CHAPTER-I

Magic Realism: The Historical and Conceptual Origin

Though not a very recent phenomenon, yet, magical realism is one of the most suitable narrative styles, mainly adopted by the post modem writers. Being an oxymoron, the term startles us at the first hand. How to synthesize both magic and reality into a whole? This question totally confuses a reader. Both ‘magic’ and ‘reality’ are poles apart. They do not appear to sit comfortably side by side. The two are rarely compatible. But the concept magical realism is a harmonious blend of these two irreconcilable terms and today it has achieved tremendous international popularity and recognition. It is a narrative mode where magical as well as realistic elements are merged together to foreground a hidden reality. It is an unexpected alteration of reality. Here the magical and the fantastic elements appear as real and day to day affairs. In Salman Rushdie’s words, magic realism is the, “commingling of the improbable and the mundane” (Midnight’s Children 9). Geoff Hancock describes magic realism as constituting the “conjunction of two worlds” (7). Amaryll Chanady states that magical realism is an “amalgamation of a rational and an irrational world view” (21). Franz Roh suggested that it, “turned daily life into eerie form” (German Art in the 20th Century, 84). Julian Birkett ruminates about magical realism in the book, Word Power:

What kind of realism is it when people float up into the sky, or fall from it without hurting themselves, or turn into strange beasts? It sounds less like realism than fantasy, something from The Arabian Nights or a
computer game. But it would be wholly misleading to describe as fantasy such works as Midnight’s Children by Salman Rushdie, or The Tin Drum by Gunter Grass, or One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. And yet such strange events and transformations take place in these books, often describe as “magic realist” novels. (96-97)

The recorded history of magical realism is quite eventful, spanning eight decades with three vital turning points. The first period is set in Germany in the 1920s; the second period concerns the Central America in the 1940s and the third period, beginning in 1955 centres around Latin America and it continues till today. This proposed study will basically spotlight the idea of magical contortion of reality, which abounds in all those literary works that adopt magical realist narrative technique. This technique very craftily twists the ordinary everyday reality with the aid of magical happenings in such a way that the magical appears quite mundane just like the real. Subsequently, both the real and the magical get settled harmoniously and that creates a clearer as well as deeper vision of reality. For the said purpose, I have selected two novels, namely Mikhail Bulgakov’s The Master and Margarita and Gunter Grass’ The Tin Drum, where both the writers have contorted reality in a magical way to foreground some hidden truths. How they have done this is an interesting area to investigate further.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to clear up a misunderstanding regarding the two confusing terms, ‘magic realism’ and ‘magical realism’ which many people mistake as synonymous. However, both the terms are subtly different and can be
delimited and disentangled in order to have their meanings clarified. Magic realism refers to a technique of art and painting that attempts to produce the mysterious elements of everyday life as clear representation of reality. Magical realism is a literary narrative mode, employed by many writers in their texts in order to present extraordinary occurrences as ordinary and mundane affairs, by taking help of magical elements.

**Realism and Magical Realism**

While referring to magical realism, it is essential to examine the relationship between realism and magical realism and how the shift of emphasis occurred from one idea to the other. In literature, the concept of realism was first propounded by Greek philosopher Aristotle through his concept of mimesis. He claimed that the act of imitating life, or mimesis, is a natural instinct of humans. Witnessing art is an essential way to learn about the universal truths of life. Realism developed mainly as a literary trait of the novels in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The novels existed as they attempted to represent life realistically in order to engage the interest and sympathy of the readers. It was expected that the novel would show rather than tell the reader an objective interpretation of reality. This was classical realism. However this traditional concept of realism experienced a setback when in the twentieth century many critical theorists such as Henry James emphasized the involvement of imagination in literature to paint a realistic picture of life. David Grant in this connection remarked, "Here realism is achieved not by imitation, but by creation; a creation which, working with the raw materials of life, absolves these by the intercession of the imagination from mere factuality and translates them to a
higher order” (15). This form of realism makes the narrative of a novel intricate, because the realistic elements do not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents. Actually realism is not presented but constructed in these novels. This approach to literary realism is most crucial to the development of magical realism as a novelistic discourse. Magical realism also marks a recent and significant evolutionary development of an old and venerated literary genre, romance. Despite its differences from the historical romance, the magical realist novel exemplifies the same cultural logic that structures and undergirds the historical romances of Walter Scott. Its history of origin includes the masterful weavings of magical and real in the epic and chivalric traditions and continuing in the precursors of modern prose fictions like the Decameron, The Thousand and One Nights, and Don Quixote. However the historical romance is not the sole source of magical realist fiction. It has many different generic progenitors and descendants like archaic literary and oral narrative traditions, pre modern socio-religious institutions, practices and beliefs etc. From the medieval king Arthur's Tales to Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels or Nathaniel Hawthorne's Rappaccini's Daughter to Franz Kafka's The Metamorphosis, magical realism has been used for centuries. These narrative traditions are brought by the practitioners of this literary genre into contact with the European realistic novel. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris note:

... the widespread appeal of magical realist fiction today responds not only to its innovative energy but also to its impulse to reestablish contact with traditions temporarily eclipsed by the mimetic constraints of nineteenth and twentieth-century realism. Contemporary magical realist writers self-consciously depart from the conventions of
Magical realism may be considered an extension of realism in its concern with the nature of reality and its representation. At the same time it resists the basic assumptions of post-enlightenment rationalism and literary realism. Mind and body, spirit and matter, life and death, real and imaginary, self and other, male and female—these are boundaries to be trespassed or fundamentally refashioned in magical realist texts. Once again, coming to the concerned movements of art and literature, namely magic realism and magical realism, in magic realism magic refers to the mysteries of life; whereas in magical realism magic refers to any extraordinary occurrence or anything spiritual or unaccountable by rational science like ghosts, disappearances, miracles, strange atmospheres etc. Magic realism is a type of painting that emerged in 1920s Weimer Germany and was concerned with expressing, via a focus on real-world objects, the mysteries of life that lurked beyond the surface reality. Magical realism is a literary genre that treats the extraordinary as something perfectly normal and incorporates magical happenings into a predominantly realistic narrative style.

