

MAGIC REALISM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELECTED FILMS

*A Dissertation submitted
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree
of
Master of Philosophy
in
English*

Submitted by

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH & FOREIGN LANGUAGES
CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF HARYANA
JANT-PALI, MAHENDERGARH
2016**



Central University of Haryana

Mahendergarh

(Established vide Act No. 25 (2009) of Parliament)

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No. CUH/2016

Date: 12.7.2016

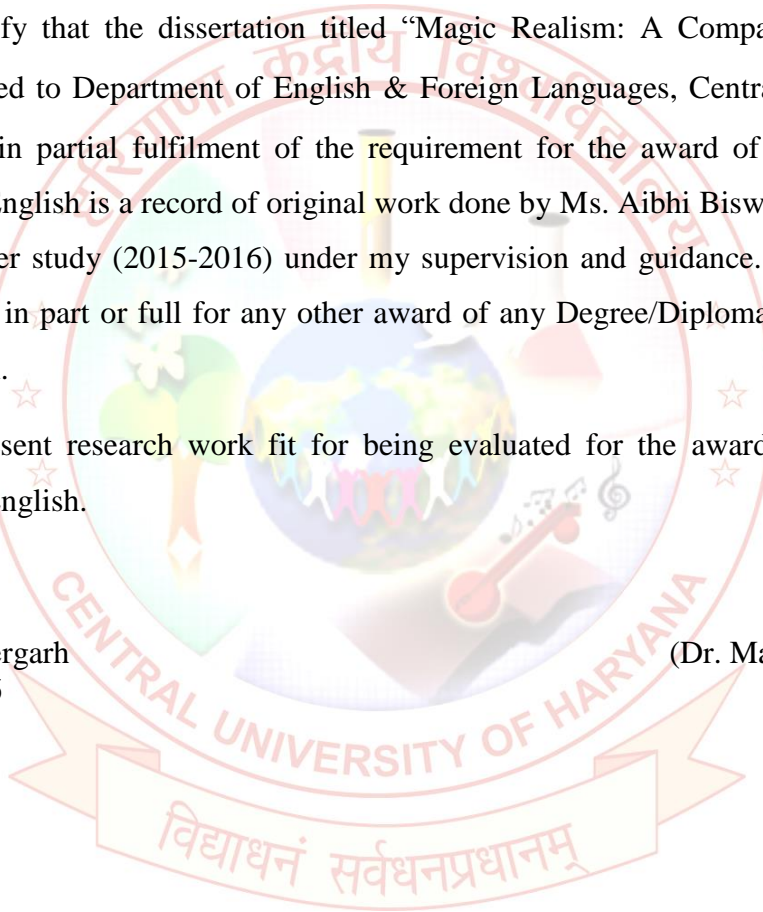
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled “Magic Realism: A Comparative Study of Selected Films” submitted to Department of English & Foreign Languages, Central University of Haryana, Mahendergarh in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English is a record of original work done by Ms. Aibhi Biswas (Roll No. 6030) during the period of her study (2015-2016) under my supervision and guidance. This dissertation has not been submitted in part or full for any other award of any Degree/Diploma of this university or any other institution.

I deem the present research work fit for being evaluated for the award of degree of Master of Philosophy in English.

Place: Mahendergarh
Date: 12.7.2016

(Dr. Manoj K. Vidyalankar)
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the M.Phil. Dissertation entitled **Magic Realism: A Comparative Study of Selected Films** has been exclusively done by me under the supervision of Dr. Manoj Kumar Vidyalankar, Assistant Professor, Department of English & Foreign Languages, Central University of Haryana, Mahendragarh. The work presented in this dissertation is original and references to the other works have been made with proper acknowledgement and complete source of information that is included in the Works Cited Lists and Bibliography.

I, further, declare that this dissertation has not been submitted to any other institute or University for the award of any degree.

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PREFACE

Wikipedia defines Magical realism/magic realism/marvellous realism as an artistic mode which spans over the literature, painting and film, comprising of a range of subtly different concepts along with an unhesitant acceptance of magic in the rational world. Magic realist works aim to capture the fantastic that is present within reality. Piyush Ashish defines magic realism as an unexpected transformation of reality, an insight into the reality which seems singular. It is effective and powerful due to the interweaving of European Realism and non-European Fabulism. These two worlds appear to the viewer as almost merging. A magic realist work occurs in a realistic setting which is recognizable historically and geographically by its readers/viewers. Magic realist works can fuse their narratives with the indigenous folktales, cultural beliefs, superstitions and the history and politics of the area it's based on/in. Its settings are historically and geographically real and correct hence the readers/viewers are presented a world where nothing is taken for granted yet everything is possible. The mode employs an overlapping of the mundane and the fantastic hence it has connections with Surrealism. Magical realism is a unique narrative form used in Latin American fiction which uses the acceptance of magical elements in their rational daily lives and has roots in variant cultures where magic is part of their reality in form of fables, folktales, myths and superstitions. The famous magic realist writer Arturo Usler Pietri defined magic realism as a type of writing focusing on "the mystery of living amongst the reality of life." (Maggie Ann Bowers 13-14).

Magic realism was introduced in cinema in the late 18th century but these films used magic realist events and tropes in their narrative to depict a truer reality. The films like *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Wings of Desire* can be called proto magic realist films. Recently magic realist films have become quite popular even in mainstream cinema. Earlier magic realist films were independent productions by radical filmmakers who wanted to break free of

conventional realism and challenge the dominate system of filmmaking. These filmmakers belonging to different countries and cultural backgrounds were connected by their aim to depict thought on screen and to explore the deep recesses of reality bringing forth magical, silenced voices and issues. These magic realist films generally are original productions of filmmakers along with magic realist writers. These are not adaptations of magic realist novels. Since a magic realist work's (film) definition is not concrete, it's a difficult category to define. Hence to safeguard themselves from criticism and unanswerable questions filmmakers avoid calling their films magic realist instead call it a unique blend of different filmic genres.

Magic realism therefore is an unofficial filmic category yet if searched many lists of movies pop up claiming to be magic realist. The validity of these lists is questionable but some lists are quite well researched and having supportive sources for its claims. This proves that indeed there is a something called magic realist film and it is a global trend, nonetheless. The recent popularity of such films like *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *The Path of Zarathustra*, *Midnight in Paris*, *To Rome with Love*, etc.; show that the need to the hour is a hybrid, vibrant, meaningful phenomenon like magic realism. It is able to connect people across the globe through contemplation and empathy. It urges people to contemplate on contemporary issues and search for its solutions via unconventional means since conventional methods have failed. Finally, it is important to note that magic realism is a mode perfect for cinema. It's essentially a visual, representational mode which anchors us to the reality and history of our world rather than providing an escape and numbing our thinking. The deep meanings which it urges us to contemplate are universal in nature despite being rooted in a certain culture and history. Spreading the message that humanity is one and therefore we need to understand and cooperate with each other.

(Aibhi Biswas)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

No project is a solo task; I have been blessed to find skilful and helpful people who have guided me throughout this task. These people my teachers, friends and classmates have helped me write, review and learn things during the duration of this project. Without their cooperation, advice and guidance this project would not have been possible. First of all, I express my sincerest gratitude towards God, who has granted me the opportunity to undertake such a project and given me the strength to carry it out till the end. I convey my deep gratitude to Prof. R.C. Kuhad, Vice-Chancellor, Central University of Haryana, Mahendragarh, for making available all the facilities and rendering help under his generous patronage. I express my respectful gratitude to Dr. Sanjeev Kumar, Head, Dept. of English and Foreign Languages without his knowledgeable insights, this work would not have been possible.

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Manoj Kumar Vidyalankar for his support and encouragement during this research work. My interactions with my juniors and respected teachers have helped me expand my knowledge and explore new areas which helped me shape this project. I am also thankful to the faculty members of the Dept. Dr. Bir Singh Yadav, Dr. Snehasata and Dr. Sudeep for their advice they have provided throughout my time as their student. I express my thanks to my classmates, Ruchi Nanwal, Jerene George and Surender Kumar; whose insights and advice, during discussions were influential to shape this project. I like to express my appreciation for the Library Staff of Central University of Mahendragarh, who have helped me procure material for this project. At last but not least I like to give my thanks to my parents who have supported me physically, emotionally and financially throughout my life and this project.

(Aibhi Biswas)

CONTENTS

Certificate	
Declaration	
Preface	
Acknowledgement	
Chapter – I: Magic Realism in Film: Definition, Features and History	1-41
Chapter – II: <i>The Path of Zarathustra</i> : India's Take on Magic Realism on Screen	42-70
Chapter – III: <i>Beasts of The Southern Wild</i> : America's Magic Realism	71-89
Chapter – IV: Summing Up	90-98
Select Bibliography	99-109
Appendix	110-115

Chapter – I

Magic Realism in Film: Definition, Features and History

Magic realism has a broadly descriptive definition rather than critical or rigorous one. This wide definition; generally used to categorise literature which portrays magical, fantastical and seemingly unreal elements in a realistic and conventional environment. Academics and critics have failed to seek out a proper definition for the term. They recognised the term being a mode which is more powerful and precise than they originally thought. Zamora and Wendy Faris claim it's a mode which can explore and “transgress ontological, geographical, political, generic and many other boundaries, such a unique coexistence of separate worlds, spaces, theories and system is rarely possible in any other mode” (Zamora and Faris 5). Critics have completely stopped trying to set a specific boundary and definition for magic realism. Yet most viewers/readers accept Auturo Uslar Pietri's definition. This proves that the term has a wide range of features and contexts and its own unique usage. The term has strong academic and cultural usage. It is not supposed to function according to the academia's techniques, perceptions and terminology.

