Elements Of Magic Realism: A Reading Of

Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years Of Solitude* And

Salman Rushdies’ *Midnight’s Children*

N. Ramesh Chandra Srikanth
Lecturer in English
Govt Degree College, Thorrur
Warangal (Affiliated to Kakatiya University)

Abstract

“Magic Realism” (el realismo magical) was a term first coined in 1949 by the Cuba novelist Alejo Carpentier to describe the matter-of-fact combination of the fantastic and every day in Latin American fiction. Later exemplified by novels like Gunter Grass’s *The Tin Drum* (1959) and Marquez’s *one hundred years of solitude* and also applied to paintings by famous painter Micheal Parks - world foremost artist in the realm of imaginary realism and Rob Gonsalves a Canadian Painter often categorized as surrealist but injects a sense of magic into realistic scenes. This paper studies importance of the Magic Realism as a Popular Literary Construct in select novels and how the two writers incorporated elements of Magic Realism to reflect their society and culture towards universal appeal.

The implicit manner of presentation with reference to the happenings of society or nation or world not only belongs to the responsibility of people of that region, but also of universality (The
reference here is to Garcia Marquez, edited and introduced by Robbin Fiddian, Longmen group Limited, 1955). This strategy of interrogation and revision is reflected in the writings of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie especially in *One Hundred Years Of Solitude And Midnights Children* but what type of aspects these writers took from this vast experience into a truncated, is only the thought of the basic moments. The features of this theory or these writers keen insight show the whole method of this Magic Realism in its practice.

The idea that reality contains magical elements is inseparable from the cultural assumptions of the people who embrace such ideas and are reflective to their system of beliefs.

The ultimate roots of this thesis of ‘marvellous real/the magical real lie in a discourse of the marvellous that originated in the Sixteenth Century, Prof Chiampi insists on the historical phrase and significance and discourse in the collective imagination and cultural outlook of Spanish America. The Paper explores Magic Realism as a study in select novels of Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie and how their national history, the society, colonialism, the era of post colonialism and the changing the dimensions of duration of generation, Irony towards the significance of their whole experience of particular region to nation and towards universe in its omnipotence.

**KeyWords:** Magic, Realism, Marvelous Real, Myth, History, Time, Ambiguity, Reality, supernaturalism and subjective exaggeration, Intertextuality.

**Introduction**

In this presentation, the study is primarily focused to explore the elements of magic realism in the two seminal novels, *one hundred years of solitude* by the Latin American Columbian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez and *Midnights’ Children* by the Indian born British writer Salman Rushdie. In this study my thrust is to emphasize the distinct characteristics of magic realism as revealed in these two texts and tried to define Magic Realism incorporating list of thoughts and
ideas by other critics about this popular genre. It is also analyzed how these great writers have presented magic realism as their vital tool in employing Magic and fantastic elements with reality to create an aspect of magical realism in a distinct way in their respective novels.

As far as the novels written in the form of Magic Realism on a Comparative note are very few, this research study tries to overlap those gaps by comparing two novels from two continents, Latin America and Asia entitled *One hundred years of solitude* and *Midnights’ Children*. Though these writers are from different continents varying in the influence of surroundings and history in particular, the general objective of my presentation is to identify and demonstrate the magical elements in both the novels. To find the comparative and similarities in presenting the characteristics of magic realism and how these distinct features of this new construct effect in the meaning of each novel in the context of Post-Colonial Scenario towards universal appeal.

The most famous and important magic-realist author in the Hispanic environment is definitely Gabriel Garcia Márquez, is widely recognized as the perfectionist of this new literary construct ‘Magic Realism’ and greatly related to the Hispanic environment. He has become the pioneer of the ‘Latin American Boom’ through his magnum opus *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. He is considered to be a member of the generation of authors following Borges and the group of authors, including Milan Kundera, Salman Rushdie, and Carlos Fuentes, D.M. Thomas, Toni Morrison and many others. Basically, Magic Realism combines realism and the magic (or fantastic) in a way that the magical elements and miracles rise naturally from the reality portrayed.

