

The Transcendental Line Reverberating into Everlasting Infinity: A Psychoanalytical Study of Shoojit Sircar's *October*.

Payal Saha

Independent Research Scholar

Assistant Teacher in English of Chaitan Dears Junior High School. West Bengal School Education Department. District: North 24 Parganas.

Email: saha.payal79@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper aims at the exploration of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic view about the language of the unconscious, of the subdued and the hidden as highlighted in the literary or cultural text such as art or fiction as depicted in the movie *October* (2018), directed by Shoojit Sircar, written by Juhi Chaturvedi.

The movie opens with the humdrum monotonous routined existence of a five star hotel. The male protagonist Dan Walia and the female protagonist Shiuli Iyer work as interns at the same hotel. Shiuli leads a very disciplined life with whole hearted responsibility for her job in contrast to Dan who always bear some grudges against the various departments of the hotel. They are just a contradiction to each other. Everything was going on in a linear way when the conflict arises- on New Year's Eve Shiuli and her friends were having party on the third floor of the hotel, when Dan is nowhere to be found. Shiuli accidentally slips off from 30 feet (third floor of the hotel) and is hospitalized. Every members of the hotel staff visit Shiuli at the hospital expressing their shock and grief, but Dan gets seriously affected when his friends tell him that Shiuli's last words before her fall was "Where is Dan"?

A single line changes the phenomenal condition of Dan henceforth- exploring Freud's notion of the structure of the human psyche: the ego, the superego, and the id. Dan not only get seriously affected but also from then on visit hospital everyday for a long period of time, neglecting his duties and suffering financial crisis. The story runs through Freud's interesting area "id" – the area of desires which do not come to the fore in our consciousness- that is the unconscious. It might be that Dan always had a feeling for Shiuli. Here the last line before Shiuli's fall serves the vent to which Dan's repressed feelings started surfacing. Repression doesn't remain repressed throughout. The unconscious emerges in particular moments- "Freudian slips/ Parapraxes". The consequent actions from then on can be treated as Freudian slips/ Parapraxes as we find Dan's intense endeavor to make Shiuli regain her health, her consciousness at the cost of deviating from all his practical duties so that he can know the reason behind Dan's enquiry just before her fall. Dan recalls Shiuli's fondness for the Shiuli flower and immediately the flowers were placed in her ventilation so that her olfactory senses are stirred and her health improves. An idea sanctified even by the doctors. It highlights whether comatose people with brain injuries hear when we speak and the spiritual exercise which brings them back. Love reciprocates; even Shiuli at this comatose stage becomes violent in Dan's absence and is becalmed at his presence.

By the end of the movie, Shiuli suffers death but Dan evolved as a much matured man who knew that though they did not enjoy the worldly love like other folks, their feelings were anomalous and enriched through the unconscious psychology. Dan could not regain Shiuli; the person but got the

responsibility of taking care of Shiuli; the symbolic plant which she always loved in her childhood, from Shiuli's mother.

Key Words: Repression, Sanctified, Comatose, Anomalous.

Introduction

“I think therefore I am”

The famous French philosopher and Mathematician Rene Descartes (1596- 1650), known as the Father of Modern Philosophy declared this line in his 1637 masterpiece *Discourse on the Method*¹. Much of his philosophical thinking lead him to speculate the connection between the mind and the body which was built on the idea of radical doubt, in which nothing that is perceived or sensed is necessarily true. The only thing that remains true that is a mind or consciousness doing the doubting and believing its perceptions, hence the famous formulation “I think therefore I am” or in Latin the “cogito ergo sum”. Descartes also proposed that the mind and body were two separate and distinct entities but even the body was not so certain a thing as the mind because like everything else in the world, the body could only be sensed because there was a mind to sense it.