Western world's confusion about the definition of magic realism comes from their 'conception of the real'. In a magic realist work reality is created “in which the relation between the incidents, characters and setting could not be based upon or justified by their normal acceptance by bourgeoisie mentality” (Angel Flores 191). Louis Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris explain that western readers are unable to link with the superstitions, fables, folklore and myths which form the roots of the magic realism. Magic realism relies upon realism, the imagined or magical elements are depicted as if they were real, stretching the real to its limits and sometimes beyond it, propose Maggie Ann Bowers. A magic realist

work highlights the complexity inherent in the reality and nature by creating illusionary spaces that recedes into the background. The viewers must interpret these mysterious and hidden parts of an image in order to achieve a complete, in depth understanding of the work. Though she suggests this regarding magic realist paintings but this can also be applied to other magic realist works.

The definition of magic realism is problematic asserts critic J.S. Hurley as it encompasses range of definitions and is used to refer to a variety of works of Art which belong to various cultures and various forms of Art like visual art, literature and audio visual art which includes cinema. Critic Jean Pierre Durix observes people have started to label “so many different kinds of artistic productions as magic realist that the term has lost its ability to distinguish between genres” (Durix, 116).

Critic Edwin Williamson concludes that most critics generally agree that magic realism is a narrative style which “blurs lines between the traditional realism and fantasy” (Edwin Williamson 5). Critic Wendy B. Faris “suspension between two different discursive systems” (Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* 9) presents the post-colonial situation. Hence magic realism is an effective decolonialism tool as it presents new cultural voices and an alternative to the European realism. Thereby questioning dominant discourses and propagating a liberating feel. Magic realist narrative is imbued with symbolism and visual imagery, implying the inadequacy of the dominant Realism to describe the non-western way of life and viewpoints appropriately. Hence it contains subversive, revolutionary essence which opposes socially dominant forces. Kaushik Trivedi says that magic realism fuses external factors and the interval factors of human existence such as combining science fiction/ physical reality with the psychological reality. He claims that magic realism is “an intimate affair between the readers” (Kaushik Trivedi 392) and the work. Discussions of magic realism over the last few decades have opened debates regarding

the relationship between reality, fiction and the reader/viewer. Magical realism, Wendy B. Faris observes contributes to a kind of international literary diaspora and cosmopolitanism open for wide application. The elements of magic realism are irreducible and hybrid, which questions the basis of realism, leading to an "alternative ways of being" and "new forms of discourse" (Wendy B. Faris 13).

Magic realism uses various narrative modes which are complex and ambiguous thereby attracting multiple viewpoints. Magic realism's definition and application is problematic and ambiguous in certain works hence academics have enough space to question and bring out multiple opinions about it. Zamora and Wendy B. Faris claim that magic realism has an important presence in the contemporary world of Art, especially literature because it creates "comparative connections, avoiding separatism while at the same time respecting cultural diversity" (Maggie Ann Bowers 64). Critic Wendy B. Faris claims that magic realism's internal contradictions of including magical elements within rational reality, presenting the confusion of the colonized man who has no control of his destiny and the political system engenders this confusion and helplessness. Its unconventional modes of narration and internal contradiction challenges the conventional realism and the western world view, destabilising social and gender ideologies and transgressing boundaries making it perfect to represent the Decolonialisation discourse. It explores the margins and offers alternate perceptions of the world, identity and gender thereby giving voice to cultural minorities. Magic realism portrays the hidden and silenced voices of such spaces and histories even if it does not aim itself to address such issues of decolonialization and pre-colonial histories. Maggie Bowers suggests that this gives magic realism a political nature, the users of this mode tend to be anti- imperialist, feminist and Marxists, who engage in issues related to post colonialism, cross culturalism, trans culturalism and debates on the clashes between the western, empirical and the non-western mythical and oral cultures.

In magic realism 'magic' does not mean a magical act which gives the illusion of something extraordinary happening rather it's the 'mystery of life' as scholar Kaushik Trivedi purposes, here something extraordinary actually happens. Magic realism uses real life, historical settings as well as fantastical elements, the imaginative features are meant to be allegorical of the different states of consciousness and symbolic of the multifaceted reality we live in. Its narratives are like a puzzle which the audience needs to solve yet are unable to solve, unlike the mystery genre questions are left unanswered.

Scholar Maggie Ann Bowers tries to categorise and delimit the mode of magic realism by examining and exploring its relationship with other genres like realism, surrealism, fantasy or supernaturalism, science fiction and post modernism which have common features. Understanding the relationship, it shares with these genres is the key to understand the mode itself. Critic Amaryll Beatrice Chanady gives an overview of the traits of magic realism. Most critics agree that the supernatural or anything outside the conventional as being a trait of magic realism. Generally magic realism is seen as another name for fantasy fiction, author Terry "[magic realism] ...a polite way of saying you write fantasy" (Terry Patchet interview with Linda Richards). Disagreeing critic A. B. Chanady says that in fantasy the presence of the supernatural is seen as problematic, attention is drawn to it and the authorial reticence creates a disturbing effect on the readers/viewers. Whereas in magic realism the supernatural is explored in a way that is valid, natural and there is no hierarchy between the real and the unreal. Magic realism observes critic A. B. Chanady does not create completely different, fictional or fantastical world nor follows conventional reality completely rather it transforms reality by creating a world which cannot be understood using conventional codes of perception.

Fantasy in literature and film is an extensive genre which uses magical elements as a major part of the plot creating an alternative world based on supernatural elements, whose

basis can be rationally explained. This fantastical world has its own elaborate, extensive details and its own rules that explain the magical happenings such as in the book and the movie series of *Harry Potter*. Fantasy does not demand critical attention since it's deemed as for mere entertainment of its readers or viewers, an attempt to escape the real world reality. Whereas magic realism incorporates magic within reality but these fantastical elements are never really explained yet they are accepted by the audience as a normal part of reality without drawing any special attention. In fantasy a great deal of suspension of disbelief is demanded from its audiences which can only be managed by creating a new world and its appeal comes from the freedom achieved in that new world. In contrast, magic realism the suspension of disbelief demanded is little or none, making it more difficult to achieve as it needs to be achieved within the constraints of reality and be linked to the world we live in. According to critic A.B. Chanady the supernatural in magic realism does not disconcert the readers because of its antinomies hence its readers and characters do not try to find a natural explanation for it. Fantasy films appeal directly to the imagination rather than appropriating the truth or plausibility of the truth behind the myth.

Surrealism is generally confused with magic realism both in literature and cinema, since both of them explore irrational and unrealistic aspects of humanity and its existence. Surrealism and magic realism has a prior historical connection coming from Franz Roh's *Magischer Realismus* and its influence on Alejo Carpentier's *Marvellous Real*. It was influenced and inspired by the surrealist movement in 1920's Europe and the European literary Avant Garde. One major difference between them is that *Surrealism* explores the link between the imagination, the mind, the inner life and human psychology through different forms of Art. It attempts to express the subconscious, unconscious, the repressed and inexpressible. In contrast magic realism is grounded in reality and rarely presents the extraordinary in form a dream or a psychological experience. Maggie Ann Bowers proposes

it takes the magic of a recognisable material reality and places it into the mysterious world of imagination. The ordinariness of magic realism depends on its acceptable and unquestioned position in the conventional physical world. Surrealism focuses on the psychological and cerebral reality rather than the everyday reality.

Surrealism and magic realism both tend to explore the unusual, mysterious and magical through art which point towards the raising of socio political concerns and explore them through an imaginary world. This can be abstract or through subtle shifts in consciousness that portrays the objective world on the screen. Magic realism and surrealism are similar in their emphasis on objectifying human perception and the human subconsciousness, though Art. For instance, filmmaker Guillermo de Toro and Tim Burton are called magic realist as their films present a synthesis of reality and fantasy. The 2006 film *Pan's Labyrinth* is considered as a great example of magic realist cinema. The reworking and representation of the Spanish civil war through the fantastical, depicting it through the eyes of a young girl is able to use a variety of “conventions from folklore, horror, science fiction, legends and myths.” (Felicity Gee 19). The film sits on the border of a variety of genres which is often confused with magic realism like Surrealism and Fantasy. Surrealist Raphealle Moine talks about Surrealism as a film genre and states that keeping tabs on the definition and the limits of a ‘surrealist film’ is essential but in case of a magic realist film it is not.

Science fiction is often confused with magic realism, mostly in films. Science fiction like magic realism blends the real with that of the imaginary and is often categorised as a form of the fantastical but Maggie Bowers suggests they are different. Recent magic realism has gone beyond mere Fantasy and Surrealism to depict a reality is magical yet has roots in the everyday life.

The science fiction narrative is distinct from magic realism as it is set in a world different from any known reality and its realism resides in the fact that we can

recognise it as a possibility for our future. Unlike magic realism it does not have a realist setting that is recognisable in relation to any past or present reality (Maggie Bowers 109).