I

Magic Realism is the most important literary mode of the twentieth- Century. It is a concept first conceived by critics in the 1920s and 1930s contributed to the development of black consciousness and their suppression by the colonizers. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2002:122). Magic Realism sometimes in the literary sense referred as a mode of writing that incorporates the
“fantastic” in the “mundane” that emerged in the 1960s in Latin American fiction as a reaction to Western Realism.

According to Zamora and Faris, Magic Realism is originated as an antagonistic reaction to the European Rationale to demean the dignity of the colonized people. (Zamora and Faris, 1995:135-136). This rejection of the western realism left a gap and the writers had to fill this and this resulted in the emergence of Magical Realism.


Alejo Carpentier who coined the term ‘Lo Real Maravilloso Americano’ referred magic realism as, seemingly miraculous occurrences in Latin America. This is contrasted with the lack of magic and imagination in European Folklore.

He opines, “The marvelous real that I defend and that is our own marvelous real is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin American. Here the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace”. (Alejo Carpentier.1995 [1975] p. 102-104 ).

One of the main features of this genre is the presence of a fantastical element which cannot be explained according to our knowledge of the world, but the magical things really do happen. The characters mostly accept these things without questioning. Another point is that the magic-realist events exists in the gap’ between two worlds -- the real and the magic; these two worlds are often represented by the worlds of the dead and the living. Therefore, in almost all the magic-realist texts, the reader finds the appearance of the ghosts and the living in contact with them. This notion has a connection with another element and that is the use of legends and folklore. The last characteristic I will mention is the altered perception of time, space and identity (Wikipedia; Zamora 167-177). The purpose of using magic realism in writing prose differs from author to author. For the ‘decentralized' authors (including Rushdie) it serves as a device to present their
opinions on the mainstream culture and politics. At the same time it helps to demonstrate the distance between the centre and the margin (between the West and the East in the case of Rushdie). To understand Rushdie's work we must class him as a postmodernist and the author from 'elsewhere'. Most of the authors who write in English, but are of foreign origin are not included in the canon of English literature. Even though Salman Rushdie comes from India, he is incorporated in these cannon.

Thus Magic Realism as a narrative technique holds subjective exaggeration, myth, history, time, ambiguous reality and supernaturalism. These ideas are eventually taken rugged method of reality of human existence and its happenings in fixed limits of past into present and present into future. These ideas are contrasted with the action of the past into the present. Luis Leal, an internationally recognized scholar defines Magic Realism as “an attitude toward reality that can be expressed in popular or cultured forms, in elaborate or rustic styles in closed or open structures”. (Luis Leal, 1995. p. 119-123).

The specific objective of my paper is to envisage the elements of magic realism in both the novels and how these two writers from different continents and varied history, struggled with untangling reality by trying to get behind the inexplicable in things, in life, in human acts in creating the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances to be more realistic than the realist text.

The renowned Colombian author and perfectionist of Magic Realism, Gabriel Garcia Marquez defines this popular genre as,

“a kind of premeditated literature that offers too static and exclusive a vision of reality. However good or bad they may be, they are books which finish on the last page. Disproportion is part of our reality too. Our reality is in itself all out of proportion. In other words, Garcia Marquez suggests that the magic text is, paradoxically, more realistic than the realist text.” (Scott Simpkins, 1995. p.148)
While, in the words of Patricia Merivale, the Indian born British writer Salman Rushdie sees Magic Realism as,

“a way of showing reality more truly with the marvelous aid of metaphor and as a development out of Surrealism that expresses a genuinely Third World Consciousness” (Patricia Merivale, 1995. p. 451).

The implicit manner of presentation with reference to the happenings of the society or the nation or the world, not only belongs to the responsibility of people of that region but also of universality. (The reference here is to Garcia Marquez, edited and introduced by Robbin Fiddian, Longmen group Limited, 1955).

This strategy of interrogation and revision is reflected in the writings of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie, but what type of aspects these writers took from their vast experience into a truncated, is only the thought of the basic moments. The features and elements of this theory of Magic Realism and their keen insight show the whole method of this Magic Realism in its practice.

In the context of mid-twentieth century definitions of cultural identity and the development of post-colonial theory, Magic Realism takes the political character on and overtly in its challenge to the rationalistic assumptions of western culture and makes a categorical assertion of the difference of Latin America and post colonial cultures.

