Conclusion

Although we are in different boats you in your boat and we in our canoe we share the same river of life.

Chief Oren Lyons

The thesis ‘Facets of Magical Realism: A Study of the Short Stories of Latin America’ was carried out to set free the term ‘Magical Realism’ from being used to describe all cultural artefacts that do not correspond to the definition of a traditional category of description. It has also helped to understand that all knowledge, be it from the West or the non-West, is valid and crucial to make sense of the world and life. The objective was not to create a hierarchical approach where one culture is superior to the other but rather to see differences and accept them as differences, not as elements that need to be acculturated, transcultured or assimilated. These differences were consolidated as facets of Magical Realism.

This thesis has been an investigation into the short stories of Latin America to discover facets of Magical Realism. The short stories proved to be a good primary source for this research as the variety of the stories encompassing different regions of Latin America, Spanish and Portuguese America, helped to expand the study. The focus was on regional varieties as a means to discuss the Poetics of Magical Realism. Study of Magical Realism has most often taken the benefit of the novels to make the varied claims about the mode. The short stories, being less explored, were a valuable source to scrutinize for this research. The Oral Tradition is a part of the Pre-Columbian, Pre-Colonial Latin America and the short stories helped in tracing many features pertaining to this tradition. It is a known fact that most Oral societies have implemented the written structure for communication, but there is still a dependence on the oral forms of expression. The instances of such forms in the short stories
lead us to conclude that there is an instinctive need to preserve their particular culture.

There has been no exacting rationale behind the categorizing of the stories that have been analyzed in each chapter. The facets determined the stories and the groups formed themselves in the different chapters. This has resulted in placing writers well-known in the world of Magical Realism along with the lesser-known writers. Thus the prime aim of introducing writers who are not familiar to many readers outside Latin America has been accomplished.

The journey that this study has taken is from the known facts of Magical Realism in the global context to the localized complexity of the term. In spite of the fact that the comparison between Magical Realism of Latin America and the Magical Realism of the global world is not highlighted by using the traditional comparative method, the facets of Magical Realism from Latin America become a study in comparison with the global variety of Magical Realism, forming the sub-text of this thesis. The comparison in this thesis has followed what Susan Bassnett discussed in ‘Reflections on Comparative Literature in the twenty first century’ that it is a “method of approaching literature” (Bassnett 2006:6). The point of this research has been to situate an individual way of approaching Magical Realism in a context (Latin America). The idea is to juxtapose it with other approaches that have been made earlier, not with the intention of setting a pecking order but to show that “actual comparison comes through juxtaposition of the diverse contributions and through the response of readers to that juxtaposition”. (Bassnett 2006:7). This kind of approach foregrounds the reader and this has been the second aim of this thesis-to vary the reading of Magical Realism, keeping contexts in mind rather than examining it merely as a global phenomenon.

Each of the chapters signifies an important intersection of a journey that the researcher, has taken in this dissertation. This journey is crucial both to the research and the researcher. Magical Realism caught the attention of the researcher. The researcher was struck by the
similarities in the Latin American and the Indian view of reality after the reading of a few the magical realist novels from Latin America, including Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. So the researcher became aware of the fact that there was some contribution that could be made to the study of Magical Realism which was not based on a Western perspective.

The decision to open a research discussion that pursues a different path from what was already understood about Magical Realism was initially interesting and exciting. But as the journey progressed, the truth had to be faced that it is complex to go against the grain of academia because the theoretical frameworks that have been already set and discussed become far easier to replicate. These frameworks are so well proven that every analysis of the stories that was made, keeping the researcher’s framework in mind, created self-doubt but there was need to go ahead steadily because that it is time to engage in research that celebrates difference. It is crucial in the 21st century as Bassnett says to “abandon pointless debates about terminology and definition, to focus more productively on the study of texts themselves...” This was the third purpose of this thesis (Bassnett 2006:10).

