

The Interdependence of Magical Realism and Politics in *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*

Supriya J

Assistant Professor, BMS College of Commerce and Management, Bengaluru

Abstract—One of the captivating style of today which is incorporated in the narratives is magical realism. This paper has dissected and analyzed the magical realism elements in the novel *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* by Shehan Karunatilaka, using the magical realism theory by Wendy B. Faris. The paper offers a deep insight into the Sri Lankan civil war of the 1980s, which had a profound impact on the civilians. Complex themes like war, violence and death, is addressed here and made it easier for the understanding of the readers. Instances are provided from the story, to show the interdependence of magical realism and the political aspects within the narrative. This paper argues that the fantastical world, enriched with mythological characters and fantastical elements, is preferable to the real world dominated by the politics, where the powerful engage in inhumane activities.

Index Terms—Civil war, Death, Magical realism, Politics, Sri Lanka

I. INTRODUCTION

All around the globe, there is a surge in the number of people both writing and reading novels, leading to the rise in popularity of various novel genres. One of the most intriguing and captivating genres is magical realism, also known as magic realism. This genre seamlessly integrates the fantasy world with reality, allowing readers to embrace the magical and extraordinary elements in their everyday lives without feeling perplexed. An outstanding example of this genre is the novel, *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*, by Shehan Karunatilaka, which transports readers into a world where fantastical elements coexist with the real world, creating a truly immersive and enchanting reading experience.

II. MAGICAL REALISM THEORY BY WENDY B. FARIS

Wendy B. Faris in her book, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narratives* has said that magical realism is the blending of the ordinary and the extraordinary, where extraordinary elements appear to develop naturally within the ordinary world. This mix blurs the line between realistic and fantastical worlds. (Faris, 2004, p.1).

Faris is attempting to conclude that the magical realism narrative technique aims to highlight traditions that have been overlooked due to realist dominance. These traditions are deemed unimportant and are then portrayed in urban settings. The presence of magical elements later disrupts things initially regarded as real. Magical realism portrays the marginalized world in modernism through magical occurrences and illustrates how modern people seek to free themselves from magic using the concept of realism. Defocalization has become a prominent sign of postmodernism's disapproval of modernism. It shows two different perspectives, rather than just one perspective like modernism did. The presence of spirits which was denied in modernism can be spotted here. (Faris, 2004, p.2).

According to Wendy B. Faris (2004), magical realism has five main elements explained in her book *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*. The elements consist of irreducible elements, the phenomenal world, unsettling doubts, merging realms, and disruption of time, space, and identity. The magical realism aspect in *The Seven Moons of Maali*

Almeida includes all these elements, which help the readers to show more involvement in the novel. The author has utilized these elements in a captivating manner, including mythical characters, realistic settings with political agendas and the two realms.

III. DISCUSSION

The elements of magical realism discussed in Wendy B. Faris 's theory are examined in relation to the novel *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* by Shehan Karunatilaka.

Irreducible element :

The setting of the story is the Sri Lankan Civil War, a time when numerous innocent lives were lost. The conflicts between the government, JVP anarchists, Tiger separatists, and the Indian Peace Keepers were the primary drivers of the events in the narrative. The author employs dark humour and satire to condemn the political and

social dynamics of that era. The novel contains numerous essential components. It commences with the protagonist, Maali Almeida, awakening in the afterlife and encountering a place with counters resembling those found in government offices. His acknowledgment of the bureaucratic celestial office allows others to perceive it as authentic. The setting of the novel challenges rationality. He is given seven moons, symbolizing seven days, during which he can interact with the living world using various techniques he must master. Following his unfinished interactions, his engagements are akin to a soul interacting with humans. This is portrayed as a casual event but is not easily explicable. When he begins to investigate the cause of his death and those responsible for it, he encounters numerous spirits, who are also mythical creatures and monsters. He encounters Mahakali, who appears as a beast with the head of a bear and the body of a large woman. Mahakali's hair consists of serpents and its eyes are completely black. Maali feels a chill every time Mahakali growls. The reference is made with the mythological character of a fierce goddess, Mahakali. Additionally, there are characters who takes on the role of the grim reaper and a fairy godmother to Maali in the story.

Furthermore, Maali encounters a few spirits like Sena, who behaves like a politician

by giving Maali hope and attempting to win him over to his side. Sena is a revolutionary spirit who has a strong desire for justice. Just because he has a strong desire for justice, does not mean that he is a spirit with no negativity, he tries to get everyone on his side for his own revenge. This selfish spirit also symbolizes the selfish people of the real world, who are ready to commit any kind of crime for their selfish self. He also embodies the ongoing struggle for justice in Sri Lanka during the civil war. This makes the readers connect to the characters. There are also other revolutionary spirits who are in contact with Sena, struggling for the same reason as his.

The character of Dr. Rancee is somewhat like a motherly figure to Maali and many in the afterlife, who guides them to choose the right path which leads them towards 'The Light'. She is a murdered protester who guides people in the afterlife and helps them solve their complexities by giving them clarity about certain important things. Even though she was murdered, she breaks the stereotype of spirits trying to avenge their deaths and calmly moves on to help the other spirits. This shows the difference between the mentality of spirits. The Crow Uncle, who tries to fill the communication gap between the dead and the ones alive, is also a character who is unacceptable by society. He represents the

ongoing theme of society, that is corruption and power. The mythical magical character, the talking leopard, portrays the common theme in magical realism, which is the blending of myth and reality. It also helps Maali face situations where he gets trapped in confusion. Several ghosts and spirits are present in the story, who lost their lives during the conflict and are stuck in the afterlife trying to find justice for themselves. The characters of spirits and mythical creatures present in the novel are not present in the real world. Here they are depicted in a casual tone to portray that it is something normal, which makes the reader get more involved in the story because of the interesting way it is built. The thin line between the living and the dead is blurred here.

The spirits have rules and regulations that they must abide by if they want to be in a safe position and see 'The Light'. They constantly try to communicate with the living to share information about their death or to help them. In the Crow Man's Cave, the Crow Uncle assists the spirits in exchanging important

information for something significant from their past lives. When this does not work, they resort to whispering. Mahakali also offered Maali the ability to whisper important information in exchange for his remaining moons. This whispering allows the person to share important messages with the living. Sometimes, the spirits visit people in their dreams to provide

necessary information. Here, the communication between the dead and the ones alive cannot be explained using logic. Also, the communication which takes place among the spirits cannot be explained according to the laws of nature. What happens to the soul after death is something which the ones alive do not know. But in the text, the afterlife is depicted in a way that the spirits know themselves and others, and try to solve the mystery of their death. Here, even Maali himself is confused about his death and wants to find

justice or at least attain information about what happened to him in real life. When he digs deep into the mystery, he understands that it is not just about his death but also about the political agendas behind it. He attempts to unmask the truth by conveying the information and the proofs, which are the photos clicked by him and their negatives, to his friends, Jaki and DD. The spirits are represented stereotypically as dangerous beings who are avenging their deaths. But here we see the protagonist using his seven moons to unmask the reality of the activist group and the politicians, who are more dangerous than the stereotypical spirits. He is fighting for the better development of people in the society. His mission involves retrieving the hidden photographs that expose the brutalities of war, highlighting the power of visual images in a world filled with negativity.