Currently no book length critical study of cinematic magic realism exists which can handle questions of its intermediary, multigeneric conception and its application as a visual style. In 2011, Ph. D candidate Ljudmila Popovich self-published her yet incomplete thesis entitled *Cinemagic: Magic Realism in International Cinema*. The book traces the history of magic realism in cinema, analysing the film, Tom Tyker's *Run Lola Run* 1998, Spike Jonze's *Being John Malkovich* 1999, Emir Kusturica's *Time of the Gypsies* 1988; yet it's unable to handle critical issues of it being an official genre of Hollywood. To get a clearer definition of magic realism in cinema, it's essential to recognise the main criticism against magic realism in cinema. According to critic Felicity Gee magic realist films can be separated into two categories one in which an understated folkloric content, an imaginary arena or where a regression through childhood memory or a juxtaposition with the contemporary reality; is present. The second category includes films which are adaptations of magic realist novels.

The educated viewer claims critic A.B. Chanady is well aware of the contradiction between rational and irrational as distinct and opposing worldviews yet in a magic realist film the viewer does not react to the supernatural on the screen as it were paradoxical with respect to conventional reality, since it's the perception of the narrator and characters in the fictional world. Maggie Bowers identifies some core aspects of magic realism in Wim Wenders film *Wings of Desire* 1987, the interpretation of the real and the celestial worlds and the narrative corresponding to the colour on the screen [i.e. the angel's perspective shot in monochrome and the human's world is in colour] are key aspects of its magic realism. The film disrupts reality by its magical content, here Maggie Bowers sees magic as a means of initiating philosophical questions about life after death, the essence of soul, the meaning of life etc. Art

historian Georgina Colville observes that cinematic magic realism focuses on its “narrative structure and the symbolic object placement whereas a surrealist film is connected to oneiric and automated inner worlds.” (Felicity Gee 24). She feels that antithetical realms of magic i.e. surrealism and realism which magic realism has, should be “separated so that its differences could be clearly presented” (Georgina Colville 128), in order to view Delvaux’s film as he desired it to be viewed; one needs to fuse the marginal and the real, the unconscious and the conscious, in a symbiosis. She concludes that “surrealist antimonies and magic realist, double layered, intersecting worlds are closely linked [even in cinema].” (Georgina Colville 128).

Critic Theo D’Haen compiles a list of traits which can be attributed to the mode of magic realism which describes magic realism having self-reflexivity, meta-fiction, complex, multifaceted, intertextual, paradoxical eclectic, redundant and contains the dissolution of characters and narrative instances, the erasure of boundaries and the destabilization of the audience. These traits reveal the instinctive nature of language and its fluidity which thereby leading to a revision of cultural ideologies proposed scholar R. Singh, this makes magic realism perfect for post-colonial and postmodern discourses. Hence magic realism and post modernism share features and themes of post colonialism which encompasses metafiction, multiple viewpoints, textualisation of the reader, intertextuality, time jumps and themes which can only be explained via magical assessment rather than a scientific one.

With the foundations and characteristics of magic realist art and literature one can identify a magic realist film proposes scholar Nishant Komar. The magic realist works have certain common features which are retained across arts and across cultures. Some features of magic realism are common in magic realist literature/ cinema / paintings. These features are:-

Magical Elements – Magic realist works of presents fantastical/ magical elements in matter of fact way. It brings magic, folktales, cultural myths and superstitions into reality events

which imply a social relevance. Characters generally have magical traits like telepathy, telekinesis and levitation; these woven into the narrative point to political realities that may seem fantastical but are actually real. The fantastical blends with the real in such a way that it results in a two dimensional reality unlike the one dimensional reality presented by other discourses. Magic realist films present the impossible as unremarkable yet the magic in it is able to attract the attention of the audience since it does not rely on the maintenance of the willing suspension of disbelief as the way these extraordinary elements are presented helps the audience form a kind of explanation without being directly explained in the film. Since the uncommon elements are perfectly plausible and do not draw doubts or surprise from the characters or its audience, in a magic realist film.

Realistic Setting - Magic realist works grounded in the real, conventional and everyday world and life. Magical elements are interwoven into this reality but the areas that the plots are based in are historically and geographically recognizable by the audience. There are no new worlds which no one has ever seen or heard of before. The supernatural blends with the natural world.

Authorial Reticence – A. B. Chanady describes this trait as the deliberate withholding of information and explanation about the disconcerting events in the magic realist film. The narrator is indifferent and the events are extraordinary yet they proceed in a logical way as if nothing extraordinary happened. Angel Flores magical occurrences are presented and accepted as ordinary happenings in the culturally rich countries. Mexican critic Gracias Luis Leal famously claims that if you can explain it, it's not magical realism.

Abundance - Magic realist works have a lack of emptiness along with a departure from structures or rules and the abundance details is almost disorienting for the audience. Alejo Carpentier asserts that such a layering of elements and its richness forms a reality which is beautiful as well as extraordinary.

Hybridity - Magic realist works include and employ multiple and mixed layers of reality for example the individual experience and the collective or/and conventional experiences are presented simultaneously or one experiences two different time periods at the same time. Critic Lee A. Daniel asserts that it employs methods linking oppositional states in order to depict a deeper and truer reality. Maggie Ann Bowers analyses a few films as magic realist by their feature of “collision of two different and coexisting worlds” (Maggie Bowers 111), but it is a broad category. She follows the criteria set for magic realism literature as a guide to magic realism in cinema. Magic realism demands the suspension of disbelief on the diegetic level. According to her, in the film *Being John Malkovich* by Spike Jonze, where the only extra ordinary element is the existence of the 7 ½ floor and a magic portal whose existence is accepted as real by the characters. This feature prevents this film to slip into fantasy genre; this idea was conceived by critic Amaryll Beatrice Chanady. Magic realist films present dialectic between the universal and the local, the self and the other. Although Hollywood is dominated by Americanism yet magic realism preserves the native cultural amalgamation. It forms its unique culture where it seeks to recover the lost traditional values while intermingling with urban and modern trends. This regenerates the society in a harmonious way, the global and the native gradually crystalizes in the presence of magic realism says Noelia Fernández.

Metafiction – Magic realist works focus on the role of the audience in and with the magic realist work. They are complex and multifaceted presenting its audience with multiple realities, exploring the impact fiction has on reality and vice versa. Critic Jon Thiem explains that the role of the reader/viewer can be of two types one where the fictions reader/viewer enters the story within story while reading it making us self-aware of our position as readers/viewers and the second where the textual world enters the readers (our) world. Magic is the flexible tool that enables such a relationship.

Heightened Awareness – Magic realist works generally have an intense theme. Its audience must discard their expectations of a conventional plot progression, exposition, linear time line and scientific or logical reasoning. The narratives lead to the point of the extreme says Luis Leal in order to realise all levels of the reality which presents the mysterious within the conventional. There is a heightened sense of mystery due to the transformation of reality within the story giving it a patched up quality hence it's often seen as post modernism.

Political Critique- Theo D'Haen asserts that magic realist works are transgressive, multifaceted and break down the boundaries dominant discourses set. It cannot be fit into a definite categorisation, making it subversive of pre-established systems and revolutionary against socially dominant forces. It deals with the marginalized communities and cultures giving voice to the silenced, offering multiple possibilities and viewpoints. Magic realism helps form a collective consciousness as opposed to the individual consciousness favoured by the dominant European discourses. Art critic Frederic Jameson focuses on the political nature of magic realist films, taking up examples from the selection of films he considers as magic realist. Magic realism is often criticised of primitivizing the cultures and communities it depicts. But the global presence of magic realism in which magic realist films have a major role [as cinema can reach and be understood by a greater number of people than a book or a painting] in homogenising the different manifestations and cultural differences that magic realism represents. This recovers and re-presents post-colonial history.

Close Focus - Magic realist works include ultra-sharp focus on certain objects and have a lot of detailing, an inheritance from magic realist paintings. Frederic Jameson claims of magic realist films possessing this feature in his article. Jameson asserts that focus on certain specific objects are historically and culturally symbolic like the bomb in the film *Gorączka* by Agnieszka Holland.

Objectivity- Magic realist works are objective as they eliminate the presence of its creator in the larger outlook and focusing on the materiality of the object in the real world. Making transplantation of this mode possible to most cultures and enables it to describe various objects and events without being specifically tied up to certain particular objects, areas or events. Earlier transplanting it into western cultures was difficult but due to globalisation, the West has become culturally rich.

Centripetal View- Seymon Menton proposes that a magic realist work provokes intellectual responses as the viewer's attention is deliberately divided. This is because the work is fragmented yet whole and the viewer views one part of it simultaneously viewing the whole. It steers its audience to contemplate on the issue the narrative focuses on. Angel Flores asserts that Postmodernism and magic realism have the same attitude towards their audiences, since they do not aim to satisfy the popular mass rather cater to a sophisticated section of the population who are attuned to notice 'Textual subtleties'.

Representational- Magic realist works are representational of a variety of issues, cultures and most importantly of magic within the reality of our lives. They represent what is possible, what could and may happen instead of what we would wish for to happen, which occurs in fantasy. Most fantastical, unreal scenes and objects in a magic realist film are allegorical or symbolic like the auroch's in the film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* represent the spirit of survival against adversities of life, natural or man-made. Plots and events in magic realist films are generally manifestations which highlight the localism and cultural past of the country it's based on without negating the effect of the dominant foreign culture which is equally powerful suggests critic Noelia Fernandez.