The psychoanalytic principles to the study of literature is introduced chiefly by Austrian Sigmund Freud. “ The notion of the ‘unconscious’ can be found in many thinkers prior to Freud, in some of the Romantics like Schlegel, in Schopenhauer, and in Nietzsche.² To view the unconscious as the ultimate source of human thought and behaviour shows a radical disruption of the main streams of Western thought which since Aristotle had held that man was essentially a rational being capable of making free choices in the spheres of intellection and morality. To say that the unconscious governs our behaviour is to problematize all of the notions of which philosophy, theology, and even literary criticism have conventionally rested” (*Literary Criticism from Plato to the Present* 233).

The paper depicts the movie *October* (2018) directed by Shoojit Sircar, written by Juhi Chaturvedi and its exploration of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic view that “ the language of the unconscious, of the repressed and the hidden as embodied in the literary or cultural text such as art or fiction” (*Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory* 64).

Being interns of the same hotel the male protagonist Dan Walia and the female protagonist Shiuli Iyer have different ways of looking at life. They are just a foil to each other. This contradictory nature is very well depicted in a child lost episode. Dan's carelessness is highlighted as he put the child named Rohit on a cupboard whereas Shiuli rescues the child by restoring him to his parents who were the guests of the hotel. Many a times Shiuli's sincerity was proved which was mocked by Dan. When their senior Mr. Asthana asks them the reason for not using Ammonia and Bleach together though they make an excellent cleaning agent, Shiuli answers with a blink of eye that both these substances together make “Chloromine which is dangerous” (*October* 5:04). Dan mocks “Itni intelligent hain to scientist ban jaati, Desh ka bhala hota” (*October* 5:09). It is indicated by Dan that being so intelligent Shiuli should have become a scientist and our country would have prospered. Dan's straightforward nature can be traced right at the beginning of the movie as he as a receptionist could not act according to the whims of the guest. He declares that “Rooms are subjected to availability” (*October* 6:10). When he understands that his argument is going on for a vain, he creates an atmosphere of embarrassment for the guest as he leaks out that before also as the guest had come to their hotel, Dan himself did the check in but the guest was with his previous wife.

The plot focuses on “the id, Freud's favourite territory, is the area of instincts, dreams, desires and all that that doesnot come to the fore in our consciousness. This is the unconscious” (*Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory* 65).“ The ego is the conscious mind, that which we work with, use and are most aware of. It mediates between the unconscious id and the super ego. It is the source of our decision-making, and our rational thought. The superego is what can be called our conscience. It is drawn from

social settings and cultural codes and influences the way the conscious works” (*Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory* 65). As already mentioned above then comes the id, that part of the psyche which has all those desires and dreams which cannot be expressed- even we are not aware of its existence. Dan’s inert feelings for Shiuli in his “id” or in his unconscious mind even before knowing the last line before her fall was quite clear when for the first time, he returned to his place from the hospital witnessing Shiuli’s fearful looks at the ventilation. Though he did not express directly but his conversation with his friend and his inability to eat his food is beautifully depicted. The scene was followed by a beautiful cinematography with the scene of a pressure cooker releasing sound. This can be compared to psychic landscape of Dan who tells his friend “Hawa khisar gayi thi aaj usko dekh kar” (*October* 24:32). It was like a vent to his repressed feelings like the cooker. He also observed in detail that there were 19 pipes twinning around Shiuli in the ventilation and blood was everywhere. In another episode it is seen that Dan decides to get back to the hospital first deciding not to go, at the middle of the road, hints at the emergence of the unconscious in the form of ‘Freudian slips’ or ‘Parapraxes’ “...whereby repressed material in the unconscious finds an outlet through such everyday phenomena as slips of the tongue, slips of the pen, or unintended actions” (*Beginning Theory* 99). Dan’s unconditional and selfless love for Shiuli in the form of his long time engagement in the hospital proves heavy on his career. His boss vents his resentment as Dan keep on neglecting his duties, does not remain present in the hotel, shifts his duties to his fellow interns who were also his friends. This also creates a sort of estrangement between him and his friends. In one instance they ask him the reason for him becoming so much affected by Shiuli’s fatal accident and he replies them with their reason for being so unaffected by her miserable condition inspite of being more bossom than Dan himself. Dan took care of every kith and kin going on in the hospital. On a particular day Dan notices urine output of Shiuli is greater than normal and immediately asks the nurse if more than required amount of water have been consumed by Shiuli or whether her kidney is functioning properly or not? This acute observation is more prominent as he rages against the sweeper of Shiuli’s ward that being a sweeper he has many duties, therefore it is not necessary for him to stare at the patients. Thus we find that Dan’s too much involvement in the hospital lead to his deterioration of his career.

