

Interpreting Dream in *Zorami*: A Freudian Reading

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Abstract:

The scientific exploration of the human thought process has become crucial in the present era, where the intellect is brimming with distractions, gratifications, and objectifications. The study of the human thought process scrutinises the intricate cord of conscious or alert, and unconscious or innate processes to unveil the intricacies of human behaviour. Sigmund Freud's dream theory offers profound insights into the workings of the human mind in both the sleep and waking states. The theory also decodes the experiences, memories and sexual connotations carried by the observed individual. His oeuvre on dreams provides imperative observations that continue to mentor apprehensions in daily life. Such psychoanalytic literary approach provides a compelling framework for interpreting a human being's choices and behavioural orientations. This paper studies the mental state of an individual, whose childhood was marked by physical humiliation and psychological trauma, through the dream analysis framework. Malasawmi Jacob's *Zorami: A Redemption Song* offers a promising terrain for an interdisciplinary analysis of literary, psychological, and sociological dimensions, as it embodies the broader socio-historical milieu of the protagonist's time.

Keywords: North East Indian literature, Conscious-Unconscious, Dream theory, Psychoanalytic criticism, Trauma and memory, Narrative Psychology.

A firmly ingrained outlook to consider the Northeast region of India and its literature as 'conflicted' is an act of reductive labelling and discursive erasure. Such categorisation invalidates the cultural memory of its inhabitants without probing into the historical and structural causes behind any conflict. Historically, the British regime has divided the region haphazardly just for administrative purposes. Also, the colonial regimes considered this area inutile to administer as per the prevailing diversity, whether in terms of lineage, ethnicity, dialects, geography, tribal faith or values. The insensitivity of colonial agents towards indigenous ecological integrity caused sustained plundering of tea and timber from Northeast India. Later, with the withdrawal of colonial powers, the government sought to weld the deprived Northeast region with the mainland. However, indifferent territorial demarcations conducted by colonial bureaucrats hindered the very process of integration. The 1947 partition and the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War paved the way for a wide range of alarming issues to enter the region's core, which continue to shape the region's socio-political realities. Sanjoy Hazarika noted;

Tens of thousands of persons were uprooted and moved, within a radius of about twenty to fifty kilometres, to a settlement. The old buildings and homes were either torched, demolished or left to rot. The destruction of this symbiotic relationship between the land and its people has predictable consequences ... sharpening the outcry against Indian control. (113- 14)

Therefore, the fiction from North East India is an exceptional fusion of political and personal aspects of life, where collective dissent against establishment. It offers a layered depiction of overlapping struggles of the inhabitants of this territory. This blend of 'political and personal' produces an authentic and pragmatic influence on its literary canon, which mainly explores the varied nuances of resistance and its effects on emotional health and the psychic healing of society.

Malasawmi Jacob's novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song* traces the coming-of-age journey of a Mizo girl from childhood to adulthood, paralleled by the journey of Mizo society from trauma to healing.

The novel details various alarming events that flashed in Northeast India, which also might have gone unrecorded in any official archives. In this context, the narrator states, “The state was under the Armed Forces Special Power Act since it was declared a disturbed area. The Indian army could do so as they pleased; no one could stop them as they had the sanction of the highest authority in the country” (Jacob 117). This fictional text exhibits the harshest side of AFSPA because this law ultimately assists the deployed security personnel with complete impunity to detain, summon and shoot any person without bearing any accountability against it. Moreover, being safeguarded by this law’s shield, the vicious act of raping a woman becomes convenient to penalise those who dare to raise their voice against hegemonic powers. It is a traumatic experience for the entire family and circle, but the victim faces an extreme level of physical and emotional trauma. The family members and even the females of the household fail the victim, who looks to the family for emotional support during such a difficult time. Zorami’s mother informs her to stay tight-lipped about the incident; she also envisions this misfortune as ‘shameful’ and unworthy to discuss. The crisis here is that the ‘silencing agent’ and the ‘silenced subject’ both are in the category of the victim and are traumatised. In her work *Trauma Culture*, Kaplan recounts Freud's understanding of collective pain or collective consciousness, “... as Freud pointed out long ago, how one reacts to traumatic events depends on one's individual psychic history, on memories inevitably...”.