The concept of spirits searching for answers to their unresolved questions is more than

just ordinary in the lives of real-world individuals. When Crow Uncle attempts to reach out to Jaki regarding Maali's death, Jaki struggles to believe the events unfolding around her. For the readers, this situation is presented in a way that feels familiar and acceptable, making it easier for them to accept.

In the 'In Between', an ear check determines if the deceased is ready for 'The Light', which may symbolize heaven itself, and the River of Births offers the dead a glimpse into their past. Since these events cannot occur in the real world, they cannot be

proved or justified. The narrative is filled with exciting twists and a wealth of mystery. Key mysteries include the celestial visa office setting, the undisturbed realm of the

dead, the causes of their deaths, and the circumstances of Maali Almeida's death. *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* is a captivating whodunit filled with fantastical elements. The storytelling utilizes a first-person narrative presented in the second person, making it easier for readers to connect with the story and keep them engaged as they crave more. Set during the civil war in Sri Lanka, the novel tackles theme of crime, which was common in that tumultuous period. The incorporation of mystery feels particularly relevant, as it reflects the reality of events happening in the real world. The dark humour surrounding the country's politics is something to debate about, and blending it with mystery is commendable.

Phenomenal World :

The novel opens with a detailed description of the afterlife, a world the protagonist, Maali, is unaware of. The author employs vivid imagery to convey this setting, as it plays a significant role in the story. Right from the beginning, we see what Maali perceives around him and hear his thoughts about it. He finds himself in a dilemma, questioning whether he is dreaming, hallucinating, or dead. Surrounding him are

counters resembling those in government offices, where people stand in long queues, waiting for their turn. When Maali reaches the front of the line and speaks with Dr. Rane, the authoritative figure in a white saree behind the counter, he believes that perhaps this is not a hallucination, but that he is indeed dead. The description provided by the author in the first chapter, known as 'First Moon', has set the base for the rest of the story. The detailed description of the place, which includes the smoke coming out from nowhere, the height of the ceiling, the mentality of the protagonist and his thoughts about the place, the description which

distinguishes the spirits from the people of the real world, the attire, and the look on the spirits' face and the conversation taking place between the spirits, sets the foundation of the story immaculately. The description of the spirits or ghosts waiting in the queue refers to the attitude of the people of Sri Lanka

provided by the author, to make the readers understand the mentality of the people at that time and of that particular region. Maali, who wakes up finding himself in the afterlife is described and portrayed well by the author. The details given about him, that he is a war photographer, and a gambler, and the information that he is into men, not just one but many men, by referring him to a slut, allows the readers to paint a picture about him, whether it is positive or negative. This helps in building the story as it revolves around his life and his life beyond death. His dedication towards his job is shown even in his afterlife, where he is seen carrying a camera around and clicking pictures of what he saw around that he considered as something exclusive. His dating life is described with clarity by giving examples, where even though he is dating DD who is committed to him, he has many affairs with other men. The cause of his death was unknown, even though he was confused, he was determined to find the reason for his death, like any other spirit. All these details about Maali add life to the story, which portrays the type of person he is and judges him based on the incidents around him. Maali, a passionate war photographer, had many secrets hidden in the form of photographs. He clicked anything he found interesting, or that would impact the world and change things for the better. These photographs played such a major role, that the characters in the story were so desperate to get hold of it and its negatives, that they did not even hesitate to end the lives of the innocents. The photographs were safely hidden under a bed in a box, that his close ones knew about. Maali's only aim in the afterlife was to make these photographs public. This was a difficult journey for him, and he took it sincerely by giving it more importance than finding the cause of his death. The photographs held such significance in his life that he was almost on the verge of not going through 'The Light'. He considered them as not just the memories of the past, but the proof that would destroy the Government and the devils working there. Even though he would not be a part of the future in the real world, he was determined to make it a better place for future generations. Through the description of the author, the readers can understand that the

photographs are very important. These photographs were in different envelopes in the box, there was also an envelope which he did not want the world to see, which was completely based on his affairs with men. He knew that this would break the hearts of DD and his close ones, and society would judge him, based upon such clicks. With all these detailed descriptions of what the photographs meant to Maali and where it was hidden, the readers can imagine the tense situation of the story. The detailed description of the setting of the story is done well by the author, as it holds the situation of the story by giving the historical context. The story's backdrop is the Sri Lankan Civil War which involved many activist groups. The time saw injustice, the killing of the innocents, cases of missing and many more inhumane things, but the devils behind this were getting saved without any punishment, as there was no one to question their atrocities. The chaos during the time and the violence faced by the people of the society are shown in the story with the help of fictional characters. The mentality of the ones in power is visibly in contrast with the normal civilians. The ones in power are trying to gain more power through inhumane ways, whereas the normal citizens are trying to save themselves by not getting killed. The police were working under the guidance of these powerful people. The revolutionaries were getting arrested without any reason. Even though people were resilient and led their lives silently and peacefully, the ones in power, because of their greed, snatched their freedom and way of living from them by making them suffer painfully. There are many examples in the story which add to the atrocities committed by the powerful ones. The death of the protagonist himself is one such example, where he is confused about his death as he was aware that he did not do anything wrong that would put him into such a situation, even though was a war photographer. The well-renowned Ministers, committing such crimes, help the readers understand the depth of the situation. The actions of the government are one of the major things the author points out. There is a rich cultural reference that helps the reader in captivating the setting in their mind to proceed with the story. The novel is filled with supernatural elements. The detailed description

of these elements helps the readers to relate to the story as it is not common in the real world.

There is a blend with historical fiction, where we see mythical characters, but these characters are not portrayed in a stereotypical manner. There is a slight change in those characters' personalities and what they stand for. The details regarding the same, help the readers not get confused with the stereotypical mythological character.

