

Magic Realism: An Overview of Gabriel Garcia Marquez' One Hundred Years of Solitude

Jaffar Shah

Assistant professor, Department of English
Balochistan Agriculture College Quetta, Pakistan.

Ghulam Rasool

Assistant professor, Department of English
University of Balochistan, Quetta, Pakistan.

Zia-ur-Rehman

Ms Scholar, Department of English
Balochistan University of Information Technology
Engineering & Management Sciences, Quetta

ABSTRACT

Magic Realism refers to the method of describing reality in a mythical, magical and supernatural version of the indigenous cultures. This paper highlights the significance of the tool of Magic Realism with reference to Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude as a fantastic literary form employed by the writer to present his culture, society and political history. Reality combined with magical elements, this paper has Magic Realism as theoretical framework to prove how Gabriel Garcia Marquez manipulates this tool to tell the reality of his national history, colonialism, and post-colonialism period. Employing the tool of Magic Realism, the writing is all about troubles, loss and death in the Colombia. The intention is to combine fantastic in order to present his Colombia, where myths and modern inventions are part of the same environment; where the indigenous culture has not been subdued by the advent of modern technology. The writer of the novel also wants his people to acquire true knowledge in lieu of mere imitation of the West. The main source of the data in this paper was literature review that helped identify the gap. This paper is meant to bridge the gap identified through the literature. The specific objective is to ascertain as to how Magic Realism has been employed by Gabriel Garcia Marquez in One Hundred Years of Solitude so as to stick to the truth of his national history.

Key Words: Magic and Realism, Myth and Reality, National History and Culture.

INTRODUCTION

The originator of the literary construct Magic Realism was a novelist from Cuba named Alejo Carpentier who in the year 1949 referred to it as the matter-of-fact amalgamation of the fantastic and every day in Latin American fiction. He says, "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, 102-104). Magic Realism is the most prominent literary construct of the twentieth- Century. This element of Magic Realism was first developed by critics in twentieth century which led to the inception of black awareness and the way they were suppressed by the colonial powers. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 122). Magic Realism is a construct in which whimsical and eccentric stories are presented as if these were part of the ordinary life. Magic Realism is different in nature from "once-upon-a-time" style in which the weird quality of fictional events is given more prominence. In Magic Realism, the narrator presents dream like elements so close to truth that they seem to be real and readers are convinced to follow the willing suspension of disbelief. Magic Realism is artistically employed to re-think the reality of the world. It is not the form of escapism from the realities of the everyday life as was done by the Romantics such as John Keats and the rest; rather, it is a way of presenting fantasies as part of every day life. There are a number of characteristics of Magic Realism, but the most important feature of Magic Realism is to avoid concurrence of past, present and future. However, these elements make Magic Realism different from fictional. In such novels, the World in question must be directed by an intrinsic reasoning, while Magic Realism cannot be bound by the laws of the physical and natural world.

It is widely believed that Magic Realism emerged as a reaction to the Western Realism. In the literary sense, Magic Realism refers to the style that combines fantastic to the mundane and in the 1960s this construct was employed in the Latin American fictional writings. Magic Realism emerged as a rejoinder to the European Motivation to undermine the people they colonized. (Zamora and Faris, 135-136). This denunciation of the Western Realism resulted in a kind of vacuum that had to be bridged and trying to fill this gap finally made writers have recourse to the tool of Magical Realism. The Colombian writer and the most prominent proponent of Magic Realism, Gabriel Garcia Marquez deems Magic Realism 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, 148)

Magic Realism as a tale form embraces idiosyncratic overestimation, fable, history, time, unclear veracity and supernaturalism. These notions are presented as integral part of the reality of human life and its occurrences in the confines of all times.

In this paper, the chief aim is to figure out the components of Magic Realism in the novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Here the emphasis is to find out the chief features of Magic Realism as distinct in this text and to delineate Magic Realism including the views of the critics about this literary construct. It is also the aim to ascertain as to how the writer has used Magic Realism as an important tool in an endeavor to combine Magic and weird features with reality. To find the characteristics of Magic Realism in the context of how this construct has been skillfully used by Gabriel Garcia Marquez so as to manipulate his history with reference to the colonial and post-colonial theme.