The Interpretation of Dreams primarily mentions Freud’s own dream regarding Irma’s illness. The famous dream “Irma’s Injection” unfolds at a gathering where Freud blames Irma for her passive response towards his treatment. When Irma reports physical distress, Freud conducts a clinical examination of her throat and diagnoses an acute dysfunction. The dream portrays that

such severe symptoms are appearing due to Dr M. Otto's usage of unsterile injection. The chemical reaction of the impure injection is causing pain and delayed recovery for Irma. And, this is how the responsibility for Irma's declining health no longer rests on Freud and subtly shifted to the carelessness of someone else. So, this medically detailed dream "fulfils several wishes... that I am not to blame for the pain which Irma still suffers, and that Otto is to blame for it" (Freud). He purposefully mentions his own dream which he had on July 1895, for three simple reasons:

First, it is his own dream, and it allows him complete access to associations. Thus, reliable interpretation and methodological transparency are possible.

Second, the dream appears disturbing and unpleasant, and thus, it is appropriate to establish that even anxiety-producing dreams are wish-fulfillments and not random or meaningless.

Third, Freud can use Irma's injection as a blueprint to explain the workings of a dream. How dreams hide, impersonate or relive their real meaning has been demonstrated by Freud through his own dream sequence.

His dream also provides possible organic and psychogenic causes for his patient's sufferings. The primary purpose of the dream was to protect Freud's ego; thus, it diverts attention away from the failed talk-based therapeutic approach and displaces guilt onto bodily processed or organic cause beyond his control. So, this illustrative and personal account of Freud becomes a model to prove that a single explanation is insufficient to fulfil the wish; instead, the human psyche offers multiple symbolic solutions, as healing requires repetition. The underlying wish fulfilled here is "I am not to blame for the pain which Irma still suffers.", because repressed desires are usually fulfilled through the dream process. Freud achieved self-exoneration as everything else, like Otto's injection, infected throat and others, is to blame.

This study predominantly observes two sets of dream sequences of Zorami, focusing the concordance between the symbolic form and psychic reality. For instance, in one of her dreams, she projects a snake following her, coiling around her, and eventually “undoing” her, indicating her deep-seated fear, vulnerability and a compromised inner being. In another dream, she envisions a distant brook, that compels her to bathe in it, but unfortunately, she discovers it filled with muddy water and it reflects her deep disillusionment and frayed consciousness. In another dream, however, she indulges in bathing in the abundance of clean brook water, which serves as a metaphor for spiritual rebirth and restoration of inner balance. This paper explores a series of dream sequences as an assemblage of the intricacies of Zorami’s past, her repressed conjugal desires, and the formative influence of newly acquired religious belief. According to Monte’s observations in his work *Beneath the Mask* (1977), “Psychoanalytic theories assume the existence of unconscious internal states that motivate an individual's overt actions”. Freud’s Dream Theory provides a similar conceptual schema to review humans’ subconscious motivations and past experiences that shape cognitive progression. Citing Burdach, Freud asserts,

The waking life, with its trials and joys, its pleasures and pains, is never repeated; on the contrary, the dream aims at relieving us of these. Even when our whole mind is filled with one subject, when our hearts are rent by bitter grief, or when some task has been taxing our mental capacity to the utmost, the dream either gives us something entirely alien, or selects for its combinations, only a few elements of reality; or it merely enters into the key of our mood, and symbolises reality. (Freud)