Defamiliarisation- Magic realist films defamiliarizes recognisable events, objects and scenes for its audience and learn that they do not completely understand the situation that they thought they knew is strange, yet it has something to teach its audience what they never

anticipated, explains critic Maggie Ann Bowers. Scholar Edmund Haeng states that magic realism is essentially a defamiliarization device, magic realist narrative defamiliarizes the familiar (objects, events and elements) in order to show the dislocations and disjunctions in the country's political, social and cultural discourses which may be seen as a resistance to the conventional, dominant western discourse. Magic realist film proceeds a point of conflict which manifests in the real and from which a doubling of the real and the imaginary develops, the reoccurrence of symbolic objects act as the anchor for the audience to navigate from reality to the imaginary without the suspension of disbelief. The background music echoes the themes of the plot and influences the viewers so that their perception of reality is transformed.

First Person Narration- Magic realist films generally are shown from the narrator's point of view who is experiencing the events. What the protagonist knows, sees and hears is what the audience know, see and hears. This subverts the authority of the camera, true to the subversive nature of magic realism. Magic realist works may narrate the story from a child's point of view. For example, *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), directed by Guillermo del Toro.

No Explanation or Justification – Explanation is not a part of the magic realist mode even in its cinematic form, it is neither an alternate reality nor a series of irrational point of views which are later explained in the film as someone's dream or insanity. Critic David Isaak asserts that magic realist films in some unexplained way interweaves or intersects another order of reality with our everyday reality. It is not the mere exchange of one set of rules with another which happens in fantasy or science fiction nor is it the mere existence of the unexplained or uncanny which occurs in horror films. The sense of magic realism arises in a film where the extraordinary is an imminently present in the backdrop of ordinary, everyday events or where a compilation of realistic events offer a counterpart to the conscious reality. Magic realist films do not have a clear cut resolution and some core events are left

unexplained leading to it being questioned by the audience this will lead to different people arriving at different conclusions. This maintains the nature of magic realism being a multifaceted mode offering multiple possibilities.

Ambiguous End- Magic realist movies may depict ambiguous or peculiar stories yet preserve a sense of logic and a meaning which is deeper than the surface meaning of the pictures on screen. *Tvtropes.org* argues that a film can be considered magic realist if the audience at the end of it are left with thought to ponder and create hypotheses on and create alternative explanations, which can be naturalistic or supernatural or both. But the narrative of the film is the most important, it will be magic realist only if it's done in a satisfying yet intriguing way and not merely led to an open ending. It is generally done by showing an event which could have happened but it's not established by the film that it happened, making the narrative ambiguous. This does not happen in a fantasy film where it is established that everything magical that has happened has happened, although only in that alternative magical world. Magic realist films generally give some characters a form of non-magical special powers like the grandmother has in the film *Time of the Gypsies* or the protagonist of the film, who can communicate with his rooster, this allows multiple possibilities of the mundane fantastical. The director does not confirm or deny a solution or explanation to these phenomena's if they do then it results in the 'it's a dream' or 'it was destiny' trope, negating the magic realist narrative, elements and purpose of the film. The audience see the events anticipating or conceiving of a weird explanation but are unsure of its reality and reliability. Magic realist films the mystery of the fantastical element or event is preserved. Critic David Isaak concludes that magic realist films core feature is an acceptance of ambiguity without a doubt, which can range from a powerful unexplained undercurrent of meaning depicted by events which are ordinary with an intersection of another, alternate order of reality.

Angel Flores agrees that magic realism has become an international commodity, and adding to this Zamora and Wendy B. Faris says that it's a product of the postmodern world. Magic realism is a cross cultural, cross art phenomenon and its latest form has become popular in cinema. Magic realism is traced to have roots in a variety of art forms starting from visual arts, leading to literature and presently popular in cinema. The different usage of the term across time periods has made its definition difficult, which becomes more problematic when it's applied to cinema. In the case of movie adaptations of magic realist novels, the features, links and aim of the movie was clear but later when it started to be used for films which were not adaptations, the term was used in a broader sense. Yet some scholars still try to grasp the concept of magic realism in cinema, the filmic genre is still in emergence. It being a clear cut, concrete filmic genre in cinema is not yet established. Since the viewers, filmmakers and critics have not arrived at an agreement about its stylistic features. The medium of film facilitates the working of the mind along with imagination and magic, a key feature of magic realism; making it suitable for the big screen.

In cinema and literature, the mode is open for contestations & debates and the debate doubles its force when the label is applied to films. One major problem in magic realist films is lifting the literary label and applying it to the cinematic genre says critic David Isaak. Maggie Ann Bowers claims "film is not often considered as magic(al) realist in criticism and neither is magic realism...recognised categories of film. However, it is possible to recognise features of magic realism ...in many films" (Maggie Bowers 104). Critics do not investigate this subject and the research around is little as well. If one has to start research on magic realism in film then one must start from Frederic Jameson's article "On Magic Realism in Film" 1986 and his later article "Soviet Magic Realism" 1992. Maggie Bowers discusses magic realism in cinema by analysing movie adaptations of magic realist novels and movies like *Being John Malkovich*, 1999 directed by Spike Jonze which are considered magic realist

yet are not adaptations. These films have magic realist features out of which the constant feature is that in the film depicts the real world with some extraordinary elements which all the characters seem to accept. She states that the magic realist aspects of these films acts as a means of posing philosophical questions like the existence of god, role of fate and destiny, the idea of self, etc. These questions are posed at the ambiguous end of the movie and extend beyond the film's purpose to simply divert one's attention and entertain.

People assert that many films are magic realist which have few common features, most importantly all these films are "kind of weird" (David Isaak n.p). Generally, filmmakers want to preserve the authority of the camera, hence most films are shown from an omniscient point of view, rarely showing the subjective point of view and if it does then it's usually a dream sequence or a brief eyes of the beholder moments where the vision gets wobbly due to effect of being hit or drugged. A film shot through the point of view of one character, where its audience only knows what that character knows, is rare. The authority and objectivity of the camera is problematic, in case of magic realism, its audience is accustomed to *border skipping* [a term used by critic A.B Chanady to describe the blurring of genres or categories in a magic realist work]; they are able to move to and fro between two systems, periods or discourses, viewing a synthesis of both. This hinders the objective, documentary like quality when it's confronted with the unconventional, the uncanny or strange.

A film may portray alternate realities but it generally tries to explain those realities, which we see on screen. Since we saw it they do not want its audience to question the pictures on screen. A film can show a reality having a different set of rules that will be an alternate or parallel world like in *The Chronicles of Narnia* or *Harry Potter*, which is the premise of a fantasy film. *Star Wars* would be a science fiction film or it all could be a dreamlike in the film *The Nutcracker*. But in magic realist films the audience has faith in what they are seeing and understand and accept it without any surprise or doubt. The

acceptance of the uncanny but surprise and fear at its appearance is the premise of the Horror film, which generally explains the logic and justification of the uncanny presence like in *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005) or *Haunting in Connecticut* (2009).

Critic David Isaak compares the feeling a magic realist film gives out to psychiatrist Stanislaw's description of the boundaries of the states of consciousness being like a beaches surf zone where the two worlds of the shore where everything is stable and the world of the sea where the rise and fall of the waves has its own stability. This a fluctuating, indescribable arena does not follow the rules of one particular discourse. The magic realist works are comfortable here, not cinema as objectiveness of the camera is unable to function efficiently.

Magic realism, claims Mary Hurd, is "officially not recognised as a cinema genre but features of magic realist literature are retained in magic realist films." (Mary Hurd 73). According to Wikipedia a list of 44 films are categorised as magic realist which includes Woody Allen's *Alice* 1990, *Purple Rose of Cairo* 1985 and *To Rome with love* 2012 and Emir Kusturica's *Time of the Gypsies* 1988, are fine examples of magic realist movies. Maggie Bowers asserts that magic realist films are cultural productions like magic realist literature and paintings. She views the employment of magic realism in films as a narrative art. Very few critics consider films as magic realist like Frederic Jameson. Generally, those films are labelled and analysed as magic realist which are adapted from magic realist novels like *Como Agua Para Choco* (Like Water for Chocolates), Laura Esquivel's 1989, magic realist novel; adapted into a movie in 1992 directed by Alfonso Arau. Maggie Bowers asserts that magic realism which enables us to explore the world through our imagination without losing connection to the real world. Magic realist films explores disruptions in the real world, recognising that extraordinariness can also be contained in the world we live in. Critic Robert Stam mentions that magic realist movies which are not adaptations but does not elaborate on them. Despite there is a list of movies which are not adaptations of magic realist novels yet

they are labelled as magic realist. Critic J.S Hurley asks “Who labels them magic realist? And why? The scholars? The critics? Is magic realism misunderstood?” (J.S. Hurley 13).

The list of magic realist films is long as well as diverse. The more we analyse a film on the lines of magic realism we come to realise that we are unable to explain it; it frustrates us not knowing how to explain it corresponding to the nuances of reality which we follow but are unable to explain its logic. The best way to employ magic realism in films is to hint at the logic, since explaining it will negate the awe of the mode and the audience will lose interest. Maggie Ann Bowers claims that the audience tend to accept magic realism of the things that we see and question [on screen] like we used to believe in things when we were children. Recently more magic realist films have been produced but earlier films like *It's a Wonderful Life* 1946 and *Stairway to Heaven* 1946 also contain magic realist elements and can be considered proto magic realist movies. Many directors have used the mode or elements from this mode for many different and radical purposes. Maggie Bowers adds films are places where one generally turns to, to see our internal struggles played out externally on the screen, consciously or unconsciously. Generally, the viewer identifies with the issues, events or problems depicted by the film and ultimately gains a better awareness and sometimes solution of the same.

