Killing one person is a vile crime in the eye of the creator". (p.87) Thus he directs himself to a religious point of view having sided with morality principle. Aref can clearly understand, the reason of attraction for the lady is sexy and pronounces, "Then what else? All are over." So he comes to the final conclusion, "I have no more alternative left." (p.92) Again vacillation occurs. He thinks, Kader suppressed her voice because "Perhaps the husband of the young lady has come in search of his wife." (p.93) To avoid being discovered and his family being maligned, he fled from the back of the shrub. But he got caught. Kader has his arguments. He felt Aref would reveal the incident but he might not do so as he is their dependent and lacks in courage. On the other hand, he can defend himself by dismounting the crime on Aref. He associates the teacher so that he can be involved as a part of it and cannot reveal it forever. He can understand, "A young teacher is a spineless man." (p.95) The last resort is Dasdasahab, but he would be extremely hurt hearing it. He would like to save his family name and fame. But his superego gets dominant and he comes to a decision. "He has no way but to reveal the fact. Had there any scope, he would not reveal it. A lady sacrificed her life meaninglessly. He believes human life is not that much worthless. No, he has no way." (p.98)

Once he is determined, he doesn't feel the weight of the existence of Kader. He says his prayer. He prays and feels the intimacy and presence of the creator. He feels that Kader should also be punished. Kader threatens him, "How many witnesses are needed? They will say they saw

you.” (p.100) This can't touch Aref. He also tells him that he would be hanged if he is accused. Still, he doesn't budge. He is firm to tell Dadasaheb in the evening. He again thinks of the position of Dadasaheb and his poor condition, his widow mother with brother and sister depending on him. He asks himself why he should bring danger to him. He then goes to think, Kader is a cruel man, but he has done nothing wrong to Kader. He is not the enemy. He will not get support from anyone. Rather they would accuse him and term him as foolish. He visualizes them say, “The man was quite in peace. A good job, extreme care of the big house. Had he not been foolish, would he bring misfortune on him?” (p.106) Though he vacillates, he advances as his superego directs him. Next day after morning he prayer goes to meet Dadasheb. He again thinks about the whole incident deeply. He comes but again hesitates, “Haven't I made a mistake by coming to say the secret to Dadasaheb.”(p.113) But he cannot get back and says, “Kader Mia has killed a woman.”(p.114) Dadasaheb doesn't understand. He doesn't feel to repeat it. He stands up and says, “I have come to say goodbye to you.” (p.114) Everything is ready. He takes his suitcase and starts for the court because he knows, “It is his duty to tell the secret to the authority. To hand over the responsibility of the elder brother of Kader means not only to leave the responsibility unfinished but also tell the man to do something extremely inhuman.”

(p.115)

The young teacher does his duty and then returns to his village house. After two days, he is arrested and taken to the thana. There the anger he sees in the eye of the police, the way they treat him, the words they speak about him- all seem to be a part of the previously written drama which has been rehearsed. Only when he is asked to sit down in front of the officer, he hesitates because he thinks it was not in his script. What he hears from the police first with a threatening voice is, “Did you want to play tricks? No tricks will not work”. (p.116) The teacher hears it, says nothing and feels nothing. Again it sounds to be a part of the script. So he keeps calm. The police member repeats, “You thought, you will win by playing tricks?” (p.116) He keeps silent. Thus even in an awkward situation, he takes the lead with the position of a decision maker. He is insisted by the police officer saying, “Do you agree to confess your crime?” (p.117) Aref feels to say and he says the same story. He is taunted by the police and he retorts by repeating the same words. He is then informed that there will be an investigation and that will only bring him harm. Nothing can budge him from his decided position. The police make the last try to make him understand. But all these he has thought and visualized both the actions and consequences. He finds nothing new.

He finds satisfaction as “Isn't he listening to his own arguments in another person's voice? Isn't it the proof of his sagacity and farsightedness?” (p.118) So Aref remains calm as if nothing were touching him. The inspector tries to make him weak, but that only makes him stronger. He can understand that “The fight he felt he was fighting against others is actually against himself and he has won the battle.” (p.118) The final threat comes as the police officer says, “Can you understand? Let it be that you are right, but where is your witness? You have seen nothing with your own eyes, but your opposite party saw you.” (p.119) Still, no change comes over the teacher, rather he repeats his words of truth. The police officer taunts him. But that cannot reach him or touch him the least. He rather tries to remember the young lady's face, and feels, “Still

someone is to be punished for her death?" (p.120) The moral principle guides him. Even if he is wrongly punished, he feels, "Whom the punishment due will reach there. Can't he get solace for this?" (p.120) As Aref reaches superego, he finds everything as eye-opening and fascinating as all are just in line with what he doubted, though, felt, visualized much ahead of the real happening. This materialization of what was conjectured to the point doesn't demean him; he rather finds it satisfactory, a ground he can be proud of. Chaudhury (1996) rightly observes, "The story of *Chader Amabasya* is the story of the collapse of this young man. He collapses and gets whole." (p.151)

Thus the young teacher overcomes the negotiating principle of ego and reaches a point where morality and truth matter only, and to advance that stand, no threat can hinder the progress and nothing can dissuade him. Superego thus overcomes and wins. Aref, the weak minded poor teacher, has transcended from an ordinary position to a height where none around can be found or even imagined.

Conclusion

The novel *Chader Amabasya* is a depiction of a mental journey of the protagonist Aref Ali whose simple life gets shaken by an unexpected incident of the killing of a marginal woman. The very exposure makes him think and rethink his position and consequently reshape his moral being an external stand. In the process, the writer shows how the hero makes use of the defence mechanisms to shed off his anxieties and secure his life. But the mental journey that he goes through takes him gradually to a point where he is more mature and stronger. His ego as a compromising agent gives in and superego as a moral and idealistic agent wins. So the self in Aref comes out of the cocoon both physically and mentally to overcome the challenges that paralyze the higher attainments. Aref thus emerges as a man with a better understanding of the situations and surroundings and enjoys dominance even when he is supposed to be vulnerable. Thus he embodies the journey of a human personality from instinctually dominated to balancing to morally and ideally upright which automatically goes with the propositions of Freud and other psychologists who studied the domains of human personality and its transition towards the highest stage.

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