The very initial segment of the novel introduces the readers to a happy newly married couple, Zorami and Lalliansanga, and then a very contrasting image of Zorami in the chapter “Looking Back”, where she was sitting alone, totally absorbed in a trance-like state. She was

expecting a phone call from her husband to wish her Happy Birthday, who was on a Bank-sponsored trip at that instant and to add to the apprehensive thoughts of Zorami, his young and charming colleague, Julie accompanied him on the trip. Malasawmi Jacob employs the technique of Stream of Consciousness, as a series of past incidents starts to surface in Zorami's mind, one after another. She abruptly starts tracking her childhood, marriage and the present status of her relationship with her husband, Sanga. Later, the plot acquaints readers with a 13-year-old innocent girl who has been sexually molested by an army officer, and she is none other than Zorami. Her sense of guilt and shame after this assault drives her every decision in life. Her attempt to charge Sanga for the act of infidelity is analogous to that of Sigmund Freud's dream sequence to deflect responsibility for Irma's condition onto another doctor. Zorami employs deflection, similar to Freud, as a coping strategy to manage the trauma of sexual assault, an experience she perceives as deeply stigmatising her sense of self. To seek semblance, self-preservation and emotional relief, Zorami accuses her husband of a suspected affair with Julie and therefore undertakes an act of distancing herself from the pain and blemish of the past about being raped. This act of disassociation is very similar to Freud's act of charging another doctor in his dream for the declining health of one of his patients, Irma, which is widely known as Irma's Injection.

Malasawmi outlines the challenges in the life of a rape survivor, "She runs home panting and crying. [...] She gets violently sick. Her mother asks but she can't, won't tell. Such a thing is not for telling. She keeps vomiting throughout the night" (Jacob 37). The torture on Zorami's body manifests the torture inflicted on the Mizo people and their land. Over time, scars on the body may heal, but psychological scars are the toughest to heal. Her pain is the adumbration of psychological torture that people experienced collectively during the conflict. When the conflict was at its peak and curfew was imposed, an innocent teenage girl went to fetch water from a well and came home

with destiny changed because, on her way, an army officer raped her brutally, “She was lacerated, ripped apart. A fiend in the human body did it in revolting lust” (Jacob 197). Her family members took her to the hospital. Urine and blood soaked her clothes. There, a nurse stitches her up without anaesthesia. “How she screamed! The needle pierced her again and again. Stinging pain upon pain” (Jacob 198). Malasawmi invites readers to engage all their sensory organs, to smell, see, hear, and feel, and then try to familiarize with the uneasiness of a teenage girl. Following this event, Zorami has the same dream sequence repeatedly throughout her life, which reflects the wounded psyche of the survivor and the rising symptoms of PTSD in a victim;

“And the dirt, the dirt! How she wanted to wash herself clean, to be immersed in a flowing river! But there was no such river within reach. All she could get was a few mugs of water for bath. She loathed her defiled body like a rotten carcass. In sleep, she dreamt of a brook running down a hill. But when she reached there, she saw only muddy, filthy water” (Jacob 145).

New learnt Christianity might have impacted the subconscious of Zorami and her dream content, in which she kept for a river. This dream resembles the biblical imagery of water as a purification agent, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (*The Holy Bible*, New International Version, John 4.13–14). Her dream of bathing The river represents a yearning for purification and rebirth, a subconscious plea for healing from her traumatic past. She visualises a clear, inviting river, sparkling under the moonlight. She feels an irresistible urge to bathe in its waters, believing that doing so would cleanse her pain and guilt. This dream symbolises hope of redemption in her otherwise dark world. After bearing such deep

scars on her body and mind, she is now unable to emerge from this trauma and faces psychosomatic pangs from time to time.

Various instances of a snake's image appear in Zorami's dreams. "At last, as daylight peeped in through the ventilators, she fell into a fitful doze. And dreamed. An enormous black snake is coming after her. She wants to run away, to escape, but is held immobile. The snake crawls forward and catches her. She woke up panting, covered in sweat" (Jacob 160). In Christian mythology, snakes occupy a crucial place, often symbolising multiple and layered meanings. They are linked with Satan and the fall of man, yet can also carry spiritual significance. In Zorami's recurring dreams, snakes either follow her or coil around her, symbolising deep subconscious fears and unresolved conflicts. According to Sigmund Freud's Dream Theory, these dreams can be analysed through their *manifest* content (the literal events within the dream) and *latent* content (the hidden psychological meaning).