Film critic may arbitrarily or hastily tag a particular type of film as magic realist which to them seems magic realist which misappropriates the term, adding to the confusion and ambiguity. The odd and distinct list of films that different writers, critics or armatures classify as magic realist range from Francis Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* 1979 to David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* 1986. They do not provide a criteria based on which they recognised these films as being magic realist. If analysed properly it maybe be found that some of them fit better in the fantasy, science fiction or surrealist film category.

Looking at the current production and interest in the magic realist movies, there is an unofficial recognition of the category of magic realist movies but critics do not want to fall into the trap of magic realism as a movie genre as the boundary and basic features of the category or genre are still not put down as concrete. Presently this category's features are fluid and fluctuating and its specific features are yet to be universally accepted and approved. But there is no doubt of its presence in the world wide cinema stage and its presence has been acknowledged universally and by the dominant movie market of Hollywood. Even though it is officially not a genre it's certainly on the path of being one. Any genre comes into acceptance and usage only when recognised by audience worldwide for example the genre of romantic comedy did not exist earlier but since films of that type are being produced and seen, the audience started to recognise key features of such films, grouped them together and formed a new genre. Magic realism does not show any preference towards any particular filmic genre and can be combined with any filmic genre like intimate drama in the movie *Wings of Desire* by Wim Wenders, *Field of Dreams* by Phil A. Robinson, or war epic like *Red Sorghum* or gentle comedies like *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. This is one of the hindrances of magic realism being a cinematic genre and hence to avoid complications film critics and filmmakers regard it as a cinema style or technique.

As far as the viewership of these movies is concerned, the term 'magic realist movies' is searched on the internet and numerous lists of magic realist movies pop up, including a list by Wikipedia, a universally acknowledged site for reliable information. Hence Magic realism in film is indeed a universally acknowledged and employed category though it has its own internal problematics and workings. The popular film site *IMDB.com* presents a list of 586 films because the website uses the term 'magic' 'realism' not as a genre but as a key words which has a connection to the movies in any way explains critic J.S. Hurley. Though Wikipedia does the same but its focus is more concise and it does recognise some key

features of magic realist movies within the movies listed, some of the movies mentioned are truly magic realist excluding the ones which are magic realist novel adaptations. A film is labelled as magic realist by amateur film critics and mostly in movie reviews and reactions to movies presented during film festivals. Most magic realist movies produced in the last few decades have won and been nominated for international film festivals. Some amateur critics have their facts clear about magic realism like Genevieve Valentine's article, "Top 10 Magical Realism Films" by is well researched.

Scholar asks J.S Hurley asks if the producers and critics are too willing to label films as magic realist. On the internet there are various listings of the top ten, top twenty list of magic realist films, which are mostly formed by amateur critics but some like Genevieve Valentine's do make good sense and have some argumentations added to i.e. variety of professional and nonprofessional sources pop up when searching for magic realist cinema for instance the website *Tvtropes.org* states

. . . one of the easiest way to distinguish magic realism from other genres the use of the omniscient narrator is the story told by first person narration or not... another feature is that the magic that affects reality comes either from a plurality of sources like god, black magic, spirits all at the same time or from no source at all ... usually there is a strong correlation between magic realism and surrealism (*Magical Realism, Tvtropes.org* n.p.).

"Hollywood's Magic Realism" list on *Listal.com* lacks validation of its claims and lists movies based on the broad definition of magic realism being the interweaving of fantastical elements with reality. Hence the list ranges from *George of the Jungle* 1997 to *Sucker punch* 2011. Some lists are based on the assumption that magic realism as a sub-genre of fantasy without valid sources to support the claim, making it difficult to recognise magic realism as an official film genre or category. The debate on magic realism in cinema emerged

with the release and popularity of the film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* 2012 directed by Benh Zeitlin. Tom Shone a former film critic claimed it being the rise of magic realism in America and traced the turn of American audiences towards magic realist techniques of narration and presentation in films.

There is a large portion of the population who do not know what magic realism is exactly but in the present scenario where majority of movie goes are literate and are familiar with the pre-existing movie genres, one can at least decipher after watching a magic realist film that what they watch does not fit any of the pre-existing film categories. Very few professional and amateur film critics endeavour to explore the category of magic realist film rigorously. Producers do not indulge in officially recognising magic realism as film category or genre and only label those films magic realist which are adaptations of magic realist novels, since that is a safe categorisation. Films like *Beasts of the Southern Wild* 2012 are marketed as magic realist to gain audience's attention and create interest. Generally, the public views a genre linked a particular type of film, in this respect magic realism in cinema is a challenged category. The concept of a genres and its function is a wide, it involves various factors. The classification of works of art into a genre has various functions, most importantly it's a guideline that helps determine which film to watch. Secondly genre categorisation helps in writing film history and finally the economic motive behind the classification into different genres is that it's seen as a rational system for producing and exploiting cinema, describing what it is? Where it is used and for what? According to Robert Stam, a genre only exists if it is recognisable as such by a community. "Genre comes into being when it organises a set of semantic features into a stable syntax – that is when a film is formula is put in place that is recognisable to a public audience, and to which film attached themselves, through different levels of generosity" (Raphaëlle Moine, Hillary Rader, Alistair Fox 60).

According to these authors this happens when the filmmakers (the producer, screen writers, director, etc.) are able to conceive the film as relating to the genre while the audience is able to receive and react to the film as such. A genre must be recognisable in a film, since the magic realist film is not a clear category for the audience. So the filmmakers play it safe by avoiding making any statements about the category film falls under like in case of *Beasts of the Southern Wild* where Benh Zeitlin does not label it as magic realist but a film depicting a fusion of genres and having a unique way of depiction. They feel it's safer to let the audience categorise films as magic realist which share features with its literary counterpart. It's interesting that the films which are put under one list as magic realist are different from each other in many aspects and its features are quite shallow in some of these. Therefore, it would be too risky to assert that magic realism in cinema is an established genre.

Recent films like *Big Fish*, *Amelie*, *Chocolate* and *American Beauty* are difficult to understand and Hollywood labelled them simply as visually stylised rather than magic realist which is a complex arena. 'Visually Stylised' and magic realist films are different in the way details of the plot are focussed on via which the ordinary is seems to become the extraordinary, which transforms the viewer into a child who views the world anew. Visually stylised implies the unique visual treatment of a film whereas the in magic realism the film contains layered, complex elements and techniques which can be traced back to developments in art and literature. Hence when the label of magic realism was transferred from literature to cinema its features and techniques were retained.

A film festival is an international platform for cultural exchange in which films aim to entice political, social and cultural discourses and proliferate this dialectic among the global audience. Films at a film festival must be universal enough to be able to transgress cultural boundaries. Magic realist films often bring to light cultural and indigenous beliefs, myths, legends as well as cultural practices, in a way which depicts their subjective experience and

cultural realities, conveying realities other than the dominant one. Therefore, magic realist films often presented and appreciated at film festivals asserts Bruce H. Rogers. Characters consciousness in such films is reflected in via magical elements, events and objects which in turn shows the cultural values the film wants to be recognised.

Films mean different things to different people whereas majority of the population see it as a form of entertainment, some people consider it's as the expression of one's world view and perspective. The contemporary world is multicultural and multiracial and open to the influence of various traditions, a world ideally attuned to magic realist narrativization. Since magic realism focuses on marginal voices hence by default it presents a resistance to dominant system's influence and ability to assimilate marginal systems or discourses within them. Cinema is an efficient and effective tool of modernisation and globalisation. It the world recognise marginalised cultures/communities and their histories and traditions. Magic realist films have a uniform authorial vision and style behind their making since they arouse similar responses from the industry professionals and international audiences at film festivals. They are also uploaded on the internet in order to gain recognition, reactions and acknowledgements from viewers all over the world.

Magic realism has not been much explored in cinema. Films are considered magic realist by very few critics like Frederic Jameson, Maggie Bowers, Robert Stam and Frederic Luis Aldama. Films have not been critically analysed as magic realist except as film adaptations of magic realist novels like *The House of Spirits* 1993 by Isabel Allende. In 1950's magic realist novels started getting film adaptations, recognising that magic realism is suited for the medium of cinema. Features of magic realist literature and magic realist films are similar.

Ernesto Sabato's novel *El Tunel* or The Tunel was the first magic realist literary text to be adapted into a film. But scholar Lulú Panbehchi assets that cinematic magic realism

really originated from the movie *Talpa* 1956 based on Juan Rulfo's text of the same name. Frederic Jameson's in his article titled "On Magic Realism in Film" 1986, analyses images of selected films which he sees as magic realist using the techniques of a visual art critic. Whereas Maggie Bowers examines the visual elements of the film and how they affect the narrative of a magic realist film which ultimately leads to questions about philosophical issues which extends from being just being a means of entertainment. The analysis of adaptations of magic realist novels into magic realist films offers us an understanding of how essential the placing and aim of a visual element is in a magic realist film. There are many adaptations of magic realist novels into films which were quite popular such as *Like Water for Chocolates* was the highest grossing foreign movie in the box office that year. The viewers feel a sense of increased sense of reality as actual events unfold on the screen and the realism of the film is controlled by the director's choice of lightening, depiction and symbolisation. Like a golden lightening shows a romantic, celebratory mood whereas everyday scenes are portrayed in a less bright light. There has always been a close relationship between literature and cinema as films are from an early period been adapted from or inspired by texts. Ronald Perrier states "study of literature will cast light on the meaning the film presents and a study of films will illuminate the full value of the text" (Edmund Haeng 5).