Mahakali is one such character, where in the real world she is worshipped as a deity who kills demons to protect her humans and looks out for them like her children. But, in the story, she is portrayed as something negative, who tries to take the moons of the souls, in return for a favour. Here, she tries to manipulate the souls into committing some sins to have them under her control, without sending them towards the Light. Many ghosts and spirits are present in the afterlife, each striving to seek revenge or complete their unfinished business. Dr. Ranee is present in the afterlife as an authoritative figure who tries to help people find their path towards the Light. Whereas, other ghosts like Sena are in the afterlife trying everything to seek revenge

for their death. We see a few spirits taking up the positive role, while some are selfish. It is the same as the people living in the real world. Not all are good or bad. Some people are good, living with the ones who are bad. Many inexplicable things happen in the story, which questions the logic behind it. The art of whispering learnt by the spirits is one such thing. This connection between the real life and the magical world helps the readers understand the story clearly. These magical elements are connected to real-life events, and described vividly so that the readers understand the context

behind them and view the events as normal.

The themes are explained in detail in the novel. The themes of love, death or afterlife, violence, corruption and injustice, and identity and sexuality are fabricated smoothly by the author, using his set of magical words. The details provided to explain the theme of violence are appropriate. We come across the atrocities committed by the ones in power, death, and abduction. Afterlife or death is the main theme of the novel, wherein the readers can come across different supernatural elements in the afterlife, and the confused state of Maali in the afterlife is the main ingredient which spices up

the entire plot. The theme of injustice and corruption is seen where the ones in power are gaining more power even after the bad deeds that they are committing, by stealing freedom from people and getting the entire society under their control. Corruption and injustice are also seen in the afterlife, which helps the reader connect to the other end of the story.

Maali's journey in the real world is filled with many struggles and confusion. From the beginning of the story, with the help of the details provided by the author, it is believed that he is sexually and emotionally attracted towards men and has no sexual attraction towards women. He is seen having countless affairs, even though he was dating DD and also before that. Even though he was very accepting of his sexuality

and was honest about it, people around him mocked him. To show more about his personality, the author gives a few examples in the story where other characters mock him and try to harass him. This shows the mindset of a few people even during such crucial times when they had no time to think about anything else. All these details add to the characteristics of Maali and the mindset he requires to face it.

Despite all the negative situations and things happening in the story, the author has also filled it with profound human connections which is of great value to a person. Even though his job required him not to trust people, he had good friends and family around him. His friends Jaki, DD and his mother were very important to him. His friendship with Jaki was like that of a sibling even though the atmosphere between them initially was that of lovers, but once Jaki understood that he was into men, she maintained her distance. But they never grew apart. Everyone thought of Jaki as Maali's girlfriend and she tried to keep up the same reputation even after his death, as she did not want people to judge him based on his sexuality. The relationship he had with DD was not just sexual, it was also about how they understood and reciprocated with each other. DD even went against the words of his father to stay on close terms with Mali. DD, Jaki and Maali were also seen living in the same apartment, which shows the amount of trust they had in each other. Even though Maali had a complex relationship with his mother, we can see the love he had for her. He also thinks about his dad, who

is remarried to someone else. Even after his death, Maali is seen thinking and caring about his friends and family who are alive. He even goes to the extent of

losing himself to Mahakali, to save Jaki. All these details about the importance of love in Maali's life help the readers relate themselves or their lives with it.

All these realistic, accurate descriptions of the fantastic world depict the realism in the magical setting of the story. Even the minute detail plays an important role in the story for the readers and for the depiction of the story. Karunatilaka uses dark humour to merge the realms and make it convenient for the readers to connect to the realistic aspect of the magical world, which makes them accept the fantastical things as reality.

Unsettling doubts :

The afterlife projected in the story as seen by the protagonist who is dead, Maali Almeida, is a chaotic place which looks like that of a celestial visa office, as people are lining up to get some information or help or anything available there. He comes across the spirits, whose bodies look decaying in various degrees. He also comes

across many spirits of animals conversing in human language and many other supernatural elements. All these descriptions blur the lines between reality and the supernatural for the readers, leading to challenges they face in perceiving what is real and what is imagination. The protagonist faces confusion at the beginning of the story, when he looks at the celestial visa office, thinking whether he is dreaming or hallucinating or is dead. The journey of Maali can be very confusing for the readers, as it is for himself. His memories are in fragments, with no order or clarity. This confuses the reader whether the situation he is thinking about is real or is some distorted memory of his life. The narration too does not give any clarity about the

same, as it just talks about what he is seeing and experiencing. The truth might remain hidden for a long time before the reader realizes it.

Throughout his journey in the afterlife, Maali has conversations with many ghosts, who tell him about their death, the reason that they are stuck in the afterlife and the things they are looking for. The injustice caused by the government and the activists'

group had led to their deaths and they were trying to seek justice and help the ones who are still alive. The trauma caused by all these incidents and the unresolved issues of the government are all the consequences of the Sri Lankan civil war, which makes the readers confront the situation of that place and the type of violence the people there would have faced. This might be something new which might lead to a bit of confusion for a few of the foreign readers who are not aware of the real-life situation of Sri Lanka during the civil war. The story highlights the brutal reality of Sri Lanka.

Depicting the afterlife in the novel raises some concerns that make the readers doubtful and might put their minds into an unsettling state. Each realm is portrayed as identical and different from the other. The portrayal of life, death and what comes after death, is done in a way that would put the reader's mind into thought for a very long time. The afterlife setting is that of a celestial visa office, where ghosts are waiting in a queue and fighting for their turn to enquire about required information and to get themselves checked, to retrieve their memories of when they were alive.

This is a nightmare for the readers, who are worried about where they would end up, and how they would end up, after serving their term in the real world. This does not just confuse them but also disturbs their mind because of the reality present in magical realism. Even when the setting of the afterlife is magical, the presence of the realistic components makes the readers connect. This can also cause trauma to the readers' minds, where they think about Maali's struggles and the supernatural elements he faces and try to get away from the whole created magical world. This might also raise

existential questions about life and death when they have served their term in the real world and the world beyond death, the afterlife.

The character of Mahakali as portrayed in the mythologies is that of a powerful deity who fights against injustice and causes destruction of the bad people in the world. But the Mahakali in the novel is depicted as a negative character, who tries to possess every spirit in the realm by manipulating them. Readers might face confusion if they try to relate the character of the mythology as something similar to that of the story. This might mess up the storyline in their head. The instances in the afterlife, where

supernatural elements like spirits floating everywhere or moving around are projected,

distract the reader as this goes against the laws of nature. Also, communication happens between the spirits and the people of the real world through whispers leading to disturbance in their minds and may cause trauma. The readers might hold all these elements in their minds for a longer duration, instilling fear or leading to unsettling thoughts.