**History behind Magical Realism**

Magical realism defies definition. The ambiguity involved in the explanation of the term prompted many critics to abandon the term. In the convention of the *Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamerica* in 1973, critics like Emir Rodriguez Monegal strongly suggested that the term was ambiguous enough for the
future theorists. However many other critics and scholars sided with Fredric Jameson, who in his essay “On Magic Realism in Films” asserted that magic realism was very much in vogue even in the last part of the 20th century and not only literature, but also many new films belonged to that genre. As a result magical realism did not slip into oblivion altogether, but is becoming a more and more prominent phenomenon today.

The first inception of the term *magic realism* happened in Germany in the 1920s, in the writings of famous German art critic Franz Roh. He used the phrase *magic realism* in his essay titled, “Nach-Expressionismus, Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei” (Post-expressionism, Magic Realism: Problems of the Most Recent European Painting). Through the term, Roh referred to a form of painting that “differs greatly from its predecessor (expressionist art) in its attention to accurate detail, a smooth photograph-like clarity of picture and the representation of the mystical non-material aspects of reality” (Bowers 9). He used it to describe a group of painters who are generally categorized Post-Expressionists. He also declared that within this art, “the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it” (Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism 16). Roh tried to infuse some original thoughts to his discussion on magic realist painting by differentiating it from some other influential movements like Expressionism, Surrealism etc. Expressionism is a revolt against the tradition of realism. It seeks to express a personal vision of human life by exaggerating or distorting the objective reality. Surrealism touches the realm of mind and imagination and tries to delineate issues related to human psychology. On the other hand, magic realist painting returned to realism after Expressionism’s more abstract quality, as it expressed extraordinary occurrences of material reality as ordinary and mundane. There was a
concern to produce paintings that were grounded in the objective world, yet not completely of it. An important precursor was the Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) whose works were known for representing familiar objects from unfamiliar angles and perspectives, a quality Roh felt was present in magic realist paintings too. Subsequently, this seminal form of magic realist painting enjoyed its popularity in other countries like France, Holland and Italy. Ultimately, it shaped the foundation of magical realism as a literary genre. However, etymologically speaking, the term had been coined originally more than a century earlier by a German Romantic philosopher Novalis to describe an idealized philosophical protagonist who amalgamated both ordinary as well as magical phenomena. He envisaged two kinds of prophet, "who might live outside the boundaries of enlightened discourse without losing touch with the real" (Warnes 488). Christopher Warnes also comments about Novalis' insistence on "inwardness and intuition" (489) as well as the distinction "between natural truth—that which requires validity in terms of objective reality—and magical truth, a subjective, self-referential truth that depends on an inward-looking mystical intuition" (489). Novalis' idea of magical idealism became a synthesis of realism and idealism. But he never developed the idea of magical realism. He only emphasized on the issue of looking beyond the physical world while still being firmly rooted in the real world. Besides Novalis, there was the great art historian Heinrich Wolfflin, who described an artistic style called Baroque where the play of contradictions like nature vs. artifice, sensuality vs. spirit, surface vs. depth, and real vs. magic was abundant. But it was Roh who served as the conduit between the European uses of the term magic realism and its Latin American literary version. The unstable German Weimar Republic during 1919-23 served as the historical
background for the development of the magic realistic paintings. During this period, Germany was ravaged by political violence and extreme economic difficulty arising out of war (Davies 941-942). Democratically distanced from the rest of Europe and caught between the demolition of their old world and the uncertainty of the future, a desire for ‘Sachlichkeit’ (matter-of-factness) was the growing focus of the nation (Michalski 8). It sowed the seed for magic realist painting and Sergiusz Michalski stated, “Ultimately, it was a reflection of German society at that time, torn between a desire for and simultaneous fear of unconditional modernity, between sober, objective rationality and residues of expressionist and rationalist irrationalities” (13). Dr. P. Indira Devi’s comments are also worth mentioning here. She said:

There are a number of factors that led to the development of this movement. In Post War Germany there was a prevailing feeling of disillusionment and angst due to instability stemming from the defeat in the war. The intense emotionalism and the experimentation of the Expressionist movement, which had dominated the arts in northern Europe for two decades, ran its course. Art critics who had previously promoted Expressionism felt that the Modernist movement had moved too far towards abstraction. These same artists developed a realistic style, portraying everyday life but adding a twist of the bizarre and unusual. Magic realist painters added dreamlike and fantastic elements to their art, but their subject matter always remained within the realm of the possible. (2)
In 1927, Roh’s essay was translated into Spanish and appeared in the influential Revista de Occidente, a publication widely circulated in Latin America and read by writers like Jorge Luis Borges (Argentina) and Miguel Angel Asturias (Guatemala). Meanwhile in Europe, Roh’s ideas excited the Italian writer Massimo Bontempelli (1878-1960), who played a major role in the conceptual development of the term. Being an admirer of both surrealism as well as German magic realism, Bontempelli, for the first time, applied Roh’s thoughts in writing and not to painting. He published a bilingual magazine 900. Novecento in 1926 and it published magic realist writings. He sought to explore the mysterious or fantastic aspects of reality, applied to the written word. According to Bontempelli, the main function of literature is to create a collective consciousness by “opening new mythical and magical perspectives on reality” (Dombroski 522). He has been regarded unanimously as the first magical realist creative writer and his bilingual magazine spread the popularity of magic realist writings Europe-wide. For instance, his work influenced the Flemish writers Johan Daisne and Hubert Lampo in post-Second World War era during the 1940s and 1950s to adopt the magic realist mode in their writings.