Scholar Frederick Luis Aldama explores the diasporic culture of cinematic magic realism, especially Indian and African cultures and their conception of magic realism aims to revitalize their representations of Art, including cinema. Frederic Jameson in his article says that magic realism embodies not a realism that can be transfigured by having a magical perspective but a reality which is already in itself magical. Noelia Fernández claims that magic realist filmmakers aspire to gain recognition in the mainstream Anglo institutions without giving up their heritage thereby enhancing these films syncretic nature. The magic

realist films bring together divergent cinematic realities of the mainstream Hollywood and independent local cinema. Magic realist filmmakers portray a syncretic discourse that combines features of both cultures. National and international filmmakers have begun to represent ethnicity without the complexities of the past, many magic realist films deal with issues of the border region, immigration and identity in transition, yet rooted in cultural power shifts. A common aspect of magic realist films is that its magical aspects initiate philosophical questions like the existence of god, the role of fate and the conception of the self which is well beyond the assumed function of the film being for entertaining and a means of escape from the real world problems.

Scholar Felicity Gee asserts that between 1925 and 1949, five significant texts were published which challenged the function and effectiveness of realism in works of Art through the exploration of the magical or marvellous. These texts were French surrealist André Breton's 1924, first manifesto of Surrealism, in which he explained his concept of *Le Merveilleux* where the unexpected suddenly erupts into the everyday life, second is Franz Roh's 1925, book *Nach Expressionismus* where he identified a new trend in painting which he terms as *Magischer Realismus* which identifies the weird qualities of the exterior reality of an object. Third is Jorge Luis Borges 1932, article "Narrative Art and Magic". Fourth is the Surrealist Pierre Mabille's 1940, *Le Miroir De Merveilleux* or *The Mirror of the Marvellous*. The last is the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier 1949, article "lo real maravilloso" or the marvellous real in the preface of his book *The Kingdom of the World*, addressing the ontological magic in the reality and existence in Latin America. For cinematic magic realism the magic realism referred to by André Breton, Franz Roh and Alejo Carpentier's texts are important as their understanding of magic realism directly influenced the conceptualisation of magic realist films and helped magic realism being acknowledged and understood in the postmodern era, having gone through the influence of European Avant Garde.

Franz Roh in his 1925 book *Nach Expressionismus* asserted *Magischer Realismus* as being a form of painting in which visible objects express invisible meanings. Similarly, the images presented in the magic realist film link to our perception of world that the images become metaphors of philosophical and psychological questions arousing interest in them. Critic Franz Roh's conception of magic realism was based on the materiality of the object and how that inspires internal perceptions and emotions in its viewer, ultimately it links to the concept of defamiliarizing the familiar. Frederic Jameson claims that magic realist films renew its audience's appreciation of the real. Robert Stam traces the new wave cinema and its link to Marquezian magic realism.

Robert Stam asserts that literature and film are a part of a long, Trans-textual process, giving the cinema culture a good basis especially to cinematic magic realism. He agrees that magic realism in literature and cinema is a problematic category since it functions as an open and diverse space for transgressive and alternative forms of art which is rooted in multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. The emergence of cinema as an artistic mode in 1920's and its development in the cultural realm increased magic realism's significance even more. The cinematic apparatus is essential to magic realism being a visual mode, especially after the emergence and popularity of magic realist films internationally asserts scholar Felicity Gee. Films are able to capture our physical as well as our mental life. In literary narrative the switch from a first person narrative to a third person narrative symbolises a flashback or dream but in cinema the mode is able to create a seamless illusion of the transition between the internal, imaginary and the waking real world. In magic realist films these worlds are generally indistinguishable from a multi-perspective version of reality.

Magic realist films emerged in an era of photography and cinema and the debates surrounding them are linked to discussions of 'New Art' and modernity. These debates are essential to understand contemporary magic realist films and its relation to early films and

with the objects that Franz Roh and Alejo Carpentier discuss. We must remember that the early writings on cinema like Antonin Artaud's "Sorcery and Cinema" 1928, André Breton's discussion of magical space of the movie theatre in "As in A Wood" 1951, saw the experience movie going as a psychological journey of identifying dreamlike images on screen as magical. The 20th century Modern Art was driven by anti-rationalist, anti-enlightenment tendencies, leading towards a secular type of magic. A new realism and secular magic is the core of Franz Roh's magic realism which believes in approaching the magical within reality via a visual narrative rather than a religious or divine experience. Felicity Gee points that Art historian Christian Green argues that secular magic ties modern artists to modern media.

Frederic Jameson theories on cinematic magic realism explores a peculiar visual pleasure linked to the magic realist film. The magic realist film, according to Jameson has a combination three major aspects of historical raw material, colour and the focus of the narrative on violence and on a lesser degree on sex, which creates a visual spell for its audience. The historical sources used in magic realist films contradicts the aspects of an older mode while foreshadowing traces of a new, future mode. They do not present a slice of the past rather displays a history with holes, showing the developing cultures which were previously not acknowledged by the dominant, western discourses. Frederic Jameson takes a formalist approach and tries to determine the features of a magic realist film. On the other hand, Robert Stam takes the help of cultural and film studies, traces the developments in cinematic magic realism from the art movements in Latin America. Both Jameson and Stam discuss the under development of Latin American cinema production linking it to magic realism's aim to emphasize on realities of the Third World. They discuss the rise, development and aims of third cinema or third world's cinema which includes concepts like the *Aesthetics of Hunger*, *Aesthetics of Garbage*, and *Cine Imperfect* by Julio Espinoza which explore reality in the magic realist films produced by Latin America.

Frederic Jameson argues that the First World individuals view the political, economic world as separate from their private or community world whereas in contrast the Third World individual's stream of consciousness narrative projects a view which is politically inclined and the individual's destiny, especially of the protagonist of the movie becomes an allegory of the public realm, in a Third World culture and society. Fernando Solana's, filmmaker, argues that revolutionary filmmaking to resist the nominal objectivity of the first world cinema and mass media, creating films which challenge conventional reality. Such aspects are a part of a magic realist film. The feel of such films is not limited to the textual narrative but extended beyond it, giving it an imperfect look. The strategies like having a degraded raw material for a film, a delicate variation of ratio or frame per second are decreed by Hollywood, which Hollywood filmmakers designed to dominate film culture around the world.

Frederic Jameson views magic realist films to be set against nostalgia films as magic realism politicises the past history rather than turning it into a postmodern simulacrum for example the past violence is not glamourized in magic realist films like it is done in contemporary American film like Old West movies of Clint Eastwood. In magic realist films, images of historical sufferings are converged with the diegetic present and presented through certain key objects which emerge from the familiar surroundings but made to appear strange to the viewers. He adds that the effect of these images on its viewers is not worn away as the retelling or re-imagining of the violence, interrupts the narrative creating a gap or excess of meaning and this diverts the viewer's attention. In magic realist films nostalgia is replaced by a more subjective, interactive history that requires a more intense participation from its viewers. Critic Barbra Klonowska states that magic realist film's supernatural elements defamiliarizes the known history and re-imagines it on the screen. Jameson's theories of cinematic magic realism are complicated and difficult apply on contemporary films. But it's

one of the first critical writings on the topic and lays down the basic features of magic realist films.

According to him magic realist cinema has bases its structure on a type historical raw material which has disjunction present in it. Cinematic colour heightens the presence of magical tools in the film and the narrative has historical gaps or holes. These features of a magic realist film are “not realism to be transfigured by supplement of magical perspective but a reality which is already in and itself magical or fantastic” (Frederic Jameson, 311). The films he selects to analyse are Francisco Norden’s *Condors No Eutieran Todes Los D’ias* (A Man of Principle, Columbia 1984), Jorge Eliecer Giatan Ayala and Jacobo Penzo’s *La Casa Agua* (The House of Water, Venezuela 1983) and Agnieszka Holland’s *Gorączka* (Fever, 1981). Jameson was struck by these films shared features of narrative, manipulation of colour and political historical background. John King in his 1990 book, *Magical Reels: A History of Cinema in Latin America* observes that these films embody the ideology of Cinema Novo or New Cinema or Third Cinema; they have a unique technical quality and work out their plots aesthetically revealing a deeper understanding of the reality we live. The directors of these films use realism to portray the vivid reality in such a way that it made to seem strange.

“Affect”, “Intensities” and “Vital Events” key terms used by Frederic Jameson to describe the scenes and mood of magic realist films which create uncertainties and contradictions in the plot. Jameson describes “Affect” as the cognitive as well as the instinctual response to the objects portrayed on the screen. Carl Plantinga asserts “Affect is temporal like moods created through manipulation of the colour pallet, eruption of vital episodes and condensed images into the diegetic world...and are easily transfer to the audience” (Carl Plantinga n.p). Jameson’s history with holes in a magic realist film is one where the real history is disrupted by the magical vital episodes which link to a more subjective internal reality of the people experiencing that history. By the political

unconscious in magic realist films means the visual collage of images presented on the screen is a synthesis of images of historical sufferings and the divergent, presented through significant natural objects in the surroundings which make the familiar seen strange. Jameson describes cinematic magic realism as a two-way process where social realism is imbued with human fantasies of the characters and an incomplete version of reality is questioned by a reality which is made, artificially. The tension created the opposing categories within magic realist narratives and its symbiosis gives magic realist films their spectacular and seductive quality.