The magical realist texts that were examined in this research helped to understand how Magical Realism, as a literary mode, enhances knowledge about ‘human literary behaviour’ (Nemesio 1999:2). More important than the study of the texts as being a part of Latin American culture, this study was a focus on the literary behaviour of Magical Realism, as seen in the Latin American texts. It is possible that some of the findings in the investigation can be taken as being present in Magical Realist texts belonging to the other parts of the world but it must be emphasized that the findings in this research are not directed towards ‘exclusivising’ or ‘romanticizing’ Latin America. On the other hand, by drawing facets of Magical Realism from Latin America and discussing the uniqueness of these facets, it has helped in establishing the importance of the mode as a serious branch of Literature. It has
also helped in freeing Magical Realism from the limitations of being categorized as belonging to the postcolonial world, as describing an exotic world or as a mode that can never take the place of realism.

This thesis explains the importance of contextualizing a literary discourse in the region that has either deliberately or accidentally become the home of the mode. Global studies have taken precedence over local, region-specific studies. There is a constant desire to strike a balance between the two but this betrays local spaces. Passing references are made in most articles about the fact that Magical Realism is an expression of a reality that belongs to certain cultures but all discussions privilege the global angle and underplay the local, non-objective, nonpositivist, irrational, pre-logical angle. This thesis deconstructs the well-known discussions about Magical Realism; it centres the application that Latin America makes of the mode. This centring has been achieved by privileging the texts (the short stories) from Latin America.

Discussions on Magical Realism centred on the lack of a classic definition, on it being pigeon-holed as postcolonial discourse, on it being a reaction against the master narratives, and finally placing it against the authoritative discourse of Realism. To deconstruct such debates and to place Magical Realism in Latin America was the objective of this research and the chapter entitled ‘The Origins of Magical Realism: Centring in Latin America’ makes a conclusive statement of the findings.

Critics, both from the Latin American and the Western world, deliberate about Magical Realism, keeping a trans-national methodology. These arguments debate on issues that universalize the deployment of Magical Realism by Non-Western writers. It is decided that “the marginalized status of many third-world countries encourages their turn to magical realism – the expectation being that only a mode juxtaposing the supernatural and the
everyday can capture the dichotomies of third-world living”. ( Schroeder 2004:157-8).

Contextualizing the study brought out the nuances of its application in Latin America and facilitated in understanding that it is important to focus on literary discourses as acts of communication in a specific reality.

The search for a working definition of Magical Realism, which could be used for this research, became more and more difficult as the researcher waded through varied definitions that were accepted as the standard. This led to the fact that searching for an appropriate definition for a flexible mode like Magical Realism is not necessary when it displays facets that make the study more fruitful and relevant. This helps students of Literature acquire a better approach to reading and studying Magical Realism.

The lead to this research was the fact that in debates on Magical Realism, the term is most often used by literary critics rather than the writers themselves. The writers do not highlight the magical because they do not see a difference between the realities they portray in their texts to the reality displayed in a mimetic text. Garcia Gabriel Marquez himself said that the magical portrayed in his texts is the reality of the Latin American world. It is important to see Magical Realism not opposed to realism but as a perception of a different kind of reality. The chapter ‘The Magic in Realism: A tapestry of Realisms’ has explored this realism, seen in abundance, in the texts of Latin America indicating that it is Latin American Realism and not just Magical Realism.

The accepted connotations that surround the word ‘magical’ have been surveyed in order to get at the plural spaces that ‘magic’ occupies in the Latin American texts. These spaces become the spaces of reality in the texts that were studied. The move from looking at the two discourses as contradictory, later as syncretic to reaching a point where it accepts oppositionality has been the progress that this research has made in studying both magic and reality. Oppositionality does not mean that it is oxymoronic in a derogatory sense but that the
strength of Magical Realism lies in its oppositionality as seen in the Latin American texts; it gives way to a dynamic dialogue between magic and reality, emanating from the oral tradition, different from the static spaces of magic and reality created by cultures and societies that privilege writing.

The important findings in this research are seen in chapters III and IV where the acknowledged theoretical frameworks of postcolonialism, postmodernism and feminism are addressed. The stereotypical definition of the native and the Western concept of native knowledge and wisdom have been deconstructed in Chapter III. It is in this chapter that a study of the stories from Latin America prove that they are not merely fictional stories but contain knowledge of the cultural nuances of Latin America. The study of an understanding of the native of a land becomes difficult to pinpoint when we study Latin American stories. Latin America cannot be seen as a native culture in a complete sense. Its existence is deeply rooted in the European tradition.