Freud's theoretical implementation suggests that the manifest content of Zorami's dreams about her being pursued by a snake or finding it coiled around her, or the act of the "black snake undid her", is parallel to the deep-seated latent content of guilt and fear stemming from her traumatic past and her present struggle in her marriage (Jacob 13). The snake in her dreams symbolised her internal battle, fear, and emotional vulnerability, which drives a wedge between Zorami and her husband. This resistance to snakes in her dreams mirrors the struggle within her mind, causing her to withdraw from her relationship. Freud would interpret this as the latent content surfacing through the manifest dream imagery, indicating her longing for a more compassionate relationship with her husband, which she has felt missing for years. This image of a snake sometimes occurs to her in the waking state too due to the loneliness and whereas it also symbolise her temptation for more emotional closeness with Sanga. Freud's theory suggests that

dreams often fulfil repressed and latent wishes in order to resolve inner conflicts. Freud states, “The unconscious is the true psychological reality; in its innermost nature it is just as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world.” (Petkov)

In Zorami’s case, the ‘snake hole’, once a symbol of fear and danger, becomes a portal to spiritual awakening and personal growth. Her dream signifies the biblical prophecy, “The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den.” (King James Bible, Isaiah 11:8) As in her dream she fall into a snake hole which stands for her entry into a phase where her past trauma and fears no longer harm her. Now, she is embracing a path of spiritual enlightenment, signifying her transition from trauma to healing. This interpretation not only underscores the transformative power of her spiritual beliefs but also illustrates Freud's concept that the latent content of a dream can reveal significant truths about an individual's subconscious mind and their journey towards emotional and spiritual fulfilment.

In the last chapters of the novel, readers observe that Zorami does not react as a typical passive victim and in fact, an intellectually and emotionally independent woman who once faced a lot in the form of molestation during her teenage and then a cold relationship with her husband, finally achieves salvation through divine epiphany in form of a dream sequence which helped her to get rid of everything negative in her life such as tiring psychological fits which she used to face whenever she is alone, her confusion for her husband's fidelity and her death drive. For other people it was the new year and a time for celebration. People, were singing songs, wishing and hoping for the year to come. However, Zorami was unable to find anything optimistic, and suicidal tendencies started arising in her mind. Her thoughts became bewildered, and she started finding ways to finish her life with a knife, poison or a rope. “Lay down and die... lay down and die... lay down and die...” she repeated. “It’s not happy, and it’s not New Year yet,” Zorami thought. “It’s

the close of the beginning. A dying day, a dying year, and a dying heart. A useless, fruitless, meaningless life sealed in darkness” (Jacob 243). Suddenly, she collapsed and started crying due to the extreme negativity. With so much effort, she reaches the bed and ‘falls into a snake hole’. But this time for a total transformation. In her dream, she felt a spiritual reconnection, which motivates her body and institution to regain the spark and light she once lost her life. This divine epiphany overturns her life towards redemption and reconciliation. She dreamt of a man brutalised by a soldier. He is dead now, and his sister is moaning about his death near the tomb. She has been crying for the last four days. Then, a man asks her to open the tomb, and she finds her brother alive. The woman, the dead man’s sister, protests, “Lord, the stench will be terrible by now. He’s been dead for four days” (Jacob 249). Then the man in glory replied, “Didn’t I tell you you’ll see God’s glory if you believe?” (Jacob 249) This dream, the statement, or the Biblical imagery of Lazarus of Bethany becomes life-changing in Zorami’s life. The biblical imagery of Lazarus of Bethany becomes life-changing in Zorami’s life (*The Holy Bible*, King James Version, John 11). It feels like she has finally reached the river for which she has a lifelong urge. She is bathing in an abundance of water under a waterfall. With tears of relief and hope, Zorami enters the river, feeling the cool water embrace her. She closes her eyes and lets the current wash over her, carrying away her pain, her fears, and her past. In the end, Zorami’s psychic temperament of libidinal urge or desire for a more compassionate relationship with her husband shifts towards spirituality, which suggests Freud’s another idea of sublimation. According to Sigmund Freud’s latent and manifest dream theory, the manifest content of her dream falling into the ‘snake hole’ might initially seem alarming. However, the latent content reveals a more profound psychological and spiritual significance. Zorami’s fall symbolises her immersion into a spiritual realm, representing a profound transformation and a journey towards healing and renewal.