The perfectionist and most popular Magic-realist writer of Hispanic milieu is undoubtedly Gabriel Garcia Marquez. He is extensively considered as the originator of consciousness in Latin America through his masterpiece *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. He combines realism with fantasies in a manner that the enchanted components and marvels seem to be commonplace. The reader gets so pre-occupied in his dream world that his reality seems to be more real than the everyday truth of life.

Some structure of this kind are odd things which are not understood through knowledge, but the magical things and miracles take place time and again and seem to be real. The characters seem to be at home with these kinds of magical elements and do not seem to worry about them. They seem to give us the impression as if these were part of the ordinary life. In Magic Realism there are always two spheres -- the tangible and the enchanted; these two spheres are the domains of the deceased and the living. In magic-realist style, we come across supernatural elements such as ghosts which have perpetual contact with the living people. These ghosts along with other supernatural elements are presented in an extremely normal style that even the reader seems to succumb to believing them as real. There is the custom of myths and traditional stories which greatly influence the writing style of the magic realist writer. These folklores provide the ground for the use of supernatural elements. In the context of mid-twentieth century, Magic Realism challenges the Western version of the folk uniqueness and it helps the emergence of post colonialism. Thus Magic Realism proceeds with the dogmatic character to offer the

difference with pride. This is the difference related to the Latin America which is proud of its culture before and after post colonialism in relation to the Western culture.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez in his *One Hundred Years of Solitude* narrates his history in cycles which is the prominent style of a magic realist. The narrator, beyond the confines of time, exploring the past, present, future of Macondo moves back and forth to offer the stream of consciousness. There are references in his novel to the past events which are further linked to other events in future because these are the events he knows very well about. He asserts that: "the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth". The Buendias and their different generations in cycles and the events in their lives are in fact temporal and eventually meet 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*, pp. 3.64-5).

Garcia Marquez in "One Hundred Years of Solitude" shifts the course of the American history by highlighting the destructive role played in the ruin of Macondo. It is the story of evolution, the decay and the rebirth of the generation on ideological grounds. There are different generations of the Buendias with different notions and ideologies. The Buendia's family is against the government when it comes to the domain of socio-politics. There are characters such as Colonel Aureliano marked by callousness and inflexibility and incapability to cross the limits of fixed and imposed behavior of the society in which they exist and such are the elements which stop both individuals and the group from making any kind of progress. Garcia Marquez in an endeavor to be in conformity with socio-political grounds and in his inability to see the literary ones, desires of the authors to pause for the intelligent novelists to experience the occurrence of forcefulness and to understand that they witnessed the manifestation of great work and had not the patience and the genius to experience the amount of time they needed in order to learn how one should produce the best. Without thinking about some precedent to trail in Colombia, every writer was supposed to initiate from the blank and one could not originate a literary trend all of a sudden. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez intermingles history, war, sufferings and other realities of his homeland with fantasies in order to achieve his philosophical goals. Generations of Buendia's family and the narrative style is the reflection of a spoken norm by means of language of verbalized description and of fairy accounts in a graceful and plain mode of the storytellers.

One of the striking elements of the magical elements is the way the story is narrated in cycles. Towards the end of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* there is a manifestation of the cyclical approach to Time. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* follows the style of Bible: the story is all about the creation and the annihilation. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Marquez presents a Colombia which is still unaware of the advent of modern technology and inventions. Towards the end of his narration, everything goes back to its origin when Macondo is annihilated and nature claims the possession of the whole structure of the land.

This novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marques has multitudes of examples about the writer's recourse to Magic Realism for the reflection of his philosophy. As in line with fictional mode, this novel reproduces the total history of an imaginary city and a country, but Gabriel Garcia Marquez manipulates the tool of Magic Realism so as to perplex and at the same time entertain his reader. Sometimes, things are presented in hyperbolic manner to enhance the total effect of the story and see that the reader is convinced of the import of the story in terms of history, culture, society and nationhood. These kind of stories are amazing in the sense that they are really hard to grasp regarding the basic idea behind them and it is extremely hard to grasp the flow of the events, but the good thing about such stories is that they become part of our memory for a longer period of time because of the fantastic and magical elements in them. Such elements also leave a strong message at the end of the story. Towards the end, such a mode of writing leaves a long lasting impression.