On the other hand we find a character with too much negative thoughts in Shiuli’s uncle. He continuously demotivates her mother regarding Shiuli’s treatment at the hospital as wastage of time and money and also painful for everybody but Dan reacts in a vehement manner arguing Shiuli is at the age of 21 and no one else has the right to take decision for her life indicating that the treatment should be continued at the hospital. Many a times her uncle tells her mother if Shiuli cannot recognize anybody then the whole treatment of this ventilation is in futile to which Dan suggests that each of the members of Shiuli’s family can recognize Shiuli and that cause is sufficient enough for her family to decide that it should not be stopped. Later Dan also warns the nurse of Shiuli’s ward to not let her uncle sit beside the main operating system of the ventilation. As far as Dan could understand that her uncle was devoid of that kind of love and sympathy which as an uncle he should bear for his niece. Dan mocks at Shiuli in her ventilation that her uncle should be kept in a jungle.

But as in the words of Freud “...desire does not express itself easily because culture doesnot allow or facilitate it, and we need to pay attention to language and other forms of symbolic expression- gestures, sounds, facial expression, writing- to discover it. In this, Freud was exploring a link between language and the unconscious- a move that was to become the core of both the psychoanalytic practice and criticism” (*Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory* 64). Here this transcendental last line by Shiuli “Where is Dan? (*October* 18:01) before her fall serves that ‘gesture’ to which Dan’s submerged feelings started appearing. As already mentioned above Dan spends sleepless nights at the hospital, at the tea stall inside the campus of the hospital, even argues with the guard to visit Shiuli inspite of not having the night pass. Dan’s first reaction to this line “Where is Dan” uttered by Shiuli was a kind of Anagnorisis³ for him. He rebukes his friend that this should have been told to him much before. He not only visits the hospital immediately but also tells his friend “ Tum logo ne itni bari baat bataya nahin” (*October* 36:04). It was a moment of paradoxes for him; painful for her untimely journey towards lethe⁴, pleasurable for

discovering his significance in her life. The moment can be compared to Charles Dicken's, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times⁵...". This one question lead him with innumerable questions in his mind. He was asking himself the reason for Shiuli's enquiry on that particular day. He even enquired his friends whether ever before Shiuli asked about him on any occasions. His friends tried to persuade him that it was just a casual question by Shiuli as a friend, which, for Dan was a moment of eternal bliss.

Shiuli as described by her sister at the end of the movie that "Akka was a fighter" (*October* 1:41:11) could be realized much before as Doctor Ghosh who was treating Shiuli proclaims that "Consciousness on neurological level is defined by two conditions; patients must be awake or aware" (*October* 27:10) but she has not reached that level where it could be announced that her brain is dead. Doctor Ghosh even adds that "a soul is always conscious, she is trying" (*October* 1:10:37). When the first ray of hope flickered as Shiuli responded to the shiuli⁶ flowers kept by Dan in the ventilation, the Doctor stated, "coma patients react in this way with the smell. Olfactory senses at times respond to external stimuli" (*October* 1:00). The Doctor assured her mother it was obviously a positive sign, she is gradually gaining consciousness but nevertheless anybody can come to the conclusion.