However, the dream exemplifies Sigmund Freud's concept of *Wunscherfüllung*, or wish-fulfilment. Freud noted that "Every dream represents the fulfilment of a wish". Dreams do not interrupt a person's restorative sleep but deliver satisfaction to the dreamer. Freud calls dreams the guardian of the sleep. He states:

The dream is thus the guardian of sleep. This attempt can be more or less completely successful; it can also fail in which case the sleeper wakes up, apparently aroused by the dream itself. So, too, there are occasions when that excellent fellow, the night watchman, whose business it is to guard the little township's sleep, has no alternative but to sound the alarm and rouse the sleeping townspeople. (Freud 14)

Zorami's recurring dream of an abundant, cleansing river epitomises Sigmund Freud's concept of wish fulfilment, which occurs when the *ego* and *superego* get momentarily relaxed during sleep. Freud argues that dreams are actually 'wish-fulfilling in disguise' because censorship domains- the *ego* and *superego* are weakened, and the repressed wish (*Id*) seeks expression, therefore the process of "Condensation", and "Displacement" happens. Zorami's subconscious desire to reject Sanga's fidelity represents her *id*, the primal part of psyche which seeks immediate profound gratification. Meanwhile, her decision to heed her best friend Kimi's advice to ignore the rumours about her husband's affair reflects her *ego*, as she strives to balance her desires with reality. Ultimately, her reunion with her husband symbolises her *superego*, the moral compass guiding her to resolve and reconcile inner conflict and external pressures. She interprets Sanga's return on her birthday, bearing a gift and wishing for her happiness, as a profound affirmation of his love.

Two major dream sequences of Zorami, featuring recurring images of a snake and a brook, can be interpreted through the Freudian mechanism of "Condensation" (*Verdichtung*), which means that one image carries multiple meanings simultaneously or across repeated dreams. In

chapter VI, “The Dream-Work”, Freud states, “The dream-work makes use of condensation, in that a single element of the manifest dream represents several latent dream-thoughts”.

For instance, the image of a snake sometimes seems to “undid” Zorami, which parallels her physical yearning towards Sanga; sometimes it appears coiled around, which shows her traumatic memory of being raped, and then she dreamt of falling into a snake hole and came back transformed, which reflects her connection to the missionary teachings and desire for spiritual intervention. So, Zorami’s “dream-work achieves a compression or condensation of the material” as her multiple psychic experiences, like sexual desire, trauma, fear, vulnerability and spiritual rebirth, condensed into one symbol that is the snake (Freud). Similarly, the brook appears in varied forms, like the dream image of muddy brooks, which shows her idea of being contaminated due to rape or her guilt and trauma; whereas the inaccessible and scarcity of water in the brook hints at her emotional emptiness and disturbed marital happiness. Moreover, the dream of the river, teeming with life and purity, signifies her deep yearning to cleanse herself of the trauma of rape and the stigma of being “damaged.” At the same time, it represents her desire to absolve Sanga of any guilt associated with the alleged affair with Julie, allowing both of them to move forward without any burden of past accusations. In the intricate text, Freud explained the process of Displacement along with Condensation, where intense feelings are shifted to a safer or trivial object. The psychic turbulence of Zorami, stemming from various life experiences, has hence transferred into a dream about a snake and thereby initiated a defensive process. Freud asserted that, “Dreams are not meaningless; they are not absurd; they do not imply that one part of our mental apparatus is asleep while another part has begun to wake” (Saim).