After making its mark in Europe, the magical-realistic mode of narration moved to Latin America and ultimately became a global phenomenon. The writer who deserves special mention here is the French-Russian Cuban Alejo Carpentier who traced the history of magic realism from post-expressionist point of view and brought it to Latin America. He supported Roh’s view of magic as residing within everyday objective reality. After returning to Cuba from Europe and having travelled in Haiti, he instigated a distinctly Latin American form of magic realism, coining the phrase ‘lo realismo maravilloso’ (marvellous realism) (Echevarria 97). Carpentier
strongly believed that “lo real maravilloso americano” (On the Marvelous real in America 75) is the most suitable mode of writing to capture the marvellous American reality. Only this mode of writing can elaborately capture the chequered history of Latin America with its racial and cultural mixture. In the prologue to his 1949 novel El reino de este mundo (The kingdom of This world), he elaborated his theory. Carpentier argued:

In Latin America, the fantastic is not to be discovered by subverting or transcending reality with abstract forms and manufactured combinations of images. Rather, the fantastic inheres in the natural and human realities of time and place, where improbable juxtapositions and marvellous mixtures exist by virtue of Latin America’s varied history, geography, demography and politics— not by manifesto. (On the Marvelous Real in America 75)

These careful analyses of magical realist texts primarily took into consideration only the Latin American works. Thus the 1940s and 1950s witnessed the Latin American Boom, when a considerable number of magical realist writings emerged from the Latin American soil. A few other critics supported Carpentier’s notion of magical realism as a strictly Latin American concept. Theo D’haem in his essay, “Magic Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering privileged Centers” argued that magic realism in ex-centric and speaks from the margins. Another Critic Maria Elena Angulo also stated that Latin America was the birthplace of magical realism and the rich cultural heritage of that region facilitated in the emergence of several magical realist writers who perfected the genre to a great extent. However, he gave credit to
Arturo Uslar-Pietri, a Venezuelan writer for bringing magical realism to Latin America and not to Alejo Carpentier. Because, he exposed a line of continuation between magic realism and ‘vanguardia’ modernist experimental writings of Latin America (Bowers15). However, if we delve deeper into the issue, we will find that Uslar- Pietri’s work was confined to only the Spanish- speaking readers of Latin America. It was Carpentier, who introduced his *lo realismo maravilloso americano* specifically in the context of Latin America and his concept even greatly influenced Gabriel Garcia Marquez to write his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which is regarded as the finest specimen of magical realist novel.

Another critic Angel Flores coined a new term “magical realism” (111) in his essay “Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction”, published in 1955. Without crediting anyone, for bringing magic realism to Latin America, he argued that magical realism is a continuation of the romantic tradition of Spanish language literature and its European Counterparts (Bowers 16). In order to prove his point, he gave the example of 16\textsuperscript{th} Century Spanish writer Miguel de Saavedra Cervantes’s novel *Don Quixote* which he regarded as a precursor to magical realism. Apart from him, Franz Kafka and painter Giorgio de Chirico also embody the term. Flores gave credit to Jorge Luis Borges for being the father of modern Latin American writings and his 1935 collection of short fiction *Historia Universal de la Infamia*” (A Universal History of Infamy) to be the first example of magical realist writing (Flores 113). Along with Flores, another critic Luis Leal in his essay, “Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature” claimed magical realism as their own and relegated the style to Latin America.
It is not until much later in the century that the discussion of the genre moved to other countries and particularly to the postcolonial nations like India. When magical realism became postcolonial, it expanded to a few other non-Third World countries like Australia, Canada, and Nigeria etc., where magical realist works grew in profusion. However, with the ever growing number of magical realist texts emerging from the cup of the U.S. authors, we can claim that magical realism today is not exclusively a postcolonial narrative mode, but it is a much older and mature global phenomenon whose various offshoots require critical consideration. Roman de la Campa in his essay, "Magical Realism and World Literature: A Genre for the Times?" tries to prove his stance that today Magical realism is recognized as a global phenomenon, rather than simply a Latin American mode of writing. Because, apart from Latin America, many other countries like US, Europe, Canada etc. have produced some brilliant magical realist masterpieces. Seymour Menton, in his book, titled, Magic Realism Rediscovered, 1918-1981 also contends that magical realism is now a global trend and comments, "the emergence and persistence of magic realism in the twentieth century may be attributed to the western world's search for an alternative to the limitations of an overtly rational and technological society" (Menton 9-10).

The discussion of magical realism would remain incomplete without referring to Wendy B. Faris’ essay titled, “Scheherazadi’s Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction.” Published in the edited book Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, the essay is the most encompassing attempt to define magical realism from postmodern point of view. She believes that delimiting magical realism simply to Latin America will do injustice to
the term. She suggests that it is more useful to focus on various forms of this genre and explore its different geographical and historical variants. According to her, magical realism has acquired global prominence today and it enjoys universal acceptance too. She thinks magical realism as "a strong current in the stream of postmodernism." She enlists a few characteristics of magical realism in the essay. In order to be a magical realist novel, firstly, it should contain an "irreducible element" (Faris 165, 167) of magic which does not demand the logic of cause and effect. This type of novels relies on detailed realistic description of the fictional world. The magical happenings are described in such a realistic manner that they resemble the day-to-day physical world. The readers experience some unsettling doubts, while trying to understand the uncanny and the marvellous elements in these novels. The novels always experience the fluidity of the concept of time and space. Very often, they provide commentary on themselves. The narration is done in a matter-of-fact way without any opportunity for questioning. The language helps the readers to accept the magical happenings without any disbelief. Metamorphoses are relatively common events in these novels. Many of such novels solely target the established social order and make a mockery of it through magic. Thematically speaking, these are written in reaction to totalitarian regimes. Some of these books use rural settings and rely on ancient systems of belief, local folklore, and dream sequences etc. Very often they echo a carnivalesque spirit.

