

NEGOTIATING MARGINALISED- VOICE OF WOMEN THROUGH MAGIC REALISM: A REVIEW OF SELECT WORKS OF MAJOR WOMEN WRITERS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Abstract: Magic Realism as a genre has become very popular in Twentieth century and began to cherish the popular position of new literary construct in modern cannon of English literature. In my presentation, I would like to focus on importance of magic realism in literature associated with feminist writing, and how these women writers succeeded in creating a space through magic realism to envisage and protest the problems of marginalized women in their writings. The important aim of this study is to examine how the elements and characteristics of magical reality are portrayed in literary texts pertaining to women.

This paper clearly reviews three novels labeled as magical real texts written by the major women writers in English literature through the technique of marvelous reality:

In *the house of the spirits* (1982) by Isabel Allende from Chile, *Like water for Chocolate* (1989) by Luara Esquivel from Mexico, and *Beloved* (1987) by Tony Morrison from the USA.

In my presentation on 'Women Empowerment', I have chosen these novels written in the same period from different countries and cultural exposure in order to consider the changing dimensions of the theory of Magic Realism in particular and how they have become representative of negotiating women voice towards universal appeal. The objective of this study is mainly to emphasize the problems faced by their respective societies towards negotiating Marginalization of women at a microcosm level and further to exemplify towards omnipresence of their sufferings, disillusionment and quest for identity. The study aims at incorporating Magic Realism in depicting real in compacted manner and how these writers empowered this genre as a very simplest tool, that can serve as a way for the character, plot, or setting to take that final step, perhaps stepping away from the *real* and over to a bigger reality is exactly what these novel needs.

Keywords: Fantastic Elements, Magic Realism, Marginalization, Protest, subversion, Voice of third world Women.

Introduction: 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, 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 (1995: 135-136), Magic Realism is originated as an antagonistic reaction to the European Rationale to demean the dignity of the colonized people. 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.

According to Wikipedia, "Literary Magic Realism originated in Latin America." and between 1940 and 1950, magic realism in Latin America reached its peak, with prominent writers appearing mainly in Argentina". (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/magic-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 magic and imagination in European Folklore. (Alejo Carpentier, 1995. P.15-32.)

Alejo Carpentier 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. P.102-104)

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 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)

As mentioned above, these writers are very keen in embedding elements of magic and fantastic into real text reflecting their respective voice by adopting magical narrative. Magical happenings are accepted by the characters without much remark or surprise. The magic is centered within a place, such as a community, or within a character, and is often a result of that person or place, and something they've done or felt. All answers are not given, nor asked for. Stories/plots and events are left unexplained and open to interpretation.

Reality and magic co-exist within the story, within the chapter, and even within the same event. Although this may be surprising or disturbing for the reader, it is not so for the characters. The characters or narrator will often employ folklore and family stories to move the story along; sometimes these stories have an accepted magical element. Marginalized characters are central. These characters are sometimes powerless or organized against some much larger entity, such as the

government, time, decay, sickness or similar (Source from Spark Notes online)

In the sphere of literary cannon in modern era, the most accolade authors and practitioners of both short stories and novels of magic realism are;

Gabriel García Márquez , Haruki Murakami , Franz Kafka , Salman Rushdie , Angela Carter , Christina Garcia Laura Esquivel, Louise Eldritch, Toni Morrison, Isabel Allende, Zora Neale Hurston Amos Tutuola , Ben Okri , Jean Rhys , Nalo Hopkinson , Barbara Kingsolver (debated) , Jorge Luis Borges (debated).

Despite the term associated with other art forms initially, it became popular in literature by Latin American Writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez whose phenomenal work *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) became a magnum opus for Magic Realism, later practiced to a extent by the British Indian Writer Salman Rushdie with the advent of *Midnight's Children* in 1981.

Magic Realism turns out to be part of a twentieth century preoccupation in the world, resists capture by the traditional logic of the walking minds. The magic realists project the intimate interdependence between reality and fantasy but magical realism and modernism proceed by different means. In a way Magical realism is like the uncanny projection of a mesmerizing uncertainty suggesting ordinary life may also become extraordinary.