In this novel, the nationwide history, the people, colonialism the eon of post-colonialism and the change over time of different generations and the import is highlighted to create a profound research of the uncut history of a exacting region and homeland and towards the totality of the universe as well. The writer makes it his duty to demonstrate the consciousness of the specific time and he means to depict humankind through familiarity, whether it is the decadence of the worth or heading to a new dimension, only the mankind will explain it better. This study purposes to search the writer's approach towards culture and politics and his magic realist style and complex, untangled situation between these West and Latin American societies marked by multiple cultures and this contaminated politics, their myth, history and eventually their total existing experience through the medium of Magic Realism.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez has great skill to mix the commonplace experience with miracles, the antique events with the fantasies, and psychosomatic realism with the whimsical elements of magical type. His *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a groundbreaking novel that seems to be the mouthpiece of Gabriel

Garcia Marquez when it comes to his ideology and philosophy, and through this he gives a literary voice to Latin America. Gabriel practices the procedure of Magical Realism and the stuff extracted from past and politics to approach some extremely complex and significant themes of the novel. He speaks about conflict, anguish, and demise with skill and without ever exhausting his readers. He seems to be successful in convincing his reader of the reality of his events. He also seems to influence the basic notion of his readers through the power of his magical style of writing.

One Hundred Years of Solitude is a masterpiece of Magical Realism, in which the supernatural is presented as natural and natural is presented as supernatural. The novel presents a fictional story in a fictional setting. In a balanced way the writer presents the realities of life, like death, sufferings, war and poverty in a courageous way. The chief aim behind all such elements is that Gabriel Garcia Marquez wants to familiarize the reader to his Colombia, where fables, and myths occur with machinery and innovation. Additional intention for this makes reader perplexed to decide what is tangible and what is weird, particularly in the domain of politics. This is meant to analyze the strangeness of our ordinary existence. The complexity and absurdity of the politics and everyday life is under examination here, principally the divisions that tell about Colonel Aureliano Buendia. The political scenario is a perplexed one. There is tiny dissimilarity between the Liberals and the Conformists; both of them are complicit in some evil activities like killing and exploitation. Although Marquez is totally against the capitalism, his purpose in depicting the policies of the area is meant to be realistic description of the whole state of the affairs. Instead, he is critical of the dark side of the politics of Latin America, the perpetual predicament that yet has to be rooted out for the wellbeing of the masses. There is a story in this novel which has been concocted by the author, but the message behind this is aimed to explain a realistic historical picture.

The politics of Colombia and its violent side is manifested in Colonel Aureliano Buendia who goes to conflict counter to the Conformists who are complicit in expediting the imperialist powers to get hold of the state of affairs. The wealthy banana plantation has an imperial structure, having their force and power. They are responsible for the massacre of three thousand poor striking workers. The realistic happenings and Colombian antiquity are mixed together by Garcia Marquez and this makes *One Hundred Years of Solitude* a perfect model of Magical Realism. The reality in the novel is intermingled with what the writer fabricates, but the novel on the whole narrates the Colombian history in a critical manner. This helps the writer shrink this long history into something that seems to have been managed in a convenient manner.

This novel narrates the story of a fictional Latin American country founded by the Buendias family, or in other words it is the story of the town named Macondo which was founded by the Buendias family. Whatever the cycle this story follows, everything moves in a fantastic and interesting manner. There are also other examples in the novel about the form of solitude and the isolated life possible in human life; it is about the lack of proper consciousness on the part of the inhabitants or about the joys of being with those you love the most in your life. This is also the story of one hundred years in the life of inhabitants - the story of the town's birth, development and death. Civil war and natural disasters which challenge the survival of its inhabitants. There are three types of fabled features in the novel: classical stories, characters of the type of mythical heroes, and supernatural features. Macondo has something of the type of magic in it and everything seems to be fantastic in this world. It is a place situated more in the mind than being a geographical entity. There are almost no examples in the text about the very geography of the land in this story. There is a mention of the magical and fantastic elements and reality is expressed through all these magical instruments. The characters or the heroes in the story are moved by their retrospection and the complex nature of time. We come across things such as ghosts and fantasies. These traces are signs of the past and they symbolize a lingering nature that follows Macondo and the people who live there. The ghosts and other supernatural elements are an integral part of the Latin American history. These elements have been part of the fiction of this region in order to make it acceptable both to the reader and to the philosophical goals of the writer. This also proves the fact that Macondo and the Buendias were the kinds of supernatural entities to some extent who were unaware of their own history; they are subject to lack of self-determination, development and also they are disillusioned about their basic ideology that is the reason behind their social predicament.