Thus, the tremendous popularity of Carpentier and Garcia Marquez created a misconception that magical realism is solely a Latin American phenomenon and ignored the role of Europe as well as Germany in its conceptual development. However, today magical realism enjoys a global popularity, through the works of
many master exponents of this genre like, Gunter Grass from Germany, Salman Rushdie from India, Angela Carter from England. From the 1960s to the present, there has been a strong current of magical realism within the general movement of Post-modernism, especially in British and North American literature. Dr. P. Indira Devi elucidates:

*The Magic Realist movement can be classified into four different time periods in the Twentieth Century, which can be described as follows:*

*The first period, which can be classified as the avant-garde years in Europe when Franz Roh first used the term in his Nach-Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus that appeared in 1925 and Andre Breton stated, “the marvelous and aesthetic concept as a part of everyday life.”*

*The second period, in the late 1940s when the related concepts el realismo magico or Magic Realism and lo real marvilloso or marvellous realism traveled from Europe to America appropriated by Arturo Uslar Pietri and Alejo Carpentier as a metre to measure, compare and evaluate indigenous cultural art forms in the American vein. But Pietri adopted Roh's term magic Realism, Carpentier the more influential novelist and theorist, used Breton's version of Le merveilleux and used in the prologue to The Kingdom of This world, his famous concept of marvellous reality.*
The third period, which began in 1955 with the publication of the essay Magic Realism in Spanish American Fiction by Angel Flores. It continued through the 1960s when criticism searched for the Latin roots of some novels written during the “boom” and attempted to justify their experimental nature.

The fourth period, where Toni Morrison, Arturo Islas, Maxine Hong Kingston and others tried to expand the magic realist tradition in a significant way.

According to Angel Flores, Magic Realism can be distinguished from other realisms by the attempt to transfer the common and the everyday into awesome and unreal. (6-7)

Common Features of Magical Realist Fictions

Magical realism couples realism with fantasy. It is a literary genre that practically tricks the readers into believing the fantastic or supernatural elements. Magical realist novels craft a very realistic storyline, characters and setting using vivid and minute details to convince the readers about their verisimilitude and accuracy. But subtly and slowly, the writer starts blending the magical or unrealistic elements at a pace that allows the reader to believe the unbelievable without even realizing it. By the time, the readers discern the presence of magical elements in an otherwise realistic narrative, they have been enthused into the realistic picture that has been so craftily painted for them and are duped into believing that the extraordinary is just ordinary and mundane after all. Actually, magical realism takes the supernatural for granted and spends more of its space exploring the gamut of human reactions to it.
Magical realism exists when magical elements arise in the world as a result of the overflow of a character's psychological state into the real world. For example, if vampires exist in a story because a character is imagining that they do then we have magical realism. If vampires exist in the story because they exist in the world then we have something closer to fantasy. We can cite another example of *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien. His fantasy is not magical realism, because its setting is a created world which is a whole new world that doesn't resemble the real world. So, the distinction between realism and magical realism becomes transparent when we compare it with other genres.

Magical realist fictions are serious fictions. They are not escapist, but reflect the society and its people. This genre explores truth. It is not thoroughly speculative like science fiction. The magical elements or incidents presented in these novels are not the result of thought experiment, but the manifestation of the reality of those people who believe or experience those magical elements or events.

Magical realism has a tendency to defamiliarize. In literature, magical realism often combines the external factors of human existence with the internal ones. It fuses scientific physical reality and psychological human reality by incorporating different aspects of human existence like thoughts, emotions, dreams, imagination, sentience, the subconscious, etc. Magic is often used against the established order and very often metamorphoses take place. With these kinds of amalgamation, magical realistic novels can be more exact in depicting even the unknown territories of human reality. In spite of facing the dilemma of believing or not believing the unreal or fantastic elements, a reader can easily bridge this gap between the real and the unreal by
momentarily suppressing his or her disbelief and adopting the reality presented in these texts as final. So, in a nutshell, we can say that the realities in these novels are painted as the human experience of this universe.

The miscellaneous use of myths, legends, fairy-tales, the oral tradition of storytelling, folkloric customs, the obscure, spirituality, religion etc. intensify fantastic aura of these novels.

The characters in these novels are often idiosyncratic and possess unusual or symbolic names. The plot is not linear and often labyrinthine, circular or spiral-like and intertwined. If we are used to linear narratives, then a magical realist novel or story will prove difficult to grasp the meaning. Because, multiple plots or subplots occur. The novels are usually set in a rather specific historical, geographical or cultural context. There is peculiarity in the representation of time and space also. Time-shifts between co-existing plots, flashbacks and flash-forwards, the creation of a mythical place like archetypal Macondo in Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are quite common. Space is often challenged and identity is broken down at times. While reading such genre of writing, we must maintain an open mind and remember that what we are reading is basically expressionism or perhaps extreme perspectivism. The psychology or perspective of a character is not just in his or her head, it is spilling out into the world.

These novels follow a post-structuralist style of writing. Unconventional spelling, punctuation and collocation, use of regionalism, surrealist and expressionist descriptions, transgression of varieties of genre, meticulous detailed description of objects, original metaphors and similes, frequent juxtapositions, hyperbole and litotes,
repetition, heavy symbolism, sardonic irony, oxymoron, paradoxes etc. abound in these novels.

They delineate a realistic description of the incidents or characters with stress on normal, common and everyday phenomena, which are then revised or retold with the help of the marvellous.

Sometimes, magical realism is given a postcolonial twist that seeks to resist European notions of naturalism or realism. At times, it calls for a hybridity of cultures as well as reading experience.

The inexplicable in its many shapes and forms plays a major role in all magical realistic novels. This phenomenon occurs in extremely mundane circumstances. These novels end leaving the readers in uncertainty, whether to believe in the magical interpretations or the realist representation of the events in the story.

Some of the common themes of the magical realist novels are family history, life and death, the afterlife, social or natural catastrophes or cataclysms etc.

As regard the author-text-reader relationship, the following is commonplace in almost all magical realistic novels: the author’s perspective is that of ‘the Other’, the narrator(s) is(are) idiosyncratic; the evolved duties of the reader requires him or her to put their perception of reality on hold in order to decode the text.