As she chewed each match, she pressed her eyes shut and tried to reproduce the most moving of her and Pedro. The first time she saw him, the first time their hands touched, the first bouquet of roses, the first kiss, the first caress, the first time they made love. In this she was successful; when the match she chewed made contact with the luminous image she evoked, the match began to burn. Little by little her vision began to brighten until the tunnel again appeared before her eyes. There at its entrance was the luminous figure of Pedro waiting for her." (Esquivel, Laura. *Like Water for Chocolate*. 1993. p.67-75).

Sleman says that the marginalized characters, and even marginalized authors, are one of the basics of magic realism. "At its base is the vocalization of the oppressed: people who have been exiled or stripped of their voice by power players (like governments, corporations, patriarchs, etc.). These are some of the least pretentious people in the world telling some pretty extraordinary tales." (Sleman, Stephen. 1995. p.407-426).

In Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* , Tita's sister, Gertrudis, is destined for the hard work and servant hood required of most women her age in rural, Revolutionary-era Mexico. However, it is this same hard work that grants her an exit from her burden. This scene is the beginning of Gertrudis' story arc in which she shakes off the traditional roles that are thematic to the novel, and begins a journey toward her true self.

"(Gertrudis) climbed up and down ten times, carrying buckets of water. It was brutal exercise, which made the heat of that burned her body grow more and more

intense, until she nearly fainted. The only thing that kept her going was the image of the refreshing shower ahead of her, but unfortunately, she was never able to enjoy it, because the drops that fell from the shower never made it to her body: they evaporated before they reached her" – *Like Water for Chocolate*

The term Magical Realism was survived and expanded its boundaries since 1980s and 1990s, called as the 'post-boom'. During this period there was an emergence of significant women writers reflecting heart-rending experiences of women who were kept silent, mutilated since ages and explored as a protest to male authored literature through this popular genre. Chilean Isabel Allende was the female writer to have achieved best-seller status and her novel *The House of Spirits* (1982) that employed magical realism, was widely acclaimed. Isabel Allende (1942-), in her first novel *The House of the Spirits* (*La casa de los espíritus*, 1982), presented a saga of three generations of the del Valle-Trueba family, the last chapters unfold on the background of the tragic events in Chile in 1972, when General Pinochet seized control of the country in a military coup. It has gained a wide popularity and an immediate success and gave Allende an international reputation.

In her essay, "Writing an Act of Hope," Isabel Allende opines,

"[n]ow, finally, women are breaking the rule of silence and raising a strong voice to question the world. . . [with] a literature that doesn't invent history or try to explain the world solely through reason, but also seeks knowledge through feelings and imagination." (Isabel. 1995. P. 165-175)

The House of the Spirits offers themes of marginalization and symbolizes voice of protest against chauvinistic male patriarchy. It is a poignant example of subversive female narration, empowerment and voice of protest. Her reminiscence which includes her female relatives' perspectives is a direct symbol of Esteban Trueba's narcissistic, rigid, and linear version of events. Throughout the novel the incorporation of woman-centered narration advocates the triumph of women's narration and their revision of patriarchal and authoritarian history. Alba watches the military erase history and devastate the country "[w]ith the stroke of the pen," but she in turn harnesses this power of writing in order to resist.

Alba writes her family's story from the women's perspective; she includes Nivea's compassion, Clara's intuition, Blanca's love and her own resilience, all of which are excluded from Esteban's version. Alba and her female ancestors have risen to the position of living symbols of history.

The history of African-American is full of dreadful experiences. The women were cruelly treated like caged birds. Here a voice of protest against such oppression was witnessed by the American writer Toni Morrison (1931-), whose novel *Beloved* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 and the Nobel Prize in 1993. The novel is set in 1873

and focuses on Black history of USA, when The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 gave slave-owners the right to retrieve their "property" from states which abolished slavery and here in this novel through magic realist technique, she protests the suppression, marginalization of women of entire black community by white dominated culture and aspires for human values and compassion.,

The novel is set in 1873 and focuses on Black history of USA, where the slave-owners struggle for their right of "property" from states under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 that had abolished slavery. *Beloved* turns on the slaughter of a baby by her own mother. Sethe kills her child rather than have her returned from freedom to slavery.