The films Jameson selected are 1980's films which have a cold, detailed and closed focus view which Franz Roh points out in magic realist paintings. Jameson says that these films have a close focus on an object, which indicates the magic realist quality of that object, by making it even more objective or could be presented as a part of a montage shots combined to create a story. He accepts the fact that the social reality in itself is magical in Third World countries. Jameson discusses the colour outlook of magic realist films. He states that magic realist films do not have a glossiness or gleam of an idealised past, which is a feature of nostalgia films and links it to Lacan's concept of "the gaze" based on "deceiving the eye". Hence he asserts that glossiness engenders the images for consumption rather than being a simple representation. In magic realist films colour is a "libidinal apparatus" which observes the "discontinuous intensities" (Frederic Jameson 318) that involves drama and links to Freud's "uncanny". Jameson relates the colour of these films to the economic situation they are produced in, i.e. the economic situation of the Third World countries. It portrays their underdevelopment, poverty, oppression and remnants of colonial influence, hence magic realist films exemplify political concerns.

The last aspects of magic realist cinema he discusses is its narrative which are a "kind of bas-relief history" (Frederic Jameson 321), in which only bodily manifestations are

retained such that we are inserted into it without even minimal distance” (321) asserts that magic realist narrative in a film mobilises resources which were never before exploited [pornography] and violence as raw materials for the plot and the possibilities it presents. Magic realist films wanes the affect of historical narratives and perspectives, focusing on an older, temporal form of narrative which gives out uncodified intensities into a hallucinatory contemplation. Unlike postmodern films, magic realist films do not create an experience of being under influence of drugs rather the “experience is reconquered by the other, internally constructed means” (321). The theoretical framework of a magic realist film is more applicable and significant to the aims of the Imperfect Cinema or Third Cinema of the 1970’s and 1980’s. Latin America films have transformed in look and nature now due to the effect of globalisation hence Jameson’s theories difficult to apply on more recent films. Louis Parkinson Zamora asserts that the magical objects of magic realist narratives contradict sight and insight, to collapse the difference between them making the visible object as the medium of one’s insight, making them meaningful.

The magic of magic realist films, is for global audiences and secular in nature. Magic realism’s ability seems unlimited and is universal in its application, it can be applied to any national cinema and used to explore different themes and specific national perspectives says Barbra Klonowska. Jameson asserts that these films work on political discourse and social issues implicitly, expressing possible solutions through imaginary means or supernatural events or; ensuring synthesis of the real realm and the realm of wish fulfilment. He tries to understand alternative modes of realism. Modern or contemporary magic realist films suggest scholar Edmund Haeng has features which Frederic Jameson implied to but did not focus on. These features are their transgressive nature, these films cross national and cultural boundaries, bridging history and time and are transcultural which allows them to take up

cultural phenomenon's and transplant them into other cultures in a way which does not transform the host culture into something which it is not.

Critic David Curtis says that in the 1920s-30s film directors use the literary motifs and was discussing his theory of magic realism; attention was drawn to the medium, the mechanisation of culture and capitalism. Critic Mariam Hansen indicates that cinema was an integral part of the modern chaos; Avant-garde filmmaking was influenced by the different manifestos and film journals & magazines of that period, whose publishers were experimental filmmakers themselves. Franz Roh was aware of these debates and developments in films and filmmaking during his time nonetheless his primary focus was on magic realism in painting and photography. Cinema being a kind of technical magic was publically recognised by the 19th century. Photographic studies of movement especially by Edward Muybridge shows the magical effects of technology and technology being manipulated represent magic. Critic Tom Gunning says that events from daily life and the form theatre was represented in cinema and it being a technological mode of representation is its initial fascination. The magic realism's ability to enforce the suspension of disbelief as it makes the diegetic world and the events to be unfolded in temporal plane may seem magical.

Magic realism is largely developed in literature and little work is done in its manifestations in other Art forms. Magic realism has become an elastic term which has gained global importance and is not confined to Latin American culture any more. During the last few decades it's been used in postcolonial contexts since it is able to articulate non-western worldview where reality cannot be rationally explained, presently it has been increasingly applied to cinema. Film studies on this category have not been done properly and thus film critics mostly misappropriate the term.

Globalisation is changing the world's taste and shaping lifestyles speciality in metropolitan cities which are more exposed to different ethnic cultures. In the contemporary

culture it's fashionable to celebrate differences and be open to enjoy the richness of various cultures. These changes are generally progressive and humanitarian in nature, claims critic David Neo. Author Ella Shohat and Robert Stam states that Hollywood has a hegemonic, regardless of the percentage of movies it produces annually. The huge stock of Non-American film produced worldwide is not easily available in the west, they are rarely put up for show in cinema halls and not easily available in video stores or even analysed in academic film courses. When they are put up for preview it is generally granted some space in the foreign category section of the arrogant labelling of them in film ceremonies as the Oscars. Critic John Tomlinson suggests that globalisation creates a new cultural space which is constantly influenced and used by the mass media. He argues that cultural processes and transfers are not unilineal where one culture is a transmitter and the other a receiver, cultural exchange is a two-way process, which involves interpretations, translations, mutation, adaptation and indigestion. Hence no imported object is safe from creolisation which shapes that culture though these objects may have begun as western, once within the foreign culture they can no longer remain purely western. He global mass culture is no longer replacing the local culture rather it is providing a cultural lingua franca, the imported mass culture is indigenised. The multicultural corporations that disperse blockbusters now also spread afro-diasporic music like rap around the world states Shohat and Stam.

The contemporary magic realist films were influenced by early films and film criticism and Surrealism but it has diverged and became more non-political which Franz Roh asserted magic realism to be. Felicity Gee asserts that magic realist films range from non-linear abstract films known as pure or absolute cinema where the plots are unconventional and the only objects in it are light and shadow in varying intensities to a cinema which has sutured illusionary realism like a classic Hollywood narrative. Since magic realism emerged in an era of photography and cinema hence critical debates regarding them are an essential

part of modernist magic realism and linked to the framework and workings of early magic realist films. Contemporary magic realist films combine the commercial stylized visuals of the Hollywood type narrative and the ideological elements of the mainstream with European Avant Grade cinema. Felicity Gee asserts that there is a distinction between the pure anthropological magic realism which interweaves the post-colonial struggle of colonialized countries within the indigenous magical traditions and a magic realism like Franz Roh asserts which relies on the mysterious effects and transformation of perception of the real world.

The magic in cinematic magic realism asserts Franz Roh is neither religious nor spiritual and is grounded in social and historical reality, illuminating the fractures within that reality. His essay does not define the magic or how it works in magic realist films rather it identifies the material conditions of the realist part of magic realism. This includes a radicalisation of the narrative and the history which is mediated through the visual imagery foregrounding the mysterious and uncanny signifying the spaces beyond human understanding which are actually a part of the reality itself. Frederic Jameson defines magic realism as an enduring mode as the criticism it receives from other pre-established discourses like ethnography, Freudianism, surrealism, postmodernism, post colonialism and lacanianism which aims to delimit it, are encompassed and assimilated within it, giving it multiple angles of perspectives and possible solutions to the issues it highlights. This gives it a strange seductiveness and appeal. Since cinematic magic realism shares features with different film genres therefore its narrative is ambiguously socio-historical and leads the audience to wonder at the power and potential magic realist films. Jameson focuses on the transformative power of magic realism and the result of a transformed reality rather than just its supernatural aspects.

The New Latin American Cinema was a national and international project which included diasporic and exile experiences. Lulú Panehchi asserts that these filmmakers made

films which depicted their economic and cultural conditions. Filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getoni usher in a type of cinema which is mysterious, subversive and unfinished cinema which can challenge the hegemonic Hollywood and European production and distribution system. The issues and struggles of the ordinary people was the source of its plots while rejection of Hollywood and European cinema's technical perfection made it radical. Magic realist cinema aimed to redefine nationality and nationhood in cinema's, creating an alternative and revolutionary cinema. Third World Cinema/Third Cinema has three distinguishing features: the dual impact of colonial & neo-colonial on contemporary process, the presence of the influence of the West and the influence capitalism on the global economy. The concepts and aspects of Third Cinema were aimed at the domestic audience as well as the Hollywood and European audience. Julio García Espinosa states that Third Cinema wanted to create genuine, impartial art which had no concept of elitism. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam assert that there are two circles of cinema the one consisting of third world films meant for third world audiences which follow the conventions of Third Cinema and another consisting of the First and Second World people in support of the cinema belonging to the first category.

Magic realism is a mode of narration employed by Third Cinema that legitimizes the existence of a reality which cannot be interpreted by Realism so magic must be used to retell their pasts reconnecting them to the present. Earlier magic realist films, a part of the third cinema were generally state funded hence were not marketed, thus many films remained obscure. Presently these films have become available, though some may take more time to find. Globalisation is changing the national and global taste and shaping lifestyles especially in metropolises which are more exposed to different ethnicities and cultures. The unstable, polyvalent, problematic and hidden aspects of the reality of the postmodern, postcolonial

world can be critically understood by magic realism hence it's appropriated by range of artists regardless of their cultural and historical background claims Felicity Gee.