The author must have ironic distance from the magical world view in order to have an uncompromising portrayal of reality. However, this does not mean that the writers should not have respect or interest for magic or else the magic would dissolve
into simple folk belief or complete fantasy, which is totally detached from the real. Wendy B. Faris opines:

*Metafictional dimensions are common in contemporary magical realism: the texts provide commentaries on themselves, often complete with occasional mises-en-abyme--those miniature emblematic textual self-portraits. Thus the magical power of fiction itself, the capacities of mind that make it possible, and the elements out of which it is made-signs, images, metaphors, narrators, narratees-may be foregrounded.*

(175)

Many of these texts take an antibureaucratic stance and censure the established social order. They are written in reaction to totalitarian regimes. Gunter Grass reacts against Nazi atrocity in his novel *The Tin Drum* and Mikhail Bulgakov venomously attacks vainglorious Muscovites in his novel *The Master and Margarita*. Latin American writers make the North American hegemony as the issue of their attack, Rushdie writes *Midnight's Children* in opposition to Mrs. Gandhi's autocratic rule, and Toni Morrison writes *Beloved* as a reaction against slavery and its aftermath.

They use symbols and imagery extensively and exhibit a richness of sensory details. Emotion and sexuality of the human as social construct are often developed upon in great detail in these novels.

**Relation to Other Genres and Literary Movements**

Magical realism has lots of flexibility. The popularity behind this narrative mode lies in the fact that it has inherent transgressive and subversive qualities. It does
not belong to one particular era. It alternates between the real and the magical using the same narrative voice. That’s why many postcolonial, feminist and other cross-cultural writers have embraced it as a mean of expressing their own ideas. Many critics perceive close connection between magical realism and post-structuralism, which proposes that there can be multiple, eligible interpretations of a narrative. Zamora and Faris notes:

> Magical realist texts are subversive: their in-betweenness, their all-at-onceness encourage resistance to monologic political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to writers in postcolonial cultures and, increasingly, to women.

(6)

It has questioned the dominance of culture and the ideas propounded by the Enlightenment. British feminist writer Angela Carter in her novel *Wise Children* employed magical realist technique to attack the patriarchal authority of upper class and emphasized the attributes of the female working class. Magical realism made her task easy. Following that line of thought, famous feminist thinker Helene Cixous revealed the logic of European languages, in which nouns and adjectives are frequently divided into opposite pairs- the one negative and the other positive (102). Magical realism shares close affinity with Russian philosopher critic Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of carnivalesque and heteroglossia. In carnivals the people who are deprived of power enact the roles of those having power, such as a donkey being cast as a king. This provides the exact platform for the disempowered to defy the rule of the powerful or their equally powerful system. This way carnival festival reverses the
binary opposition, just as a magical realist work does literally. Again, Bakhtin observed the presence of multiple and conflicting voices in a piece of work, especially in the modern novels. He used the term polyphony to suggest this condition. He also mentioned about the technique called heteroglossia that expresses polyphony and carnivalesque spirit in a novel. In a sense, heteroglossia can be noticed in the magical realist novels also, because by keeping the aura of both the real and the magical perspectives, these novels allow many versions of truth to exist simultaneously. It cannot be identified either with fantastic literature or works that present psychological analysis. This genre is not like surrealism. It does not distort reality or create imaginary worlds just as fantasy or science fiction does. It only contorts reality to explain it in a novel way, without giving any hints to the motivations behind that. The subsequent paragraphs will more elaborately express the points of distinction between them.

POST-MODERNISM

It is a term which has been broadly applied to the period following the 1940s. The term was first used by famous historian Arnold Toynbee in 1939 in his *A Study of History*, Vol.1 and that too in a footnote on the very first page. According to him, Post-Modernism began to take shape between the two World Wars (1918-39). In Post-Modernism, there is no authority of tradition, certainty of beliefs. Everything is relative, nothing is absolute, fixed or real and everything is in a state of flux too. It is an age of virtual reality. Magical realist texts invite us to look beyond the limits of the knowable and are truly postmodern in their rejection of the binary, rationalism and reductive materialism of western modernity.
**SURREALISM**

This genre is often confused with magical realism. Though both the movements developed in the first half of the 20th century, yet they have some differences. Surrealism does not deal with the material reality, but with the mind and the imagination. It attempts to express the psychology of human through art with the aid of techniques such as automatic writing, hypnosis, dreaming etc., whereas the magical realists seek to portray the real world itself as having marvellous aspects inherent in it and not the non-physical aspect of life.

**FANTASY LITERATURE**

Another term that is frequently associated with magical realism is fantasy. "It is often erroneously assumed that magic realism and magical realism are forms of fantastical writing" (Bowers 25). But a tremendous level of subtlety is required in distinguishing both the genres. The theorist and critic Tzvetan Todorov’s definition of the fantastic can be useful here. Todorov defines fantastic literature as a piece of narration in which there is a constant faltering between belief and non-belief in the supernatural or extraordinary events presented. For Todorov, the fantastic relies upon the reader’s hesitation between natural and supernatural explanations for the fictional events in the text. This may be a hesitation that is shared with a character in the novel, or it may be emphasized in the text to produce a theme of ambiguity and hesitation (25). Fantastic literature does not strive to achieve willing suspension of disbelief of all the extraordinary events. It transcends the problems of the real world and the author indulges in the world of make-believe. The reader very clearly knows that what he reads is neither possible nor probable. In spite of his or her hesitation to accept the
events, incidents and characterization, the reader can enjoy it for the sake of pleasure or entertainment. This element of doubt that fantastic literature exudes, thwarts the aim of a text to be magical realist in nature. Because, in a magical realist text, the supernatural and the fantastic elements do not disconcert the readers as these are presented as real and mundane in a matter-of-fact manner. Another factor that differentiates fantasy from magical realism is seriousness. Magical realism is a strategy employed by the writers, which sustains the seriousness of the theme. But fantasy merely entertains. It has no contemporary relevance. Whereas, magical realism uses history, myths, politics and cultural customs to convey a realistic assessment of the present world.

**SCIENCE FICTION**

Science fictions often deal with other civilizations, usually advanced cultures set in outer space or earth’s distant future. The main characters are either humanoids or members of different species. They may have unusual powers, such as telepathy. They can rarely perform magic. In these novels, plots are generally plausible with their contexts of time and setting and the narrative consists of action that the reader can imagine without too much difficulty. These novels portray an alternate universe with its own set of rules and characteristics, whereas, magical realist fictions portray the real world without any definite set of rules.