Maali's journey in the real world when he was alive was filled with various struggles, especially his being a gay man did not help him in society. He was mocked and harassed by many, even the ones who held a higher position in society harassed him for their pleasures. Even though he was bold enough to identify himself as a gay man, society did not make him comfortable in doing so. People looked at him like he had

committed some crime by being himself and not faking it. Acceptance was never given to him by the society. This makes his character complex, which results in an even more complex narrative.

Those in power sanction violence, causing people to question the beliefs of Sri Lankan society during the civil war. Readers might face hesitation in understanding the events, as it leads to confusion and disturbing thoughts. The mythological characters and the stereotypical relation to the world might be difficult for foreign readers to understand, because of the cultural differences. However, the portrayal of the realistic events in the narrative helps the readers relate to it even in the magical realm. The narrative style here is unsettling but also appealing, grabbing the attention, and providing the required information.

Merging realms :

The bureaucratic nature of the real world is depicted in the afterlife. The afterlife is not rid of the rules or regulations, spirits and ghosts must follow the rules to reach the Light. As in any other government office, the office in the afterlife where the spirits get their ears checked remained closed when it was supposed to be opened, and Maali was instructed to return the next day for the same. The author uses dark humour to show people waiting for hours to get their work done, which does not end even after

their death. The author mocks the bureaucratic system present in both worlds. This is a fiction where

Maali after his death, is trying to solve his murder mystery. He is provided with seven moons, to do whatever he wishes to do and reach 'The Light'.

On his journey, he comes across many supernatural characters. Few of them have the

same motive as his and others are trying to remain calm or looking for something beyond. There is injustice present in both realms. Maali faces all these challenges while searching for justice for his death and for his family and friends who are still alive. The violence and injustice in the story blur the lines between the two worlds. In this novel, there are instances of merging of the supernatural elements of the

afterlife in the real world. The technique of whispering is one such thing which was learnt by a few of the ghosts in the afterlife. The spirits would whisper in the ears of people who are still alive to convey some information or to mislead them. They used this to help their loved ones and to seek revenge. We see Maali using this trick to save the life of his friend Jaki, whereas other ghosts like, Sena use this trick to seek revenge,

where it ends up killing and injuring people. Another medium used by the ghosts to interact with the ones alive is through the Cave man, who stands as the mediator between the one who is dead and the one with whom the dead want to communicate.

There is also an involvement of mythology and folklore in the story, with characters like Mahakali. Animals' spirits are seen talking with human spirits in the afterlife, which is magical. This narrative of the story creates a different kind of blend where tradition is mixed with the modern world. Here, we come across the merging of different realms, for instance, human spirits and animal spirits conversing in the afterlife. The realm of the afterlife naturally blends with the one of the real-life in the story. The involvement of mythology in the story creates a wealthy atmosphere for the reader to relate and connect to many aspects of the story.

Disruption of Time, Space and Identity :

There are many fantastical elements in the story, which are not only present in the magical world, the afterlife but also enter the real world to disrupt space, time, and identity. Here, the time does not move in a straight sequence, but it jumbles up and confuses the storyline, which also awakes the curiosity among the

readers. Here, he has seven moons to get done with his unfinished things in the afterlife or solve the mystery behind his death. This timeline provided to him is in contrast with the timeline of the real world that he had experienced before. The narrative of the story is often disturbed by the memories and flashbacks of Maali in the real world, causing a kind of disruption in the present narrative. He does not always experience this, but when he does, it comes with a sensation of pain or weird sensation, which makes it hard for

him to understand whether it was happening at the present or was it just his memories.

The challenge in this narrative lies in the fluidity of understanding the story set in the afterlife. The plot experiences disturbances due to the narrative structure and the fantastical elements that engage in conversations with one another or with Maali, offering their perspectives. This approach creates an atmosphere of confusion,

potentially leading to misunderstandings. The story portrays a bureaucratic nightmare in the afterlife, where spirits project their wounds into the crowds and engage in conflicts among themselves. Some spirits remain trapped due to their desire for revenge, while others are there for a limited time, specifically seven moons. The

treatment and hospitality these spirits receive echo the experiences one might encounter in modern government offices, providing a familiar yet unique environment for readers, as it unfolds in the afterlife. Maali is depicted as travelling between realms alongside other spirits to solve his murder mystery, protect his loved ones, and assist those in need in the real world. He employs various techniques to communicate and

navigate back to places in the physical realm. The introduction of the 'In Between', a space where spirits linger before moving on to the afterlife, adds another layer to the narrative. This constant shifting of space disrupts the understanding of the real world, further complicating Maali's journey.

The identity of Maali Almeida as a war photographer, gambler, and gay man causes a kind of confusion for himself in the afterlife. He tries to dig deep into his life in the real world, the past and the present which leads him to confusion, making it difficult for him to understand himself. This identity makes it more complex for him to understand the

chaotic nature and reason for his death. He encounters many spirits who share their stories with him, trying to seek sympathy or help from him. These stories lead him to further confusion, where he tries to question his identity. When Sena shares his story with Maali, trying to manipulate him to join his squad, Maali is confused and frightened, as his memories are not intact and he does not know if he can believe Sena. Supporting Sena also led his solving the murder mystery to consume more time. The story of Sena made him think hard about the life he led when he was alive. He questioned his sexuality, work ethic and the relationships he had in the real world. All these challenge the readers' perception by providing them with disrupting time, space, and identity in the story. The effects of war which happened in real life, are seen affecting even the dead in the afterlife.

IV. POLITICAL CONTEXTS AND POLITICAL SATIRE

The Sri Lankan Civil War took place for the reason of ethnic tensions between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils. This lasted from around 1983 to 2009. The Sinhalese resented the Tamils due to the favoritism they received from the British during colonial rule, which favored Tamils for authoritative roles, neglecting most of the population in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon). But in 1948, when they gained independence, the Tamils were not given any consideration and Sinhalese being the majority, dominated the Tamils by implementing many government policies which would benefit only the Sinhalese. One such thing is making Sinhala the official language of Sri Lanka. They also favoured Sinhalese when it came to employment and education, where they were given priority and later the seats were occupied by the Tamils. Disregarded by the Government, the Tamils formed their groups to demand their rights, which eventually led to the formation of the group called Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), where they demanded their independent state in the northeast of the island, without the policies of the Sinhalese government. The persistent discrimination against the Sri Lankan Tamils by the Sinhalese-dominated government resulted in a big conflict, which led to the civil war in 1983. There were many violent incidents and riots

which led to the full-fledged war, including the anti-Tamil riots known as Black July.