Like Water for Chocolate (Como agua para chocolate, 1989) is a first novel by Laura Esquivel (1950-) from Mexico, attracted the readers and became most commercially successful. The novel takes place during the revolution in early twentieth century Mexico and revolves around the story of Tita de la Garza and her love for Perdo, who marries to the eldest sister Rosaura by order of her commanding mother, Mamá Elena.

Like Water for Chocolate, the writer cleverly embeds the story of two women, Tita De La Garza and her mother, the formidable Mama Elena and the trajectory of their struggle against one another is a twist in the end. Tita, the protagonist, strives for love, freedom, and individuality, and Mama Elena, the chief antagonist, stands as the prime opposition to the fulfillment of these goals. This mother-daughter relationship is fraught with difficulty from its inception, when Tita is brought into the world prematurely after her father's sudden death. Mama Elena is the opposite of a nurturer, never forging any bond with Tita. Tita develops a relationship with food that gives her the power to nurture and give outlet to her emotions.

Tita and Mama Elena both have central character finding their individual struggles and their conflict with each other. The revelation that Mama Elena herself suffered the pangs of lost love is an important thematic complement to Tita's deprivation. The reaction of each woman to her predicament helps delineate their differing characters. Whereas Mama Elena lets the loss of love turn her into a sinister and domineering mother, Tita, while obeying her mother's command outwardly, engages in a lifelong struggle for love, which she eventually wins through the strength of spirit.

Magical characteristics: In all the three novels, the writers have chosen a new mode of literary genre in depicting the voice of women of their respective society's particularly the technique of magical real apart from post colonialism and post modernism. Famous critic Patricia Hart assumed the character of Clara as an embodiment of the elements of magic in *The House Of Spirits (La casa de los espíritus)* presence of Clara del Valle", (Hart 1989.p.37). Undoubtedly Clara possesses the true extraordinary abilities. "Clara clarividente (78). Allende shows Clara's abilities perceived as absolutely

normal by her family: after many years, Clara just becomes more and more experienced, and her ability is a part of an everyday reality

Morrison in her fictional story the *Beloved*, she constructed a supernatural in 124 Bluestone Road, Cincinnati, where Sethe and her daughter Denver live after their escape from slavery. The house is haunted by a revenant, the ghost of Sethe's daughter, "124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom" (9). Paul D, one of the slaves from Home, arrives at 124 and meets the ghost he treats it as it were a human being: "She was right. It was sad" (17). Paul D forces the spirit out: "Leave the place alone! Get the hell out!" (Tony Morrison. *Beloved*.2006.p.37).

As the novel progresses Sethe and Denver come to accept Beloved's presence as the physical manifestation of the daughter Sethe has killed: "Beloved, she my daughter. She mine. She come back to me of her own free will" (231). "Beloved is my sister...Ever since I was little she was my company" (237).

Laura Esquivel in her *Like Water for Chocolate* involves Tita the Protagonist, and she always finds herself surrounded by supernatural events. First time she discovers it, happens when dies Nacha, the indigenous cook, who was for Tita closer than her biological mother. Tita feels completely alone and in a very deep depression. But soon she finds out that she is able to communicate with Nacha. It does not surprise her at all. Sometimes, deliberately Tita is able to communicate her emotions to the food she cooks. For example, when she was preparing a wedding cake for her sister and her Pedro, she had shed many tears. Around her many domestic situations turn into magical events, for example, a scene of the chicken fight:

Thus the study of my paper is to find and review the seminal works of women in protest of their voice through this technique. In all the above novels, the writer cleverly incorporates elements of magic and real those are inseparable and demonstrate the strong presence of the supernatural in the physical world's setting. The abilities of Clara and Tita, the ghost presence and the appearance of re-emerged Beloved are essential for the plot. The interaction between spirits and humans, as well extraordinary phenomena are presented in the text in a coherent way, and all magic events are perceived by characters and readers as it were absolutely natural.

The term 'magical feminism' was coined by Patricia Hart in 1987 in order to describe Isabel Allende's narrative. " I define 'magical feminism' as magical realism employed in a femino-centric work." (Hart 1989. P. 30).