**Geographical Location of Magical Realism**

Magical realism is such a narrative mode which cannot be kept in a specific geographical location. Over the last three decades, it has emerged as an artistic movement of international significance. It is a vehicle for globalization of literature.
Certain locations and countries are frequently associated with this mode of narrative technique like, Latin America, Canada, the Caribbean, India, England etc., where this genre gained tremendous popularity and social acceptance.

**LATIN AMERICA**

Latin America is an important location for magical realist literary production. The fame for being the most popular Latin American magical realist novelist rests on Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who produced an epoch-making magical realist novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in 1967. Between the 1950s and 1960s, a boom period emerged in Latin America, when, many novelists tried to break away from the previous literary traditions and tried to incorporate many modern as well as postmodern styles and techniques to the novelistic discourse. The inclusion of the elements of both magic and reality in the same piece of work is one such technique. In the early stages of magical realist writing in Latin America, the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier wrote his famous magical realist novel *El reino de este mundo* that established a new variant of magical realism arising out of a Latin American context. Carpentier made a distinction between European magical realist writing and its Latin American counterpart by minting a new term *lo real maravilloso americano* which meant American marvellous realism. He saw European magic realism as tiresome pretension unconnected in magical content to its cultural context of production (Bowers 34-35). In order to establish his new genre of *lo real maravilloso americano*, he penned his novel *El reino de este mundo* and made a statement that broke away from the influence of Roh’s magic realism:
Because of the virginity of the land, our upbringing, our ontology, the Faustian presence of the Indian and the black man, the revelation constituted by its recent discovery, its fecund racial mixing [mestizaje], America is far from using up its wealth of mythologies. After all, what is the entire history of America if not a chronicle of the marvelous real? (Carpentier, On the Marvelous Real in America 88)

Carpentier believed that mixing of different cultures is at the heart of the spirit of Latin America and magical realism renders a helping hand in literally expressing this reality. He said, “Marvellous real is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin America. Here the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace” (Carpentier, The Baroque and the Marvelous Real 104). He was of the view that European magical realists produced artificial forms of magic realism, unconnected to their everyday reality, whereas Latin Americans wrote magical realism originating from their own context and personal experience.

ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD

Magical realism in English literature first appeared in the early 1970s in Canada, West Africa and the United States and now spans many locations across the globe like the Caribbean, India, Australia and New Zealand. However, the tradition of magical realism in the English speaking world is very recent as compared to Latin American. Probably the best-known writer of magical realism in the English language is the British-Indian writer Salman Rushdie. As a writer who accepts the term’s application to his writing, he is also clear about his influences in relation to this mode: Nobel Prize winners Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the German novelist and playwright
Gunter Grass, and the Russian novelist Mikhail Bulgakov (1891-1940) (Bower 47). Another English author who must find mention is Angela Carter, the famous English feminist writer of the 1980s and 1990s, who wrote some exuberant magical realist novels, influenced by the comedies of William Shakespeare and the literary theories of the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin. In *Nights at the Circus*, the story follows the life of a working-class girl who develops real wings and becomes a trapeze artist in a circus. In another novel, *Wise Children*, the narrative is told from the working-class feminist perspective of a septuagenarian woman who has cataclysmic house-destroying sex with her even older aristocratic uncle. By adopting magical realistic technique in both her novels, Carter tried to overturn the accepted gender and social roles in the English society, over which imperialism still exerted a strong influence. She had some obvious political motives behind writing these novels. Not only Carter, but all the other English language magical realist writers vehemently opposed British colonialism.

In Indian English writing, apart from Rushdie, two other notable writers of magical realist novel are Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy. However, they do not constitute a movement or group in Indian literature. Because, all these three writers are located in different countries. Rushdie lives between England, India and New York, Ghosh lives between the United States and India and Roy is based in India. They are better referred to as diasporic Indian writers whose writings exhibit a hybrid cultural context.

The situation of magical realism in Canadian literature is more secured, where it enjoys the status of a “sub-genre” of Canadian literature. Writers like Robert -
Kroetsch, Jack Hodgins engaged themselves in writing magical realist texts which were written in exuberant postmodern as well as postcolonial style. Kroetsch’s magical realist novel *What the Crow Said* attempted to express a marginal perspective of rural western Canadians who tried to challenge the assumptions of an authoritative colonialist attitude. Kroetsch was much indebted to Garcia Marquez and his novel had striking similarities with Marquez’s novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Although, following Garcia Marquez’s narrative mode, Kroetsch wrote a very specifically “Canadian” novel (Bowers 50).

Similarly, Jack Hodgins’ novel *The Invention of the World* is thoroughly anti-colonialist in spirit. It tells the story of a tyrannical man who repeats the history of colonization by virtually enslaving the people who live in his community. Another two magical realist novels, *The Cure for Death by Lighting* written by Gail Anderson-Dargatz and *Fall on Your Knees* by Ann-Marie Macdonald tries to paint a deplorable picture of the position of women, particularly lesbian women in the poverty struck and forgotten regions of Canada. In this connection, Maggie Ann Bowers says:

> Canadian magical realism shares with Britain, other postcolonial nations and the United States, a type of magical realism that has resulted from the cross-culturalism of these countries. In Canada, as in the United States, where the dominant culture is based upon an Anglo-European tradition, writers wishing to express one or more cultural influences which do not coincide with dominant pragmatic thinking often employ magical realism. As Canada is one of the most consciously multicultural nations in the world. (Bowers 52)
Another celebrated writer to be associated with magical realist tradition in Canada is Michael Ondaatje. His writings exemplify a colourful exuberant view of magical realism that has connection with Indian or Latin American magical realist tradition. Ondaatje was born into a Sri Lankan family of mixed race and immigrated to Canada. Possibly, his own transcultural and cosmopolitan background influenced his writing.