Many countries got involved in this conflict, to gain advantages, or merely to support the innocents. India too was involved in this conflict. Initially, India supported the Tamils, later they tried to maintain peace by sending a peacekeeping force. All these did not help in any way but further complicated the situation. The Sri Lankan government defeated the LTTE in 2009, bringing the civil war to an end, but the loss was enormous. It resulted in a countless number of deaths, including many civilians.

People were displaced from their homes which resulted in a crisis for refugees. As the mistake was committed from both sides, the Sri Lankan military and the LTTE were accused of violating human rights in the most severe way possible. The disappearances caused by their careless ventures, the massacres, and the use of children as soldiers were taken into consideration for this accusation. The innocents, who did not want to get involved in this fire of ridiculous fight, found themselves caught up in the same, and suffered the most without having any idea about it.

Bombings and massacres killed men, which surprisingly or not, did not affect the ones with authority, but affected the ones who just wanted some shelter to hide their poor selves. It was a result of many deaths and displacement of people. As per the reports, the Sri Lankan government had refused many investigations from independent and international sources, regarding the deaths, abductions, and missing people. Even after many years, the legacy of the war continues to impact the political and social landscape of Sri Lanka. They have tried to reconcile with the minority Tamils, but people have not yet forgotten their significant losses. Ethnic division and religious division are prominent even today in Sri Lanka.

As a result, the economy was completely devastated, especially in the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka. This conflict led to significant losses of loved ones and the loss in the economy, as tourism dropped because of the danger and damaged infrastructure. There was a major setback in social development too. The mental health of the people was deeply affected. Not only the children who witnessed or experienced it had to go through it, but the fear changed even the mindset of adults. Many suffered from trauma because of these

ruthless, inhumane actions performed during that time, and it took decades to come out of it. The trauma which is left behind is not something which a person can come out of easily, it requires effort and sometimes money too. With the poor economy at that point, where everyone had lost

their precious ones and things, searching for money to cure themselves was something an individual could not think of. This resulted in people being arrogant, ignorant, and socially unaware or awkward. More than 'awkward', we can use the word 'fearsome' to describe their personality. The scars left behind psychologically, from losing their homes or their loved ones, is something even an adult cannot easily overcome. The suffering endured might have made them strong, but the memories still haunt them, even in their dreams. The long-lasting effect of the Sri Lankan war has taken away something precious from the lives of the civilians, most importantly the mental health,

which they are to this date trying to cope with.

The already existing tension between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority was ignited and flamed up by this conflict. They could not accept their loss, which resulted in the rejection of each other. The ethnic tensions between them worsened, and the differences which they had, now left a big blank which was incurable. The challenge faced even to this date, is to build trust between each other and make them live together in harmony, without any further ethnic tension. But the loss of loved

ones has made this agenda of rebuilding trust a very tough one. The ones who faced most of the challenges because of this war were the civilians. But they had the strength of resilience which helped them to be strong even during this conflict. Most of the civilians were seen with powerful resilience, and because of the threat that they constantly faced, they viewed it as normal. As their complaints were not heard, or they did not have the strength or the courage to complain about the happenings, they had to set their mind to go through the situation. They started to become creative out of necessity, and built makeshift bunkers and shelters to protect themselves and their family from the constant bombing. Even though the powerful authorities were fighting among themselves, the civilians of all the communities came together, providing mutual care and aid. Spending each day with the resources they

had felt like a lifetime for them. Daily survival was a struggle. The civilians had limited resources, which even though used carefully, was slipping out of their hands. Necessities, like food and water were limited, and there were no medical supplies to treat the people affected in the conflict zone. Kanji (rice porridge) was one of the main things they were eating then, but even that was very limited and would not fill their stomach. The adults had to sacrifice for the family, to let their children eat. This helped the understanding between the

civilians grow, but not the ones in power, as they still lived a luxurious and carefree life. They tried to inculcate the normalcy of everyday behaviour to maintain their mental peace and provide peace of mind for themselves. Schools were open, local markets operated and the cultural and religious events happened as usual. The war resulted in many experiencing traumas and losing their loved ones, but the support from their family and also from the community uplifted their spirit. Traditional practices and religious rituals were used as a sense of comfort to gain back their confidence.

There was a huge number of displacement of the civilians. The ones who were displaced had to go through harsh conditions in internment camps. The camps were overcrowded, which resulted in the scarcity of supplements. Even during such harsh conditions, people in camps formed communities to help and support each other. This shows the innocence of the people, who did not want this conflict to happen but had to endure it because of some powerful merciless monsters. Few of the civilians took steps to seek justice for the sufferings they had to go through, even though that was something dangerous. The human rights which they were denied at the time of the war were questioned by them. They had to raise their voices to avoid getting oppressed again in the coming days. The resilience shown by the people during the civil war highlights their mental strength and the urge to go to any extent to save themselves and their families. Even though war never ends on a good note, we need to take back the strength of the people and instil it into our everyday lives. The suffering or pain that an individual goes through is nothing compared to the loss and pain faced by the people whose lives have been involved in a war.

The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida is set in the backdrop of this two-and-a-half- decade-long civil war in Sri Lanka, which involved many deaths, abductions, missing cases, and corruption. Not only the common people were affected during the time, but even the ones with the power who wanted to help the rest could not do anything about it. The situation was chaotic, where even the innocent people lost their lives, for the greediness of the ones in power. The journalists who captured the truth were shot or tortured to death. The dead bodies of the ones who went missing were not found as they were thrown into some abandoned location or to some lake. The innocents were tortured to death, just because they did not want to lose their self-respect and fall into the hands of the ones who used their power for cruel things.

There are many government parties and activist groups involved in this chaotic situation, they are, the Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Sri Lankan government, the Janata Vimukti Peramuna- Marxist revolutionaries (JVP), the government- sponsored death squads - the Special Task Force (STF). They were involved in all the chaos happening at that time, like the abduction of people, many deaths, harassment,

and so on. There was also involvement from the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) and foreign arms dealers in these atrocities. In this timeline of the story, during the 1980s civil war in Sri Lanka, these groups had a major say in everyone's life. Trying to protect and make more fortunes of their own, they not only neglected but stomped on the innocent lives of the people to move ahead and gain more wealth. This had a

huge impact on the lives of the people leading a normal life. The experiences left a kind of trauma on them, which they could not even get rid of in their afterlife. The story told by the author Shehan Karunatilaka in this novel might not be real, but the situation and the effect of that time in Sri Lanka are the real-life experiences of most of the people who lived there during that time.