Garcia Marquez applies the tool of Magic Realism while describing his characters. About Melques, he says, "He is a fugitive from all plagues and catastrophes that had ever lashed mankind" (6). It is hard to take these magical things for real but the author further says: "He had survived pellagra in Persia, scurvy in the Malaysian archipelago, leprosy in Alexandria, beriberi in Japan, bubonic plague in Madagascar, an earthquake in Sicily, and a disastrous shipwreck in the Strait of Magellan" (6). He manipulates the tool of Magic Realism in order to make us believe the strange things become part of the ordinary and normal routine of life.

This book loses no opportunity to entertain us with eccentric occurrences being the product of Magic Realism. In all kinds of situation in the story we are convinced of the truth of the unprecedented things, the stream of butterflies,

the priest ascending to chocolate, the amatory scene of lustful and forceful sex, persons whose farts exterminate all the flowers, the example of the rain of yellow flowers, the ascending scene, the birth of a child with a pig tail, the getting insane of Jose Arcadio Buendia, the strange things such as the discovery of ice in Macondo, the magnifying glass, magnet and many more fantastic examples of Magic Realism. According to a critic, "The magic realism in Garcia Marquez's novel forms a broad and diverse spectrum ranging from the literally extraordinary though nonetheless possible, to the farthest extremes of the physically fabulous and unlikely" (Bell-Villada 108).

In the novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Garcia Marquez makes use of exaggeration to add fantastic elements to the events in the story. But this exaggeration is so balanced and specific that each happening in the story seems to be real rather than fantastic, points out critic Bell-Villada (109). There are numerous examples of this exaggeration in the story such as, Colonel Buendia's thirty-two crushed mutinies; the downpour of four years, eleven months, and two days; and Fernanda's schedule of sex. Magic Realism as a mode of shifting weird into veracity is influenced by Garcia Marquez. He has the handiness to persuade us and to make us believe inconceivable things in the novel. Using Magical Realism, he gives a veracity that carries enchanted, misconception, religion and antiquity which are integral part of the world.

In an interview Gabriel Garcia Marquez tells about the origin of his Magic Realism in the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: "My grandmother . . . used to tell me about the most atrocious things without turning a hair . . . I realized that it was her impassive manner and her wealth of images that made her stories so credible. I wrote *One Hundred Years of Solitude* using my grandmother's method." That style carries a sense of credulity which is forceful enough to make readers believe the narration without raising any question about the reality of events, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez borrowed this style both from his grandmother and Franz Kafka.

As part of the Magic Realism and new inventions and discoveries, Jose Arcadio Buendia, put his hand on the ice and held in for some time. He was over the moon and amazed at seeing such a strange thing. This alludes to the way the Western technology was transferred to the colonized nations. Examples such as the magnifying glass, the discovery of ice, railway and other inventions are treated in a fantastic manner of the Magic Realism. Gabriel Garcia Marquez does not want his people to imitate the West. He believes in true knowledge instead of mere imitation. In the story, he is critical of the behavior of Jose Arcadio Buendia who is so impressed by the new technologies and the way Jose Arcadio Buendia is disappointed about the state of affairs in his land: "Incredible things are happening in the world... Right there across

the river there are all kinds of magical instruments while we keep on living like donkeys” (Marquez, *One Hundred* 8) He was so excited that he wanted his son to experience such incredible things. Little Jose Arcadio refused to touch it, Aureliano touched it and moved back his hand all of a sudden in a state of utter surprise. But his father paid no attention to him. So overwhelmed by the discovery he exclaimed, “This is the great invention of our time” (Marquez, *One Hundred* 18). Gabriel Garcia Marquez recounts the history of the colonialism to unfold the stories of how the colonizers plundered other lands for their vested interests. The passage says:

“When the pirate Sir Francis Drake attacked Riohacha in the sixteenth century, Ursula Iguaran’s great-great-grandmother became so frightened with the ringing of alarm bells and the firing of cannons that she lost control of her nerves and sat down on a lighted stove” (Marquez, *One Hundred* 14).