These stories underline certain important facts about Latin American cultural mix between the Amerindians, the Europeans and the Africans. A close study of the stories display the fact that Magical Realism cannot be associated with Latin America as a discourse best suited for the mestizaje of Latin America. They have proved that the discourse is a discourse of the everyday reality of Latin America. In addition, the conquest of Latin America went hand in hand with the print culture and during the colonial period, the Viceregal period and the Independence struggle, the novelists of Latin America found themselves completely caught in the new technology of writing. The conquistadors ensured that Latin America’s past was uprooted and that its engagement with literary forms arising out of the oral tradition was forgotten. The writers of Latin America received Magical realism enthusiastically as they saw in it a means of being able to return to their Oral past, and convey an everyday reality. Magical Realism became associated with Latin Americanism and
its form of expression. It was not just an experiment with them. It was like coming home, to represent themselves as true Latin Americans, after years of having lost themselves in the hegemony of writing. Hence the stories, examined, teach us to be open to definitions, classifications and categories.

In Chapter IV, the application that the Women writers of Latin America make of Magical Realism was studied in depth. The results of examining the stories by women indicate that the importance is on communicating notions of the Latin American woman, differing from the impressions made by the dominant cultures. The stereotypical approach to the Latin American woman as being powerless and a victim of a patriarchal society was analyzed and her strength as a woman was highlighted.

The findings in this research do not, by any means, indicate that the journey taken in this research has reached a fulfilled destination. It gives room for other researchers to take it forward from here. To assist researchers to conduct such types of research, there is an ample need for translations. It might seem contradictory that this research is localized and makes demands on the need for translations. This is mainly because the researcher realized in the process of this research that multiple translations support a more objective study, a basic requirement of research. Though the researcher could source a number of anthologies, it was found that the translations were by the same translators. Maria Luisa Bombal’s ‘The Tree’ was the only story that the researcher could get in multiple translations and an examination of both the translations gave a glimpse of what the original would be, native to Latin America. The first translation by Richard Cunningingham & Lucia Guerra is more formal and does not have the easy fluency of the second by Torres-Rioseco. The use of expressions and sentences like ‘a necklace of sparrows’, ‘hospital chamber’ ‘The rubber tree does not talk to her’ builds a narrative wherein the narrator stays outside the narrative, an omniscient narrator. In contrast, the second translation focuses on expressions and sentences like ‘garland of
birds’, ‘kindly room’, ‘The gum tree talks to her and woos her into his world.’ The second translation exudes the intimacy of story-telling that belongs to the Oral Tradition. The politics of translation is detrimental to getting to the original but at the same time, the differences introduced by different translators help in determining which translation is closer to the original and thereby the closest in communicating that particular reality.

The study of the short stories of the magical realist mode from Latin America proved that the world continuously places scientific knowledge in contrast to knowledge based on the imagination and common sense. The magical realist texts present knowledge necessary for man’s existence-knowledge that makes sense in the magical world; that makes sense to the people who live in that reality. The first world, in its ‘whitening’ project, de-centred the native indigenous cultures and established itself as the centre based on the fact that the truths arrived at by experiment and logic has no equal in the world of superstition, magic, and rituals. The important fact is that no culture in human history lacks scientific knowledge and “without rejecting the accepted Western paradigms of science and history wholesale, magic realist fiction does suggest that, in their focus on facts, logical thought and empirical proof, these indices are by themselves insufficient to capture the human experience and therefore need to be supplemented by other modes of knowledge production” (Hegerfeldt 2002:76).

Every magical realist text from Latin America is in the process of taking the reader on a spiritual journey. The narrative is the ‘materia prima’ and as one progresses through the text, the reader does not find himself in a physical place where the understanding of the text, meaning-formation or the comprehension of the narrative become important. They get dismissed as representations of worldly gain and the process of reading takes on a spiritual allegory. The short stories that were studied take the reader through an alchemical process but the solitude of alchemy is different from the solitude of the scientist in a laboratory. The alchemist works with fluid experiments, the results of which do not subscribe to any known
or particular theory. The scientist, on the other hand, strives towards empirical truths that need to be tested and proved.