The central political aspect of the story in the novel is the conflict between the Sinhalese-dominated government and the Tamil separatists (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). There are two sides to the story and ones who have not undergone that cannot relate to that pain and suffering. The Tamils tried to

create their own state in the southern part of Sri Lanka, which led to many deaths. The Sinhalese, after hearing this, could not stop their rage. This led to a whole new situation of conflict. The Tamils revolted against the Government and killed a few soldiers, this led to another conflict, resulting in thousands of deaths. There are many characters in the novel who value power more than humanity. Being in an authoritative position, where they have the power to help society, they are concerned about their growth of power rather than caring about the lives of the innocents. Real-life figures involved during the war inspired many characters in the novel, such as the corrupt minister Cyril Wijeratne and the. As these characters have an influential position in the Government, they abuse their power and destroy the lives of many people.

The author provides situations throughout the story where such criminal acts were showcased as normal, by the Government and people with power. He mentions that in Sri Lanka, during the 80s, the word 'disappeared' was a passive verb. He uses such dark humour throughout the story to depict the intentions of the government and the so-called activists of that time. The Government or groups like JVP anarchists or Tiger separatists or Indian Peace Keepers would use this word as something they could do to people who went against them or from which province they were or who they looked like, the Tamils or the Sinhalese. This was something normal then, which no one questioned or could ever question, as they knew the violence happening and had inhibited the same into their lifestyles. The death of the two innocent engineering students, who were not aware of the crime they committed like Maali, is one such example that anything which would trigger the Government or would stand in their way would be removed more easily using violence.

The character of Sena, who has also undergone such injustice and was tricked into death, is seen helping Maali to find the truth about his death and seeking revenge. His method is not that of an ethical one and the problems he had faced in real life which led to his death made him vulnerable and choose such an option to take his revenge. His friendship with Maali is depicted as resourceful and loyal, where he not only tries to take Maali to his side for his selfish needs but also tries to get him justice in his way, even though that involves risk. He is viewed as courageous

after facing hardships in the real world. He also helps Maali understand the politics of the afterlife, which is as complicated as that of the real world. The socio-political context of the story can be understood through Sena's experiences. His character depicts prizing human life and the complexities that they had to face. He desired justice, not just for himself, but also for the innocent spirits around him. He mentions a few names to Maali, who according to him are involved in his death, they are Drivermalli, Balal, Kottu, The Mask, Major Raja, and Minister Cyril. Major Raja is depicted as a brutal and violent character who would go to any length for power and money. He is a high-ranking military officer in the Sri Lankan military who was involved in the dark operations. He is part of the Sri Lankan military, which worked against the LTTE and other insurgent groups like the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a Marxist revolutionary group. He has not only tortured and killed many but also made them disappear without any trace if they opposed him, like the Tamil separatists and Marxist radicals. The harsh realities of the power given to the authoritative figures in the military are seen through his ruthless and abusive character. There are instances where he has used this power to achieve his goals, even if it leads to the death of people. The interaction he has with other characters can be seen as intimidating, as he uses his position in society to instil fear in them. He controls the people and often manipulates them to get his things done, which would only benefit him and the group he supports.

The most corrupt person in this story is Minister of Justice, Cyril Wijeratne. His character is important for the narrative, as it reflects the social and political complexities of Sri Lanka during the civil war. Being in a high social ranking, with much power, which could have changed the situation or helped people in need, he did just the opposite. His actions did not help the people but caused more blunder to the society. His character is that of someone people should fear and be careful of. The storyline is woven in a manner that his actions are one of the major causes of the story's development. The violent and corrupted side of the Sri Lankan government during the civil war is represented through his abusive and gigantic character. His hunger for more power should be noted. A fox in the jungle might have shown mercy, but his cunning nature is on a level, where he

chooses not to look down, but always to be in his eye level and think of himself. He took many unethical decisions to cover up the crimes he had committed. There was no remorse for the ruthless actions which he had committed, but he was ready to commit the same mistakes to save himself and his high-ranking position. His manipulative behaviour is seen throughout the story in various situations. The audacity a person must have to not hide his cruel self and flaunt it is something that can be seen in his character. This comes with the background of having a higher position, the political elite of Sri Lanka. Having a deep understanding of the political landscape, his power is not only through his clever and cruel work but also through many political alliances, which he maintains even during the tough times of the poor, innocent Sri Lankan society. The unethical actions and reactions of those in power during turbulent times are visible through his character. How Minister Cyril uses his authority to intimidate people into doing wrong things by manipulating them is seen through various instances. His conversation with Maali also shows the same. In this unavoidable situation, he is seen exploiting people around him for his gain. The cleverness of these authoritative people, which is supposed to be their slyness, is shown through the political schemes and agendas they plan, not for society, but for their benefit. The strategies used by Cyril are more of a demanding one, where he infuses fear in the person going against him to take the situation under his control. His willingness to indulge himself in criminal activities for his gain is very prominent. His relationship with the protagonist is in the same manner, where most of his actions result in putting Maali in danger. This shows the demerits of the politically charged environment. He justifies his actions, which is very crude. He conveys to the people that such harsh measures are necessary to maintain order in Sri Lanka. According to his beliefs and his political pragmatism, his decisions are the primary measures to maintain the political stability in the country destroyed by civil war. He adopts a ruthless leadership style, where he embodies the rule of a powerful leader by committing harsh things to maintain the people under him. He defends himself by saying that everything he does is for the good of the people and national security. In return, it is to show his dominating power and snatch the freedom

of the people. He argues that extreme measures are necessary, but deep down he knows that it is all for his benefit and to attain more power. But he wants people to view this as an act of patriotism. Even though people know the reality, they are unable to walk up and speak out, being fearful of their own lives and their family. For the situation of war, he applies his own rules, which go well with him in the situation and defends the same, that the usual moral standards do not apply during war. He commits unethical things, calling them moral in his terms. He could not tolerate any sign of weakness even from himself. This is the result of being driven over by power. He uses propaganda to justify his criminal acts and tries to manipulate the understanding of the public.