The study and the narrative perspective in all the above novels is completely female and The characters, who possess supernatural abilities, communicate with spirits, practice magic, convert emotional conditions into physical and, as a matter of fact, who are ghosts themselves, are women and the subtlety of the magic

realist texts lies in employing all the bizarre and uncanny events quite natural and ultimately reveal an underlying truth that is inseparable from our vicissitudes.

In the *Beloved*, Tony Morrison exemplifies when Sethe sees Beloved for the first time, and she suddenly experiences an intense physical reaction: "And, for some reason she could not immediately account for, the moment she got close enough to see the face, Sethe's bladder filled to capacity...the water she voided was endless" (63). Sethe's body reacts as if water has broken in the act of giving birth.

While In *Like Water for Chocolate*, when Tita is trying to quiet her hungry new-born nephew, the son of Rosaura and Perdo, she offers the baby her virgin breast and "...el niño recuperaba poco a poco la tranquilidad en su rostro y lo escuchó eglutir..., al niño de su pecho y vio cómo le brotaba un chisquete de leche" (71)

Here the writer is referring to Tita, when She saw the boy's face slowly grow peaceful and when she heard the way he was swallowing..., she removed the boy from her breast: a thin stream of milk sprayed out (70)

There are some parallels between the feminist approach and magical realism. First, the feminist criticism, in all its many and various manifestations, attempts to free itself from naturalized patriarchal notions (Selden at al 2005.p. 115)

Famous critic Wendy Faris also opines that, magical realism participates in the process of "patriarchal culture's disenchantment with itself" (Faris 2004.p.4). Maggie Bowers critic, indicates, the characteristic of magical realism is its transgressive and subversive qualities (Bowers 2004.p. 67),

Other postcolonial critic Homi K. Bhabha ,praises Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as it "revives the past of slavery and its murderous rituals of possession" (Bhabha 2010.p.5). *Beloved* presents a very powerful postcolonial discourse in its alternative representation of slavery. Tony morrison's story of Sethe Suggs's is a quest for social freedom and psychological wholeness. She struggles with her haunting memory of past slavery.

Esquivel is less concerned with postcolonial issue in her novel but the story about Kikapu Indian woman, whom Doctor Brown's grandfather had married was never accepted as his legal wife by the Yankee family and they called her 'the Kikapu', instead of calling her by the real name. "Para los Brown, la palabra "kikapú" encerraba lo más desagradable de este mundo" (99).

Allende addressing historical issues deals more with the questions of class struggle and represent the voices of the victims of the political repression. Senator Esteban Trueba had an obsession to destroy what he called "el

cancer marxista" (291), but when the political police came for Alba he could do nothing, and his granddaughter "entró en su pesadilla" (382).

The purpose of this study is to emphasize that these magical realist novels that were reviewed along with discourses about feminine conditions offer other different types of accounts of 'subaltern' voices and negotiating the marginalized in a representative way towards universal appeal. To conclude the three major writers of differing countries and cultural similarities employed the characteristics of magical realism to a great extent in the three novels particularly written by women: Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*.

The research of this study also provided textual examples from novels, demonstrated the strong, constant and simultaneous presence of the supernatural events within the realistic setting. Presence of the extraordinary phenomena as an important part of the plot and are not perceived as problematic. All these novels are femino-centred and written by women, affects the narration and the use of magical realism to a considerable degree. The magical realism it not only practiced by women but also conveys specific feminine conditions and experience. Third, the narrative ensures the possibility for characters, especially women; to express themselves within the oppressive structures they are situated. The novels offer multiple representations of subaltern voices, mainly feminist discourse, but also postcolonial and others. Eventually the issues that are exposed in general are having universal appeal.

Thus, on basis of the textual evidence, we have come to conclusion that all three studied novels demonstrate all the characteristics, which constitute parts of the working definition of magical realism established in the theoretical part. Moreover, they show some peculiarities in the employment of magical realism by authors, as they are women and their novels are focused on female characters and specific women's experience. In that way, we can assert that Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* are true examples of the female voices of magical realism.

In the end the study also raises the question of the contemporary definition of magical realism still remaining open, as many new literary texts appear and are categorized as magical realist literature; Moreover, the research area for further study in literature may include combination of the magical realist analysis with different types of literary criticism and cultural studies.

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