A close scrutiny of the texts has led to the conclusion that the synthesis between magic and reality is instinctive, not cerebral. A Latin American magic realist challenges both the centre and the margin, without foregrounding either. Hence magic and reality are two autonomous codes. And critics who talk of Magical Realism as ‘merging’ between magic and realism are bent upon homogenizing it. Looking at Magic and Realism as autonomous codes suits the heterogeneity of Latin America. The diverse facets that emerged out of this investigation proves that when a close study of texts is undertaken, Magical Realism is released from the homogenous approach that has been taken in the past.

This localized study is not contesting global spaces but is, on the other hand, focusing on the dynamism of local spaces. This enhances a study of global spaces and sees the varied differences in different cultures as important to assess the world at large. It helps in re-studying both homogeneity and heterogeneity in order to abstain from seeing the world as flat and having only the qualities that have been decided by the West. The time has come to give voice to one’s own culture without being apologetic or feeling inferior. This apologetic position or the feelings of inferiority have been imbibed in native cultures as a result of the process of colonization.

Using Indigenous Methodologies to expand the ideas of this thesis has been effective in giving expression to local experiences. It has also been instrumental in positioning the findings in this investigation. As an Indian, there has been identification with the term ‘Magical Realism’ and the reality that is conveyed in the short stories of Latin America. Simon Gikandi, in a talk delivered in December 2013, entitled, ‘From South to South: Comparative Literature from Below’, states that discussions about ‘realism’ ‘identity’ and ‘bourgeoisie’ that are confronted when South to South comparisons are made is significant.
This helps in localizing rather than universalizing. Hence this kind of identification adds dimensions to this research.

Finally this study has proved that it is difficult to decide what is not truthful to life; it emphasizes the idea that “fictions must be acknowledged as important parts of the human experience”. Anne Hegerfeldt observes that “these “anti-truth-claims” serve to rehabilitate the narrators, suggesting that perhaps there is more than one way of telling the truth, without any single way having a prerogative” (Hegerfeldt 2002:68).

The future of this research lies in studying regional differences in Latin America to examine how these differences add dimensions to the facets of Magical Realism. There is a great deal of potential in investigating into the manner in which the varied states of Latin America approach this mode which has been treated as belonging to the whole of Latin America in a homogenous way. The study of heterogeneity will be enhanced when regional differences within Latin America are studied.

To conclude, it is interesting to verify what 21st century Latin American writers think about Magical Realism; the mode that has been ‘the benchmark of their alterity’ (Camayd-Frexias 582). By and large, writers disassociate themselves from the term ‘Magical Realism’. This is mainly because the literary mode has been connected with the social reality of Latin America. In an article entitled, ‘Latin America, a Hologram’, Jorge Volpi, states that “the artistic category suddenly became a sociopolitical tag for the whole region” (Volpi 2014). Volpi goes on to say that what makes it even more difficult for the Latin Americans to accept is that the emphasis is always on the ‘indifference’ that is shown by the characters to the bizarre happenings in the texts, thereby suggesting that there is an innate lack of reason in the Latin American consciousness. Because of all these reasons, “As has happened with the decline of dictators and guerillas, at the beginning of the 21st century, magical realism has also stopped dominating the literary life of Latin America.” (Volpi 2014)
It is significant that a young generation of Latin American writers, like Jorge Volpi, Ignacio Padilla, Pedro Angel Palou, Eloy Urroz and Vicente Herrasti, have broken with the literary traditions of their country and have called themselves the ‘crack generation’. The desire to go global is strong in them whereas the US Latino/a authors are in search of their roots in the local spaces where their parents lived before they migrated to the US. These writers, unlike the McOnDo group, are friendly towards Macondo. In addition, the post-boom saw the emergence of a large number of women writers using the Magical Realist mode and this continues even today with writers like Cristina Garcia, Sandra Cisneros.

In spite of all these controversial shifts that Magical Realism has brought about in the Latin American writer’s perception, the fact remains that Magical Realism will not fade. The facets will differ and the tug-of-war between the local and the global Magical Realism will continue. Daniel Olivas, a Chicano author, says “It startles me a bit because when I write in what some call the “magical realist” style, I don’t say to myself: “Okay, it’s time to write magical realism.” I just write and whatever comes out, comes out. The label doesn’t bother me, but in the end, unless we’re studying literature, do we need labels?” (Olivas, by Tamara Sellman for Margin).
Works Cited:


Volpi, Jorge. Latin America: A Hologram - IDB events.iadb.org › IDB Home › Events. 17.01.2014.