**AFRICA**

In African literature magical realist novels are written in postcolonial mode. Apart from themes like colonialism, religion or internationalism, African magical realism incorporates local beliefs, traditions and of course Yoruba mythologies. Critic Brenda Cooper notes in this connection:

* African writers very often adhere to this animism, incorporate spirits, ancestors and talking animals, in stories, both adapted folktales and newly invented yarns, in order to express their passions, their aesthetics and their politics. (40)

The most famous author of magical realism in African literature is British Nigerian Ben Okri who wrote *The Famished Road*. The novel follows the struggles of an abiku child (a child attached both to the spirit world and the living world, who is born again only to die and return again) and the child's attempt to negotiate between the two forces from the living and the dead that seek to dominate him. African countries and mainly South Africa has a long history of European settlement and magical realist technique is employed in order to represent the colonial history along with Africa’s chequered cultural heritage. Another writer who deals with dead characters and ghosts
among the living in his writings is Andre Brink. Brink aims at giving an independent identity to the Africans.

**RUSSIA**

Russian writer Victor Shklovsky wrote an essay prior to the publication of Franz Roh's essay in 1925, which was titled *Isskustvo Kak Priyom* ("Art as a Device: Theory of Prose") and in this essay he introduced a term *ostranenie*, which means estrangement. *Ostranenie* is to experience anew in art what was earlier recognized as ordinary and mundane in life. This new term has striking resemblance with magical realism, coined by Franz Roh (Berlina 2). Though many other writers speculated about the existence of a Russian version of magic realism, yet they were reluctant to go into further details. In the prologue to *The Kingdom of the World*, where, Carpentier coined the term *lo real maravilloso americano*, he mentioned about many Russian personalities like Tolstoy, Dostoyevski, Pushkin and Ivanov etc. Wendy B. Faris in her essay also does not mention about Russian magical realism though she names a Russophone writer named Gogol as early magical realist. Gogol's 1836 story "The Nose" fits her definition of the genre where both realism and fantastic elements are amalgamated. In Stephen M. Hart and Wen-Chin Ouyang’s edited book *A Companion to Magical Realism*, except Gogol, no other Russian writer finds any mention. Erika Haber's *The Myth of the Non-Russian: Iskander and Aitmatov's Magical Universe* is the only major work of Russian magical realism where Haber analyses the works of Soviet writers Fazil Iskander and Chingiz Aitmatov who were non-Russians but wrote in Russian.
Only one author whose works were successful in creating ripples in the realm of Russian magical realistic literature was Viktor Pelevin. He experimented a lot in his short stories and novelettes collected in *The Blue Lantern* and in *A Werewolf Problem in Central Russia and Other Stories*. Most of his stories transgress the genre boundaries between the real and the marvellous and can be tagged as magical real. Two other notable Russian writers of this genre are Ludmila Petrushevskaya and Ludmila Ulitskaya. Although Roh’s *magischer realismus* shared resemblance with Shklovsky’s idea of *ostranenie* or Gogol was regarded as one of the major exponents of magical realism, who wrote keeping in mind the requirements of magical realist genre, as laid down by W. B. Faris, yet the Russian magical realism failed to catch the attention of the western scholars and critics.

**THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

The culture of the United States is truly cosmopolitan and merges different cross-cultural groups. These groups like Indian American, African American always ask for equal status and relief from being marginalized. The issues related to marginalization, misrepresentation of gender roles are best suited for magical realist novels. Many novelists and particularly a group of female writers adopted that technique during the late 1980s. The most important among them is Toni Morrison whose novels are influenced by African American oral culture and West African mythology. Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved* and *Jazz* – all have magical realist elements including the arrival of an abiku child, the presence of ghostly figures from the past, women with magical powers or born without navels, men who can fly etc. Maggie Ann Bowers states:
Magical realism is employed by these women writers to reflect the complex and sometimes paradoxical multiple cultural influences that they experience as cross-cultural American women. Finding herself trapped between the racist Anglo-European American and male dominated Chinese American cultures, Maxine Hong Kingston uses magical realism in her novel *The Woman Warrior: A Memoir of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* ([1976] 1981a) in order to express the misrepresented history of Chinese American from an insider in a community where discussion of the past is taboo. The narrator incorporates and adapts Chinese oral storytelling traditions, with many tales of ghosts, to her own Californian context with a view to creating a Chinese American communal memory. For instance, her mother tells her tales about ghosts that she encountered in China and imbues the tales with moral guidance for her daughter's American life. This mixture of Chinese, dominant American and the cross-cultural Chinese American child's perspectives, and the narrator's confusion regarding what is real and what is make-believe, creates a magical realist dimension to the text. (58)

Leslie Marmon Silko is another magical realist writer who is known for her epic postmodern novel *The Almanac of the Dead*. The novel concerns some environmental issues to be dealt with seriously. It signals the urgency of saving mother earth from misuse and exploitation. The magical realist plot centres around a native Mexican eco-warrior named Tacho, who gains power and guidance by deciphering the signs from his prayer bundles and giving an ear to the songs of sacred
Macaw birds. The novel is a merging point for different mythologies and belief systems, namely Native American, Native Mexican and West African.

While discussing about magical realist tradition in United States, we cannot deny the role of some Chicano writers. Chicano people are Spanish-speaking culturally mixed group who are vulnerable to Mexican and Native American influences. The most famous among them is Ana Castillo whose novel So Far From God, set in a small Chicano town abounds in magical happenings like the ability to change shape, defy death etc.

Another strong current of magical realism came from the Caribbean region which opened possibilities for Spanish-speaking Caribbean, Latin American Caribbean and English-speaking Caribbean literature. The two notable torchbearers are Pauline Melville and Wilson Harris. Melville wrote novels like The Ventriloquist's Tale, short story collections like, Shape-Shifter: Stories, The Migration of Ghosts etc., employing magical realistic technique. Most of her writings are set in Guyana. On the other hand, Harris, another Guyanese wrote magical realistic novels like Jonestown and Palace of the Peacock, with a surrealistic fervour that was earlier seen in Carpentier’s notion of marvellous realism.

EUROPE

On mainland Europe, literary magical realism has a post-expressionistic and surrealistic twist. Many European magical realists drew inspiration from Italian writer Massimo Bontempelli who adopted the idea of magic realism from Franz Roh. Robert Dombroski remarked in this connection, “He believed that magic realism in particular provided the prime function of a properly modern literature...to act on the
collective consciousness by opening new mythical and magical perspectives on reality” (522).