II

Gabriel Garcia Marquez in his *One Hundred Years of Solitude* sums up the biblical history. The narrator, outside time, recounting the past, present, future of Macando from a temporal point of the future beyond. He constantly relates on past events to subsequent events in retrospective future tense because the events for which the characters must wait are already known to him. The temporal structure like apocalypse is basically rectilinear rather than cyclical. He concludes on the last point: "the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second
opportunity on earth”. Thus the endless generational cycles Buendias and recurring sequence of events are in fact finite and reach their end:

"The history of the family was a machine with unavoidable repetitions, a turning wheel that would have gone on spilling into eternity”. Were it not for the progressive and irremediable wearing of the axle” (Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa, Harmonds Worth: Penguin Books, pp. 3.64-5, 1972).

Garcia Marquez in his “One Hundred Years of Solitude” demystifies the process of American history by pointing out the negative role in the evolution and decline of ‘Maconda’. It is the story of Buendia's family of generations of rebirth never repeats. The idea of biblical myth is stopped the rebirth of present history is questioned. It is the evolution, decadence, renovation of the vitals of human bile in ideology. There is a code of sexual conduct that is puritanical, class conscious character and repressive. In the sphere of socio-political determinacy, the Buendia's are against the Government. The generations of Buendia's are of immaturity, inflexibility in the case of colonel Aureliano with callousness and the failure of the will' and an inability to break out of fixed patterns of behavior which repeatedly prevent' either individuals or the group from attaining progress. Garcia Marquez trying to meet the socio-political demands and failing to meet the literary ones aspire the writers to wait for the best novelists to witness the violence and to realize that they were in the presence of a great novel and had neither the serenity nor the patience, nor even the cleverness, to take the time they needed to learn how to write it. Not having a tradition to follow in Colombia, every novelist had to begin from the scratch, and one could not accomplish a literary tradition overnight.

Whereas, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is often compared to Laurence Sterne's eighteenth-century novel *Tristram Shandy* due to its self-reflective narrative stance and to Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) for its skillful blending of the mundane and the fantastic. *Midnight's Children* explores not only political, social, and cultural events in modern
India but such universal issues as the nature of literature and the relationship between individual and collective history.

Rushdie’s novel *Midnight’s Children* is not a consistent theme. His theme is mainly depended on zigzag trajectories of persons into history in an allegorical method with a span of sixty two years. From the beginning Rushdie maintains the continuous efforts at synchronizing the three generations into national and domestic life so that the odyssey of Azizes and the Sinais becomes the Odyssey of nation. It is the experience of family living in Amritsar, Bombay and migrating to Karachi. There is a virtual strength in Indian literary history; the Jallianwallabagh tragedy, Quit India Movement, Cabinet Mission, Freedom Muslim league, riots and bloodshed, Five Year Plans, Chinese aggression, Pakistan war, Liberation of Bangladesh and emergency.

There are also typical attitudes like descence, chaos and disillusion, communal tensions, religious fanaticism besides traditional values and modernized efforts. It is an extraordinary saga of epic dimensions and resonances. Right from the beginning Saleem is conscious of his historical centrality of which his character is mysteriously handcuffed. The ironical method is that the writer maintains the wildness out of the sixty years experience. His humor sometimes bursts into farce, sometimes-travesty, not only the personality of the protagonist, but also the significance of the Indian History. There is irony towards 'purdah' system and the family relationships and identity. Critics have identified Saleem as a representative of the post-Independence generation of Indians, in whom was embodied all of the nation's hopes for a better future, and whom, in turn, had to endure the disappointment of those hopes and the frustrations of reality. Some commentators have interpreted Saleem's impotence and impending death at the end of *Midnight's Children* as symbolizing India's hopelessness, but others have seen his creation of this exuberant, profuse narrative as a sign that even in the face of human fallibility and despair meaningful works of art are possible. Actual historical figures that are fictionalized by Rushdie include the Pakistani Commander in Chief Ayub Khan, whom Saleem meets at his uncle's home and who outlines there his plan of attack for a coup d'état; and the Widow, who represents Indira Gandhi clearly symbolizes Garcian technique of blending magical elements into realistic fiction.
After reading *Midnight's Children*, it reminded of *One Hundred Years Solitude* of Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Both novels seem to have fantastical elements interweaved with realistic and historical events. In both the novels fiction blends with historical reality. Generations of Buendía’s family and Saleem’s family and their narrative style reminds of an oral tradition using language of oral narration and of fairy tales with utmost simplicity and almost primitive way of storytelling. In *One Hundred years of Solitude* For instance, we discussed the Banana massacres that appear in *One Hundred Years Solitude*, which actually occurred in Santa Marta from 1947 to 1957. Similarly, the conflict between religious factions like Muslims and Hindus discussed in *Midnight's Children* mirrors the historical violence in India. Also, the concept of time seems to be a major theme in both novels. We talked about time as a cyclical element of life in *One Hundred Years Solitude* especially noting the prophecy and its implications. In *Midnight's Children*, time is often mentioned and prophecy appears frequently.