Maali is also affected by the actions committed by Minister Cyril, both directly and indirectly. He becomes a big obstacle to Maali, even in the afterlife. When Maali tries to get justice for the ones living in the real world, by publishing the photographs he had clicked, Cyril tries to stop that from happening as his actions of committing

crimes were captured in the photographs. This delayed Maali's conquest, where he had planned to display the photographs taken by him, with the help of his friends. He also learned in the afterlife, through Sena, that Minister Cyril was the reason for many deaths and could have been involved in his death, too. Maali's friend and roommate, Jaki, also faces violence because of the Minister. When she came forward to uncover

the truth of her friend's death, this search led her to a shoe box which contained photographs of many crimes committed by the higher authorities of the Government. Before she can get hold of the shoe box, the Minister learns about it and arrives at Maali's mother's house at the same time as Jaki. He snatches the shoe box from her and takes it with him. When he learns about the photo negatives existing elsewhere, he tracks Jaki down and her life is put at risk. He also goes to the level of trying to kill her, to get rid of her and the existing evidence. His choices, even about life and death, are careless, as he is seen playing and disregarding the people's lives, even if they are just a small obstacle in his journey. The Minister is also seen following and tracking

the routes of Elsa Mathangi, who seems to show an interest in the photographs. The conversation

between the Minister and Elsa denotes that she finds the Tamils innocent, and the Minister is against her thoughts, which is one of the reasons the Minister finds her as an obstacle.

Minister Cyril and Major Raja Udugampola have a dangerous relationship, where they accompany each other in committing criminal acts. They form a great team to perform such atrocities. The infamous guy in The Mask is Major Raja, who hides his already monstrous self behind a mask and performs violent acts, such as killing. With the orders and support of Minister Cyril, Major Raja performs many criminal acts like torture and killing of people, by covering his face with The Mask, and becoming the regime's most prolific torturer, because of this even the ones in the afterlife are not aware of his real identity. Though people knew they were cruel, they did not expect them to be the monsters behind many deaths. They kidnap people and take them to a place called The Palace, where the person in the Mask, Major Raja, tortures them more than a monster, which might lead to a lifetime of trauma. In the incident where they kidnap Jaki, they take the help of Drivermalli, who because of the power is

confined to committing the crime of kidnapping. The spirit of Maali enters that building to save Jaki and comes across rooms with various other people being tortured in many harsh ways for mistakes they never committed. Jaki was on the floor, curled up like a squirrel. Their manipulative behaviour is visible when they had to convince Drivermalli to get involved with them in committing such atrocities. Higher-ups commit atrocities in broad daylight. There is another such corrupt character in the story who seems to be caring towards society only on the outside but with the same agenda as these people on the inside. This multifaceted character is Stanley Dharmendran, the father of Dylan Dharmendran. He is a cabinet minister, with the same agenda of gaining more power in his life. The conversation where Maali approaches him about his desire for more power, and his reaction to the same, shows that he is as corrupt as any other powerful person at that time. He projects himself as someone concerned about the well-being of society, especially of his son's friends, by showcasing a kind of interest in Maali's missing case. One should not get blinded by these manipulative actions, as he is one of the big villains in this story. He was a very influential person, as he knew many

higher-ups. He, being stern and stubborn, had different ideologies than those of a recent generation. Even though he was not aware of his son and Maali being lovers and were also in a physical relationship, their close bond and his doubt regarding the same drove him crazy. He never accepted the behaviour and approach of Maali. The rebellious nature of Maali did not seem to go well with the person with traditional values and different expectations. Their complex relationship adds depth to the narrative. His systematic and traditional approach did not seem to go well with that of the practical approach of Maali. Not able to accept the idea of homosexuality because of the generational conflicts, he was concerned about his son to an extent which made him commit even more crimes. This is not just because of the love and concern towards his son, this is majorly to protect his reputation in the society and not lose his power. In the story, he behaves like he is trying to help his son DD in searching for his missing friend Maali using his political influence, but all along he knows that he is already dead. Stanley had kidnapped Maali and killed him, as he wanted to push him away from his son. He had made him swallow a cyanide capsule. The thirst for more power drives people crazy and makes them commit such crimes, which are completely monstrous. Because of his manipulative nature, even though they had unresolved issues between them, no one seemed to doubt him regarding the death. But it was no surprise, as everyone with power was bound to act in such a manner during the civil war.

There are many other small characters in the story, who even with the less power they have, consider themselves as someone in a higher position than normal people and use their way through corruption. The characters in the police station, ASP Ranchagoda and Detective Cassim, used to ignore the people who used to come to file a complaint. There used to be a long line of people waiting to file complaints, and they would disregard the grievances of those people despite having no other employment. People's loved ones were missing, and it was a given that most of them would have been dead, and their families would not have a chance to look at the bodies of their loved ones for the last time. It was normal for the police to encounter such dead bodies or take the matter lightly, but for someone who had to lose their loved ones, they cannot just disregard their

human rights. This was not a way to protect the innocents as they claimed it to be, but it was a way to protect the ones in power and not get the blood on their hands. The police denied the human right to bury

the dead bodies of their loved ones. It was not impossible, but they were not ready to take the risk and act as humans for once rather than being selfish. In the story, the higher-ups themselves accept the unethical political side of Sri Lanka. DD, being a generous kind soul working to improve the country is discouraged by his father, who dares to tell him that 'Nothing in this country is apolitical.' (p.227) He tries to manipulate his son into getting into the same line as him, by saying that everything happening in Sri Lanka at that moment is bonded with politics. This was true because nothing was happening in a normal or general way during the civil war, it was just a result of some powerful manipulation or some politics behind some event. People had to be careful even when provided with lots of food, because of the politics hidden in it. It was not just the impact of the civil war that pushed the Government to this harsh level; the government itself also spread its violence and brutal mentality like a plague throughout Sri Lanka. According to the Government, to maintain their already established power and to take the entire situation under control, they had to use violent measures, even though they were not okay with the same. In the story, Minister Cyril employs death squads to eliminate his opponents from the game, just like how it happened in Sri Lanka. Many disappearances and deaths were a result of this death squad, repressing and instilling fear in the civilians. The story of this novel is fictional, but the events happening were not different from those of real life during the Sri Lankan Civil War. The harshness displayed by those in authority and the vulnerability of innocent civilians reflects real-life situations in Sri Lanka, highlighting the disconnect between the Government and its citizens.

V.THE INTERMIXING OF MAGICAL REALISM AND THE 'POLITICAL'

The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida is filled with magical realism and political components. This makes the story somewhat different from other stories. It is rather interesting to have both elements

unlike that of other stories. There are other works too, which indulge magical realism, but mixing both in the narrative is deep-rooted in

this story. Here, the realism in magical realism is shown by using political elements. It is composed of situations which make readers understand the realistic component of the magical world through the eyes of a political agenda. The story takes place in two realms; they are - the real world and the afterlife. The afterlife here comprises the 'In Between,' the 'Afterlife' and 'The Light'. In the real world, the setting is against that of the civil war of Sri Lanka in the 80s, where everything around is in chaos and filled with violence. The story setting is not fictional, making it more relatable and understandable. But the afterlife setting is fiction and questions like - Where do people go after their death? Or Where their souls travel to? is something which has not been discovered to date. However, the bureaucratic setting of the afterlife makes it simpler to relate to and can be accepted as something that might happen, even in real-life situations. The incidents taking place in the afterlife are nothing different from real life. The same old corruption, discrimination between class and race, struggle for justice and pain that happens in the real world, is also seen happening in the afterlife. The story opens with the protagonist, Maali, in the afterlife, where he had to wait in a long queue for his turn, to enquire about what had happened to him and where he was at. The spirits who stood in line with him were restless and upset that they had to wait so long to even get a word out of the official's mouth. This makes it relatable to the real world, where people are directed towards government offices for every minor inconvenience, where waiting takes a lifetime, and the result is never satisfactory.