An interesting episode occurs when Shiuli opened her eyelid for the first time at 5 AM on a particular day, a joyous moment was it as a sign of hope and fulfilment. Shiuli was praised by doctors who took an identifying session- Shiuli identifies her family members by moving her eyes towards left and right but not Dan, in front of everyone but does the same when Dan was alone. Dan blushes as a sign of reciprocity in love from Shiuli. Dan further tells Shiuli not to recognize him the next day in front of everybody, Dan was overjoyed. In their world of love they were enjoying a game of hide and seek. Their emotions bloomed to that extent which surpassed the tiresome love stories of normal people- their's was a paragon of beauty and eternity. In spite of being in the hospital, Dan does not hesitate to bring a fresh look to Shiuli. Though it seems an exaggeration to call the worker of a saloon in the I.C.U, yet the emotions involved from Dan's part to make his beloved look more beautiful through trimming her eyebrows and with a hair cut is marvelous. It reminds us of Shakespeare's "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?/ Thou art more lovely and more temperate⁷".

Along with this, the movie also paves its way for moments of laughter, wit and humour. Dan tells everybody to raise their legs in the waiting room of the hospital while the sweeper was sweeping. A comical conversation took place between Dan and the receptionist lady of the hospital when Dan was trying to enquire of the doctor's availability in the hospital through mnemonics and initials of the days of the week like TTS (Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday) MWS (Monday, Wednesday, Saturday). It gives the audience a release from the incessant pain surrounding Shiuli's circumstances. Dan sits on the wheelchair and experiences the realistic condition. The scene is comic but bears a multiple layers of significance.

The story deviates a bit as we find Dan's mother for the first time in the movie. Dan's mother tries to persuade his son to focus and concentrate in his work. Dan's mother also had a short conversation with Shiuli's mother where she expressed her grief regarding Dan's too much engagement in the hospital which distracted him from the practical duties of life. At the same time she also praised the fighter spirit of Shiuli's mother. Shiuli's mother now realized that they had been a little selfish regarding Dan's constant and continual journey with them. She admits that Dan had been like a pillar for them. She asks Dan to get back to his work. Dan now goes to Kullu for the job under the recommendation of Mr. Asthana, Dan's former boss of the hotel. Dan does all his allotted duties in a responsible manner and becomes an efficient worker of the hotel and proves himself to be a great trainee. However at his back he could always sensualize that "time's winged chariot hurrying near"⁸-he could not overcome with his feelings for Shiuli and her thought preoccupied him all the time. "Freud postulated that we bear a form of 'otherness' within ourselves: we cannot claim fully to comprehend even ourselves, why we act as we do... Even when we think we are acting from a given motive, we may be deluding ourselves; and much of our thought and action is not freely determined by us but driven by unconscious forces which we can barely fathom"(Literary Criticism from Plato to the Present 234). Dan's 'otherness' was befilled with Shiuli. Similarly Shiuli becomes violent in Dan's absence. Shiuli's mother informs Dan regarding Shiuli's

several seizure attacks followed by cardiac problems and immediately Dan returns. Dan's presence becalms Shiuli. Dan promises Shiuli not to leave her further and repents his absence from her for a long time.

Shiuli's family celebrates with happiness when she is discharged from the hospital. Shiuli's mother and her siblings and Dan too become very excited regarding Shiuli's return and start preparing for her grand welcome in her house. Shiuli's room is decorated with photographs of her childhood till then. A similar incident also happened before when Shiuli was shifted from ventilation to normal ward with all photographs stuck in front of her bed including Dan's. We can detect the irony lying behind Dan's future plan of making the inclined plane with cement bond which would easily make Shiuli sitting on her wheelchair move inside the house. Shiuli did not give them that much time to transform the inclined plane from wooden to cement bond. Shiuli's mother also narrated later after her death that Shiuli used to wait for the month of October because of these flowers named Shiuli. These flowers are short lived and so is Shiuli. The last time when Dan took Shiuli out to make her appreciate the beauty outside Dan asked her the reason for which she enquired of Dan just before her fall, Shiuli in a very emotional manner cries out "Dan Dan" (*October* 1:39:25). He got his answer, infact the cause for such waiting got applauded last. These two words were like a whole world for Dan. Here we find that the transcendental, ethereal line "Where is Dan?" reverberating throughout the movie finally transcends into eternity with the death of Shiuli.