For example, after Saleem’s father discovers that his wife is pregnant with Saleem, he replies,

"I told you so; it was only a matter of time." Saleem, after retelling his father’s words, makes this interesting observation of time: "... but time has been an unsteady affair, in my experience, not a thing to be relied upon. It could even be partitioned: the clocks in Pakistan would run half an hour ahead of their Indian counterparts..." (Rushdie, 1981. p. 86).

The unreliability of time also reminds me of similarities of both these novels. Images of joy, pleasure, sorrow, pain and inevitable death find as a natural part life. Living and dead share their fates on the earth and take it as commonplace that life in the beginning of things as well as the end. These writers have chosen Magic Realism as their narrative technique to fill such gaps depicting the eternal circle of life and death as one of the major themes in these works. Gender also plays a large role in both *Midnight's Children* and *One Hundred Years Solitude*. Males are viewed as the patriarchs and leaders of their respective families, and many of the important conversations in both books are between males. A reader is often intimated about the future in
the novels as witnessed in the case of Ursula able to predict her own death and Amaranta stating that she is going to die in few days and Adam Aziz’s nose telling something bad going to happen and his fantasies of his mother turning into a lizard. In both Columbian and Indian culture, women are seen as slightly inferior. Thus, I think we as readers definitely see this division between the two genders.

III

However, *Midnight's Children* has been compared to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* for the many reasons, magical realism is more prevalent in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Midnight's Children*. I was constantly reminded of Marquez’s style when reading *Midnight's Children*. The part when Naseem denies Dr. Aziz food reminded me of when the people of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* lost their memories. The study of my paper is to present the fact that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Midnight's Children* both deal with magic realism. Also both novels have a very descriptive history of their family and both these novels takes on the same meaning as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in the sense that both novels portray meaningful stories in interesting cultures.

As *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Marquez parallels the history of Macondo, as described through the Buendia family, with that of Latin America, Somewhat similarly, Rushdie created an allegory in *Midnight’s Children* between Saleem’s life and that of the independence of India. In Marquez’s novel, the use of cyclical time seems to suggest that Colombia does not easily learn from its mistakes and is doomed to repeat its history, fully of numerous wars and violence. Time in Midnight’s Children, however, is non-linear, since Saleem’s stream of conscious narrative constantly alternates between the past and present. Here, along with the idea of the unreliable narrator, changing the order of recalling India’s history contributes to the fragmentation apparent throughout the novels.

One of the interesting features of the magical elements is the cyclical nature of both novels. The prophecy of Julia at the end in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* clearly demonstrates the cyclical
nature of Time. Similarly, Saleem's history symbolizes the cyclical nature of the generations of India. Initially, Saleem's grandfather acquires the "disease of optimism" but gradually discovers the hopelessness of life. Likewise, Saleem is born in a world that praises his birth and suggests that "anything you want to be, you kin be". However, after experiencing the Indo Pakistani War and the Emergency, Saleem progressively developed a cynical view on his society. Saleem's child later developed a narcissistic view on the world and Saleem comments "who does he think he is". Ultimately, each generation believes that they will alter the world for the best, but end realizing this as impossibility.