Two Flemish writers Johan Daisne and Flubert Lampo cannot deny the inspiration they drew from Bontempelli. Daisne realized that distorted reality could be captured best with the aid of magical realistic narrative mode. His novel *De trap van steen en wolken* (*The Stairs of Stone and Clouds*), written in 1942 uses dream as a source of magic which ultimately makes his language more surreal. He used childhood as a motif in order to distance himself from the horrors of Second World War. Lampo was also interested in drawing out the intricacies associated with dream and sought inspiration in psychoanalyst Carl Jung’s study about dreams. In his novels like, *De komst van Joachim Still* (*The Coming of Joachim Stiller*), *Kasper in de onderwereld* (*Kasper in the Underworld*), apart from dream sequences, he incorporated elements from European myth and fairy tales.

However, the best known magical realist writer in mainland Europe is Gunter Grass, a German novelist of repute who authored a critically acclaimed magical realist novel *The Tin Drum*. The novel is all about the personal history of a boy with magical powers, who ceases to grow physically. The novel is set in a German-speaking household in a part of Poland that was at that time under German occupation and was reeling under Nazi atrocity. The novel develops as retrospective narrative, narrated by Oskar, looking back to the context of his own early life. He employs magical realist technique to capture the fragmented reality of war torn Germany under Nazi regime. In this connection, Michael Reder remarked:
Although Grass himself admits to having been influenced by fairy tales, his magical realism can be seen to have arisen from the same source as Garcia Marquez’s, that is, the distortion of truth through the effects of extremely horrific violence, which Grass had witnessed during and immediately after the Second World War. (75)

Another two writers, who can be included in the long list of magical realists, are German writer Patrick Suskind and Italian story teller Italo Calvino. Suskind is well known for his popular novel *Das Parfum (Perfume)*, which was adapted to make a film also. The narrative is carried forward in a magical realistic matter-of-fact tone. Calvino’s stories also delve deeper into a matter-of-fact narrative style which contains fantastic events.

Thus it is evident that European magic realism concerns more with experimentation of different narrative techniques and has stark contrast with the Latin American counterpart. Latin American magical realism draws its inspiration more from its own culture and mythology whereas, European magical realism does not depend much on the writer’s mythological and cultural contexts, but likes to play with the words and the language in a strikingly original and metaphorical way.

**Magical Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse**

A major cross-cultural variant of magical realism is post colonial magical realistic writing. The works included here are set in a postcolonial context and written from a postcolonial perspective that challenges the authority of a colonialist frame of mind. The proliferation of magical realist writing in English in the last part of the twentieth century was quite marked. This period also saw the emergence of a large
number of postcolonial novels. Ultimately, both trends became complementary to each other. Many well known magical realist novels were written in a postcolonial frame of mind.

Post colonialism refers to the political and social attitudes that oppose colonial power, recognize the effects of colonialism on other nations and refer specifically to nations which have gained independence from the rule of another imperial state. Colonial rulers are often blamed for trying to define the colonized people and their nation from their own perspective and to impose a homogeneous, authoritative historical and cultural identity on the colonized nation. The postcolonial writers do not address the issues associated with colonialism directly, but if we delve deeper, then these works reveal a concern for colonized people. Magical realism seems the best suited narrative technique to capture the double-faceted nature of post colonialism. Canadian postmodernist critic Stephen Slemon’s 1988 theory of postcolonial magical realism very strongly testifies this notion. He gives three solid arguments. Firstly, due to its dual narrative structure, magical realism is able to present the postcolonial context from the perspective of both the colonized and the colonizers’ through its narrative structure as well as its themes. Secondly, it is able to reveal the tensions or gaps of representation in such a context. Thirdly, the gaps can be filled with the voices of forgotten histories of the colonized people. So, Elleke Boehmer claims:

*Drawing on the special effects of magic realism, postcolonial writers in English are able to express their view of a world fissured, distorted, and made incredible by cultural displacement...*
supernatural with local legends and imagery derived from colonialist cultures to represent societies which have been repeatedly unsettled by invasion, occupation, and political corruption. Magic effects, therefore, are used to indict the follies of both empire and its aftermath. (235)

Magical realism opposes everything that is fundamentalism—racism, ethnicity and the quests for roots, origins and homogeneity. This is the key to its popularity as a mode of fiction, particularly in the postcolonial English-speaking world. The themes like history of colonization, the importation of slaves and influx of immigrants, the political turmoil after independence, economic dependency on imperial powers like the United States and England are retold and rewritten from an alternative point of view in magical realist novels. For example, Alejo Carpentiers' novel *The Kingdom of this World* is told by a slave and gives witness to numerous traumatic events occurring in Haiti during its colonial rule. Likewise, in *The House of the Spirits*, Allende attempts an inclusion of fantastic elements in real life with historical setting.

To conclude, magical realism is a combination of reality and magical fantasy. It is the transformation of the real into unreal, is an art of surprise by creating distorted version of time and space and is characterized by a cold cerebral aloofness that tries to cater to the aesthetic subtleties of a few sophisticated individuals. It is an indirect and metaphorical means to convey the undercurrents of reality and is very much adaptable still today. Stephen M Hart says:

*Magical realism possesses a broadly based public appeal. Indeed, it was the only “foreign” fiction genre chosen by Bloomsbury when the*
publisher launched the new Reading Group Internet books on various aspects of world literature. The genre of J. K. Rowling's hugely successful Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone is listed as none other than "magical realism". [...] the genre has evolved over time and place. This is precisely because of the ways in which magical realism has crossed national, linguistic, and genre boundaries. (305-306)

Finally, Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris give the stamp of approval to magical realism as the most fashionable and popular narrative mode in the twentieth century- "Almost as a return on capitalism's hegemonic investment in its colonies, magical realism is especially alive and well in postcolonial contexts and is now achieving a compensatory extension of its market worldwide (2)."
Works Cited


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