The protagonist's narrative is in a commentary style, as he finds it fascinating to be in the afterlife and experience it. But he does not find it any different from real-life, because of the usual way things were happening in the celestial office of the afterlife, which helped him adjust soon to the environment he was now in. This war photographer was provided with seven moons, that is seven days, to solve his murder mystery and to attain his relaxation by passing through The Light. All these practical processes seem as systematic as the real world. This bureaucratic system of the afterlife seems haunting, but is it as haunting as real life? is a question people

need to ask themselves. Maybe not. It is not as horrifying as that of the real world, where people with authority are habituated to corruption and get away with the same. Whereas in the afterlife, anyone could get away or face downfall depending upon how cleverly that soul performs a criminal act. In this story, the author explores many themes, like death, life, power, resilience, and justice, under the realms, the real world, and the afterlife.

One of the major satirical aspects of the novel is Maali being the war photographer, who clicks pictures not only of the dead and the havoc happening during the civil war but also of the people in power who were committing atrocities, which puts his life always in danger. The major concern is not the bombs or bullets during the war, but the risk that he takes to preserve the photos of the atrocities committed by the ones in authority. He was watched and even threatened for the photographs he had taken. The injustice they were committing to people did not just end in the real world, as we see Maali taking pictures of many unusual things, even in the afterlife. He also took photographs of the real world after his death, as injustice does not just affect the living but also the dead. There is the involvement of dark humour. When we encounter ghosts, they are often stereotyped as vengeful beings who haunt the living. However, these spirits may come to the real world to protect their loved ones and society from the monstrous forces present in our reality. The politics in the story are not subjected only to the real world. We see such practices even in the afterlife, but with different names. Manipulation, committed by characters like Minister Cyril, Major Raja, and Stanley Dharmendran, was not only bound to the real world. There were many spirits in the 'In Between' with more power and experience, which made them get many other spirits on their side through manipulation. One such creature is Mahakali, who, with the special magical powers she possessed, used to instil fear and manipulate the other spirits to join her for a death spree. She also captured the souls of many by manipulating them, providing them with many advantages they could have in exchange for it. The authoritative behaviour of the ministers in the real world is seen through her character. We also come across the character of Crow Man in the Crow

Man's Cave, who helps the spirits communicate messages to their loved ones who are still alive. He asks for something important from the spirit's life in return for this favour and measures the value of it. The idea of bribing to get their work done is visible through this, even in the afterlife.

Here, the system is the one which must be blamed in all the realms. Even if people want to get away from this oppressive system, it is not letting go of them, even after their death. It is impressive how the author has shown the struggle of individuals even after their souls are separated from their bodies. The reason for this is the carried mentality and ideology of souls from one realm to another. The only distinction that sets apart the afterlife as a magical world is the inclusion of fantastical elements. However, these elements often interfere with the real world, creating disturbance and confusion for the characters and the readers. The primary characters traversing both realms and instigating chaos are the spirits. They seek justice for their deaths and aim to protect their loved ones from the living monsters, specifically the government authorities. These spirits sneak into the physical realm, blurring the line between the magical and the real because of the political dynamics at play in both worlds. This connection makes it easier for readers to relate to the narrative and accept it wholeheartedly. The author's ability to craft such a compelling story deserves significant appreciation. The monsters in this story are not confined to the fantastical world; rather, the more dangerous ones are found in the real world through various characters. Government authorities of Sri Lanka in the real world can be more treacherous than the cruelest creatures from the afterlife. They are often responsible for many individuals' early departure from life. Among these dangers, the character 'The Mask' is the most formidable monster across both realms. He is Major Raja, who, with the counsel of Minister Cyril, commits many crimes, including kidnapping, torture, and murder. The mask he wears to conceal his face does not make him dangerous; instead, it is the heinous acts he carries out while wearing it, along with the selfish ideologies he harbours even without the mask, that truly define him as a monster. Monsters are present throughout this story, existing in both realms. Here, the readers may not be aware of the monsters in the fantastical world, but they view their presence as ordinary. The Sri Lankan society

understands how the government and its authorities operate, having encountered monsters with various abilities daily. As a result, readers are no longer surprised by the magical aspect, and they accept these creatures as part of reality. The story portrays the Sri Lankan government authorities as complete monsters, even more dangerous than those from the magical world.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this dissertation analyzes the magical realism and the political commentary woven throughout the novel *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* by Shehan Karunatilaka. It posits that the fantastical yet grotesque monsters that inhabit the afterlife, with their distorted and surreal forms, are a striking contrast to the real troubling figures represented by the government authorities of Sri Lanka, who emerge as the true monsters of the contemporary world. Drawing inspiration from Karunatilaka's unique literary style, this dissertation highlights his masterful use of dark humour as a vehicle for social critique, effectively illuminating the complexities and absurdities of society. The author's use of dark humour and sharp satire in the story served as a source of inspiration for the paper, and added layers of complexity that beckoned the readers to delve deeper. This intricate narrative compelled the readers to uncover hidden meanings and reflections on life's more profound themes woven throughout the text.

This research encounters several challenges while exploring the unethical events that transpired during the Sri Lankan civil war of the 1980s. The brutality of this conflict left deep scars on many individuals, whose traumatic experiences made them hesitant to revisit those painful memories. For many, talking about this period could disrupt their current lives, bringing back feelings of fear and distress. The potential for deeper insights exists if a courageous individual who lived through these events is willing to share their story in detail. Such personal accounts could enrich our understanding and provide a more authentic representation of the atrocities committed by the Government during this tumultuous time. This dissertation provides a comprehensive background of the story's setting, which is essential for understanding the underlying motives of the paper. It

explores the concept of magical realism in-depth, highlighting how it intertwines with our reality, allowing readers to connect with the narrative at a personal level. This exploration invites individuals to reflect on the hidden ethical dilemmas and injustices around them. Additionally, the paper carefully examines the complex relationship between magical realism and political themes, revealing how each influence enhances the other throughout the narrative.

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