As she wakes up, she notices the New Year celebration at midnight, the firecrackers in the sky, and people singing and wishing each other a Happy New Year. “A happy new year is here. Let

us sing a joyful song: Leaving all the past behind, Eyes on future, let's move on" (Jacob 251). And finally, her husband's return with a gift, marked a lovely reunion. She feels complete and free from all the guilt and fears she had in her mind. The novel ends with a song that hints at hope for peace in life in both the Zorami and Mizo communities. This song again resembles *Songs of Solomon 2:12* (New King James Bible), "The flowers appear on the earth; The time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land" (Jacob 252). Lastly, Malasawmi Jacob, through Zorami, invokes blessings for her land and people to flourish and prosper. Zorami's blessings for her land bypass classical "Secondary Revision", a concept suggested by Freud in which later operations of dream-work provide narrative logic and sequence for a disjointed dream. She attains psychic resolution without conscious narration, charting a trajectory in which her ego chooses action over narration. Her act of ethical orientation and communal blessing translates that successful wish-fulfilment may render textual representation unnecessary.

The present study identifies three principal findings;

First is that the versatile yet recurring dreams of Zorami emphasise Freud's assertion that confining dreams to a specific meaning is not possible because they absorb multiple culturally internalised symbols. Dreams function as a form of cultural meditation by disguising and then fulfilling hidden desires. In particular, the appearance of Christian imagery in Zorami's dreams. It confirms that dreams draw content from the dreamer's immediate psychological world and physical reality.

Another key observation is that the repetition of dream images in Zorami suggests that dreams never rely on fixed symbols, and undergo reconfiguration multiple times by revisiting traumatic material repeatedly. The process continues until it becomes symbolically tolerable. This progressive dream-work is explained through displacement and condensation by Freud.

A further finding indicates that Zorami's manifestation of redemption is apparently based on her husband's fidelity, at the same time, "latent dream-thoughts" (*Die latenten Traumgedanken* remains) are rooted in her unresolved guilt that emerged from sexual harassment she faced in her childhood. It demonstrates Freud's conception of symbols as unconscious substitutes, which surface in the manifest dream while actually conveying a latent meaning.

This study is strictly grounded in Freud's early dream theories discussed in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, but it warmly invites future research to analyse whether the redirection of sexual trauma into spiritual imagery in Zorami's dreams corresponds to Freud's later concept of "Sublimation" as given in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). Additionally, the Freudian lens of "Thanatos", introduced in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) can be helpful to analyse Zorami's death wish and psychic withdrawal. This approach could provide a systematic discussion about the tension between trauma, self-annihilation, and psychic renewal, or symbolic regeneration.

Conclusion:

Analysing Zorami's dreams through the lens of Sigmund Freud's Dream Theory displays psychic sediment and a profound articulation of her journey towards identity reconstruction and mental reorientation. Dreams' *latent* and *manifest* content, as well as the mechanisms of condensation and displacement, reveal how the unconscious redefines existential desires and moral dilemmas into vivid dream imagery. These dreams simply reveal idiosyncratic traits of Zorami's personality and her capacity for psychological resilience and spiritual integration. Unlike a subject who stays confined and caged in neurosis, her evolving dreams, moving from trauma, defilement to renewal and cleansing, indicate an instinctual urge for healing and coherence. Freud's framework thus not only decodes *latent* and *manifest* content but also exposes an individual's

psychological elasticity, where the individual internalises, interprets, and transforms emotional tribulations into a platform for personal awakening.

Notes:

1. This paper cites all quotations from *The Interpretation of Dreams* using the public-domain English translation available via Project Gutenberg.
2. This paper references biblical passages from *The Holy Bible, New International Version* and *The Holy Bible, King James Version*.

Disclaimer:

Limited and careful use of AI as an assistive technology has been made for grammar checking, stylistic refinement, and preliminary idea organisation. No AI tool has been used to generate original arguments, scholarly interpretations or findings.

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