IV

*One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Midnight's Children* are purely Biblical in their structure: they are stories dealing with cultural creation and destruction. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Marquez describes an edenic Colombia untouched by infrastructure and new technology. At the end of the story, Macondo is reclaimed by nature and destroyed. Similarly, Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* describes his own edenic setting, Kashmir, which quickly becomes too little for Dr. Aziz after he goes to Europe to become a doctor. Saleem's creation is described throughout the entire first section of the novel; however, even before his birth, his eventual disintegration and death is foretold. Incidentally, prophecies are significant in both of these novels as well.

The two novels that we took as an example, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Marques, and *Midnight's Children* of Salman Rushdie provided a lot of similarities between these two texts. They both intend to recreate the history of a city or country (a fictional city in the case of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*), but the author decides to do so in a way that the reader is intrigued and entertained. They also try to enhance or sometimes exaggerate certain events just to make sure that the reader comprehends the historic significance, or the importance that it has to the trail of the story. In general, I enjoy this type of readings because, even though they are
often hard to understand, they tend to stick in our memories longer and transmit a clear message at the end.

But according to the criticism, surreal fantasy comes from more troubled lands. *Midnight’s Children* is set in post-partition India; *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in Colombia. Their magic is random, surreal and arbitrary because their worlds are random, surreal and arbitrary.

Colombia’s endless and ongoing history of terror and civil war that has killed hundreds of thousands and rendered millions homeless. Then the surreal becomes normal and the insane becomes rational, that’s the well that magic realism draws from. What the surreal fantasists have to say about desperation and tragedy and violence is more powerful and realistic. In both these novels the position of the narrator is very remarkable and often enters the story since they in fact describe their own life. Metafiction is common in post modern magic realist texts, “these texts provide commentaries on themselves” (Zamora.,1995, p. 175).

The setting of *Midnight’s Children* (1978) in the “marginalized” territory of India and Pakistan may contribute to the distinct magical realist quality of the novel. We are shown into the world of a specific cultural, religious and social atmosphere and of a particular climate that arouse the feeling of the exotic. The readers of Western origin may experience a certain feeling of strangeness and outlandishness. This atmosphere of the alien might tempt them to consider the magic appearing in the text to be the very part of the particular world of India and its culture. The concept of the ‘Other’ is based here on the territorial differences.

In the end, the study concludes in both the novels the elements of Magic realism and its devices still found within indigenous storytelling; an oral tradition which continues despite all attempts of cultural genocide. It subtly tells historical facts by blending the difficult-to-swallow parts with the 'magic' or arcane elements found within traditional storytelling; for the purpose of planting greater understanding in a reader's awareness of humanity, to gently shift the worldviews of those who have not had the experiences that the author endures/has endured.
In these novels, the national history, the society, colonialism the era of post-colonialism and the changing dimensions of duration of generation, Irony towards the significance is enhanced to make a deep research of the whole experience of particular region to nation and towards universe in its omnipotence. It is the responsibility of the writer to show the spatial consciousness of a particular time and it was to show the humanity through experience, whether it is withering away of the quality or marching towards a new dawn, only the human kind will tell forth. This study aims at to analyze the cultural politics of these writers and their allegorical method of literary stylistics and an intricate, uninvolved, up rootedness between these east-western societies of multiculturalism and the politics of this pollution, their myth, their history ultimately their whole existence through this popular genre Magic Realism as a Literary ‘Construct’.

Thus, Rushdie and Garcia Marquez employ magic realism to describe the difference between two worlds or the attitudes towards them (if considering the heroes' minds). Apart from the main magic-realist elements there are also 'minor' features that comprise great parts of the novels. This magic and miracles mostly belong to the mythology and tradition of the eastern world and are presented matter-of-factly without any commentary. They appear in both novels and create the atmosphere of a typical magic-realist text. Rushdie wants to introduce the world he comes from with all its components and necessities and put it in the centre of western attention. At the same time he is not afraid of speaking his mind, even though it proved to be very dangerous. Maybe that is one reason for using magic realism -- to avoid being attacked for criticizing the political and social situation, he writes his novels under the cover-up of magic realism in which everything is possible. Eventually, the reader does not have to believe in everything that is described in the fiction. For that reason the magic in the texts is not anyhow explained, only the author (who regularly enters the story) maintains that what happened is really true. Let me conclude with Rushdie's quotation:
"A book is a version of the world. If you don't like it, ignore it; or offer your own version in return."
References