Shiuli has very short, precise and complete dialogue in the movie. Even in these short speeches the name Dan remains prominent with greetings like "Hi Dan" (*October* 3:49), a sense of acknowledgement in "Thanks Dan" (*October* 16:21), and the final transcendental "Where is Dan?" (*October* 18:01). These suggest Dan's indispensable significance in her life throughout and in. The last line before Shiuli's fall and the last words before her death meets, Dan occupying the pivotal position- the merge of unconscious with conscious.

Just before hearing the news of Shiuli's death by a phone call made by her mother Dan dreams of Shiuli in her wheelchair in front of the door of his room which was opened. "The disguised fantasies that are evident to consciousness are called by Freud the 'manifest' content of a dream or work of literature; the unconscious wishes that find a semblance of satisfaction in this distorted form he calls the 'latent' content" (*A Glossary of Literary Terms* 249). In Chapter 3 "The Dream is the Fulfilment of a Wish", of Freud's groundbreaking masterpiece *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud defined dream as "a psychic phenomenon of full value and indeed the fulfillment of a wish; it takes its place in the concatenation of the waking psychic actions which are intelligible to us, and it has been built up by a highly complicated intellectual activity" (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 118). We can imagine the complicated intellectual activity undergoing through Dan's psyche. Freud further adds "... dreams are found which can be understood only as fulfilments of wishes and which present their contents without concealment. In most cases these are short and simple dreams, which stand in pleasant contrast to the confused and teeming dream compositions..." (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 122). Shiuli's sister informs Dan that on that particular night around 2 AM, Shiuli suffered seizure, her lungs collapsed, within half an hour she breathed her last breath. Later Dan became successful in his career as a chef which he always longed for; after having attained six months diploma. The movie ends with Dan carrying away Shiuli in a small truck, no; not the person but the emblematic plant which she always loved since her childhood. A token of love, never to be forgotten by Shiuli's mother for Shiuli's reverence and homage to the most deserving person, Dan.

Notes:

1. *Discourse on the Method: Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and seeking Truth in the Sciences* is a philosophical and autobiographical treatise published by Rene Descartes in 1637. It is best known as the source of famous quotation, "I think therefore I am" or "I am thinking therefore I exist" which occurs in Part 4 of the work.
2. Schlegel: Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel was a German poet, literary critic and philosopher. With his older brother, August Wilhelm Schlegel, he was one of the main figures of Romanticism.
Schopenhauer: Arthur Schopenhauer was a German philosopher. He is best known for his 1818 work *The World as Will and Representation*.
Nietzsche: Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was a German philosopher, prose poet, cultural critic whose work had a profound influence on contemporary philosophy.
3. Anagnorisis: The point in the plot especially of a tragedy at which the protagonist recognizes his or her or some other character's true identity or discovers the true nature of his or her own situation. In the movie Dan recognizes his importance in Shiuli's life through her last line before her fall.
4. Lethe: It is actually a river in Hades whose water causes drinkers to forget their past oblivion, forgetfulness. Lethe in this case refers to Shiuli's journey towards death.
5. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...": It is the opening sentence of *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) by Charles Dickens. Dan's emotional state has been compared to this contradictory line after his discovery.
6. Shiuli flowers: Shiuli flowers are commonly known as Night blooming jasmine, native to South Asia and South East Asia. These flowers are very short lived due to which this tree is also called tree of sadness or sorrow. Flowers are used here as a metaphor for the short lived nature of the protagonist Shiuli's life.
7. "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?": This is Sonnet no. 18 by William Shakespeare. Shakespeare used this sonnet to praise his beloved's beauty and describe all the ways in which their beauty of love is preferable to a summer's day. Here it has been referred as Dan does his best to make his beloved not only look more beautiful but also more beautiful to be with.
8. "Time's winged chariot hurrying near": This line is from the poem "To His Coy Mistress" by the metaphysical poet Andrew Marvell. The expression with reference to the movie suggests the relentless and inevitable march of time which will devour Shiuli and her life.

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