From an interview with Gabriel Garcia Marquez we come to know about magical elements in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* like, “Remedios the Beauty ascends to heaven”, “Yellow butterflies flutter around Mauricio Babilonia” etc. are all ‘based on fact’. For instance, for Mauricio Babilonia, Garcia Marquez tells its source that when he was about five, an electrician used to come to their house in Aracataca to change the meter. According to Marquez, on one of these occasions, he found his grandmother trying to take away a butterfly with a duster, saying, “Whenever this man comes to the house, that yellow butterfly follows him.” Regarding Remedios the Beauty, he says that his earlier mood was to make her disappear while busy with Amaranta and Rebecca in her embroidery work. But such a scene did not appeal to him being incredible in its practice, so he made her ascend to the sky. What could have been the reality of such a scene which on the face of it seemed extremely incredible? Gabriel Garcia Marquez said that the scene was taken from some real life event that a woman whose granddaughter had run away from home in the early morning, and who had no choice but to conceal the reality from the people by saying to the people that she had ascended to the sky.

There is the incident of banana workers massacre which was something that truly took place in the life of the author. The incident in real left a deep imprint on his mind and he did not help making it part of his story in the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Gabriel Garcia Marquez puts it in his autobiography *living to Tell the Tale* on the occasion of a visit to his birth place:

“It was there, my mother told me that day, where in 1928 the army killed an undetermined number of banana workers. I knew the event as if I had lived it, having heard it recounted and repeated a thousand times by my grandfather from the time I had a memory: the soldier reading the decree by which the

striking laborers were declared a gang of lawbreakers; the three thousand men, women, and children motionless under the savage sun after the officer gave them five minutes to evacuate the square; the order to fire, the clattering machine guns spitting in white-hot bursts, the crowd trapped by panic as it was cut down, little by little, by the methodical, insatiable scissors of the shrapnel.” (14-15)

With reference to the heart-rending incident of the banana workers the following lines, in a Magic Realism fashion, get expression in the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*:

“It was as if the machine guns had been loaded with caps, because their panting rattle could be heard and their incandescent spitting could be seen, but not the slightest reaction was perceived, not a cry, not even a sigh among the compact crowd that seemed petrified by an instantaneous invulnerability. . . . the panic became a dragon’s tail as one compact wave ran against another which was moving in the opposite direction, toward the other dragon’s tail in the street across the way, where the machine guns were also firing without cease. They were penned in, swirling about in a gigantic whirlwind that little by little was being reduced to its epicenter as the edges were systematically being cut off all around like an onion being peeled by the insatiable and methodical shears of the machine guns.” (311)

Gabriel Garcia Marquez puts that the events in the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are ‘based on reality’, it means that he refers to the explanation that the whimsical and magical elements have been taken for real by people somewhere in the world and for the most part in Latin America. “This doesn’t mean these things are true but it may make them real” (Wood 56).

To sum up, Gabriel Garcia Marquez recounts everything from his own life and he also follows other writers in their styles and in the creation of expressions, characters and the style of narration. Undoubtedly, history and fictitious elements are two different genres, but there is thin line to differentiate them. Both have to undergo some inclination of the writer, his philosophy and ideology. Gabriel Garcia Marquez is a true creative writer but at the same time he has humanly infirmities like every ordinary human being. He is a novelist, who in his retrospection and with the help of his perfect skill of Magic Realism tried to put together his memory. He presents real events under the allegorical cover of Magic Realism both to entertain and teach his readers, especially those who belong to his homeland and Latin America.

REFERENCES

- Ashcroft, B. (1989). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in postcolonial literatures*. London: Routledge.
- Bell, V. (2002). *Gabriel Garcia Marquez's one hundred years of solitude: A casebook*, Oxford: Oxford University.
- Carpentier, A. (1995). *On the marvelous real in America: Magic realism*. Ed. Zamora and Faris, p. 85-86.
- Marquez, G. G. (1970). *One hundred years of solitude*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.
- - -. *Living to Tell the Tale*. Trans. Edith Grossman. London: Random House, 2003.
- Simpkins, Scott. "Sources of Magic Realism/Supplements to Realism in Contemporary Latin American Literature." *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. 145-162. Ed. Lois
- Wood, M. (1990). *Gabriel Garcia Marquez: One hundred years of solitude*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zamora, B., & Wendy B. (1995). *Magic realism in one hundred years of solitude*. Durham: Duke University Press.