Robert Stam's explains that cinema, a medium of audio-visual representation, is ideal for magic realism. Cinema is a form of modern technology which is able to bring to life the linguistic images which magic realism forms in a narrative and allows representation of multiple spaces and time periods simultaneously which is rarely possible in any other mode. It is done in cinema via the use of multiple windows in the screen, sometimes this technique is enmeshed together to show two characters of different time periods or geographical locations interact with each other in a unique way. Magic realist narratives have a fusion of extraordinary elements which almost seems delusional but cinema is able to depict them beautifully. The huge difference between literature and cinema is bridged by the use of magic realism. Magic realist films focus on shot compositions, mise-en-scenes, art designs, strategies of editing and sound effects instead of the maintenance of the willing suspension of disbelief. The way the story is presented, the sound accompanying the scenes and the message, makes the film magic realist.

Cinema is an international medium of entertainment and knowledge, which transgresses the boundaries of culture, nation, community and language yet it has its roots deeply set in the social space. International cinema trends have changed due to the filmmakers, critics and audience's interests. Edmund Haeng claims that it is inherent in cinemas nature to transgress cultural, national and linguistic boundaries, forming heterogeneous social and linguistic formations. Cultural exchange is a fundamental feature of cinema despite the perception of it being merely for entertainment. Cinema's international production, reception and consumption make it perfect for cultural exchange. Regardless of its intention, of entertainment or escapism from reality or for profit; audiences of different cultural backgrounds watch it and perceive it in a certain way. Magic realist films bring out

similar reactions from its audience regardless of their cultural and geographical situation. Edmund Haeng proposes that film festival provide films an international platform for focusing on emotional truths, political and social issues and generate communication between different cultures and community's vis the medium of films. These facilitate the relationship between the films, its audience and the filmmakers which is not possible in the cinema hall. Most magic realist films are sent to, nominated and even win at international film festival reinforces that magic realist films are not for mere amusement and are worthy of being analysed as a global phenomenon having international effect.

The relation between cinema and literature is a close and deep one. Texts are adapted into or movies are loosely inspired by some text or an original movie plot is created based on a character of a story which happens rarely for example the 2007 movie *Enchanted* directed by Julie Andrews, where an original story is formed for the screen around the literary character of Snow White. Critic Roland Perrie claims that studying films can illuminate us of the full value of literature. Cinema enhances our cultural awareness especially magic realist films which are capable of international cultural exchange. Magic realism transferred to a film retains its capability of shaping audience's sensibilities and creativity and reflect emotional truths and human nature. Filmic magic realism is a collaborative effort, taking in a variety of discourses and trends within it to form an amalgamation similarly the filmmakers take in various trends and discourses from their environment, upbringing and education to finally produce the end product: a film. Hence a film has immense work done on it along with has potential of presenting multiple possibilities to its audiences. The effectiveness of films as a visual medium for magic realist storytelling is questioned. David Isaak reminds us that film is a superficial, surface medium. It can only show what people are doing or saying and is unable to penetrate their thoughts and emotions, except by implication or voice overs.

Magic realism as a mode of narration in cinema becomes a redemptive force, a counter narrative that embodies the spectacular which belongs to the past as well as the present simultaneously. Critic Hayden White asserts that in the postmodern era it's difficult to conceive of a historical reality without the use of fictional techniques to represent. Magic realism is perfect to present the contemporary, indefinable reality and legitimizes the use of fiction and imagination to depict reality and history. Cinema stereotypes and tropes like sex, violence, culture and history are reworked and their Hollywood representations are rejected. Magic realism is not an official category but it is recognisable in films. Magic realism has proved itself to be an intermediate category, spanning over Literature, Painting, Photography, Cinema, Gender Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Postmodern Studies, Feminism, Marxism, Authors etc. Stephen Hart and Wen chin Ouyang recognises the diversity and applicability of magic realism and its use in contemporary film to depict modern realities as tied to past realities. They propose that magic realism needs to be understood in the global sense while considering its postcolonial inclinations and definition from Franz Roh and Surrealist roots.

Edmund Haeng claims that humanity's desire to remain in history, in memory has led to the want of capturing fleeting moments of life, leading to the creation of cinema which is able to capture fleeting moments. Mundane moments may seem insignificant but when remembered and viewed through a new perspective can be artistic and magical. Magic realism recognises the magical in the mundane through defamiliarization. Positive reviews and responses to magic realist films, across the world reinforces the belief that cinema is the ideal mode for visual representation of magic realism and breaks through cultural barriers. Film festivals eliminate the barriers and distance between the audiences and filmmakers. A magic realist film encompasses a socio-cultural experience enlightening and educating its audiences. Cinema medium is perfect for magic realism as the visual images which a reader is not able to visualize properly in the literary narrative are clearly portrayed on the screen. Hence the

viewer is able to absorb the image without hesitation though its meaning is to be self-interpreted. Anna M. Lopez argues that the knowledge cinema was expected to provide or invoke transformed, the real has become relative by including fantastical realities. Cinema's ability to represent and reproduce is used as a method to explain and analyse reality, by revealing its hidden aspects and discovering the material matrix which determine its workings, rather than a simple replication or recording of the lived reality, offering alternative modes of representation and unconventional techniques, working with realities of societies from the grassroots level to the top. Hence it's seen as being counter hegemonic and postmodern. In magic realist films, the interweaving of a personal experience with the contemporary technology (camera apparatus) into our lives internally is a conscious act, allowing audience psychological interpretations.

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Chapter – 2

The Path of Zarathustra:

India's Take on Magic Realism on Screen

The 2015 Indian film *The Path of Zarathustra* directed by Oorvazi Irani and starring Oorvani Irani, Rushad Rana and Tom Alter, is a film based on the minority Parsi community in India. Despite being a magic realist film, it reaches out to the global audience rather than being limited in its approach to India, to the Parsi community or the Zoroastrian faith. When watching the film for the first time, the viewer needs to focus on the film, attentively to understand its premise and message. Though, the film explains the basic principles of the Zoroastrian faith yet it leaves the viewers with enough questions which intrigues and urges them to learn about the faith in more detail from, other sources. By gaining some knowledge about the faith and then watching the film again will render the film in a new light, such is the beauty of a magic realist film.

The Parsees have a diasporic heritage. They left Persia, the present day Iran, in order to avoid persecution from the Muslim invaders around the time of the Muslim conquest of the Persian Empire, around 651 centuries A.D which led to the eventual decline of the Zoroastrian religion. Around the 7-8th century A.D. These Zoroastrian refugees carrying their sacred fire reached Sanjan, modern day Gujrat; where they sought refuge and settlement there from the liberal king of Sanjan, king Jadhav. After hearing their woes and perils as well as of the basic principles of Zoroastrians from their Dastur or priest, was impressed. He allowed them to settle there on few conditions of adopting the local Gujrati language, handing over their weapons, women to wear sari, the local costume; to respect the cow and marriage ceremonies to be done at night; to avoid conversions. The Zoroastrians faithfully accepted

these conditions on the promise of them being able to practice their religion freely and to bring up their children in their own traditions. In the contemporary period these conditions which have become a part of their tradition. Scholar Rekha Nagwanshi states that 2001 Indian Census Report shows Gujarati as the mother tongue of Parsees, who now have forgotten their original traditional dialects. The film uses Gujarati Zoroastrian language besides the dominant English, the terms “mamawaji” and “sheera masi” are Parsee Gujarati terms for maternal grandfather and maternal aunt. The Sindhi sari is adopted as the communal wear by the Parsi women, worn in the Sindhi fashion, which the protagonist is seen wearing in the film. Traditional Parsees still do not eat beef even although it’s not a religious taboo to eat pork or beef and Parsi marriages still happen at night.

The community in India is tiny yet it does not allow conversions and non Parsees are not allowed inside their places of worship i. e. the Fire Temples or Agiyaries and the Tower of Silence, where their funeral rituals happen explains Adi K. Sahukar. This is one of the main causes of ignorance regarding the Parsi Zoroastrian religion and culture. The adaptive spirit of the Indian Parsees enables this minority community’s survival in such a culturally and religiously diverse country like India. The religion the Parsees of India follow is Zoroastrianism, one of the most ancient, monotheist religions in the world. There are 19 million followers of Zoroastrianism globally; most of them reside in Iran and India hence they can be roughly categorised into two groups Iranian Zoroastrians and Parsi Zoroastrians [Indian Zoroastrians]. In the present day many Zoroastrians have emigrated to U.S.A, Canada and Britain in search of better lifestyle, better educational and employment opportunities.

The Prophet Zarathustra’s Greek name is Zoroaster on which the faith is called Zoroastrianism and on whose teachings the faith is based. Zoroaster believed in one supreme creator of the universe, *Ahura Mazda*; who imparted him wisdom in a vision. Zarathustra preached the monotheist religion of one supreme, neutral, formless and transcendental God.

His message is a positive and active; based on actions and reasons of an individual rather than staunch belief. According to Zoroastrianism the universe is dominated by two primal forces of Good and Evil. The conflict between good and evil will continue until evil is defeated after which there will be a resurrection, a final judgement and then an endless era of peace. It believes in the inborn goodness of the human nature unlike old Middle Eastern belief of the inherent baseness of human nature.

Life is viewed as a classless struggle between the forces of good and evil and humanity has the free will to choose to follow the path of good or evil. Zoroastrianism has no concept of ascetics, physical flagellation, fasting, earthly renunciation or celibacy. It believes in a comfortable way of living explains Parsi religious scholar Khojeste Mistree. He adds that it's encourages capitalism but emphasizes on social responsibility hence the wealth accumulated must be distributed evenly within the community. The principle moral ethic of Zoroastrianism is "Hvarshta, Hukhta, Humanta" (The *Path of Zarathustra* n.p) means good deeds, good words and good thoughts; humanity should follow its path. Zoroastrianism advocates free will and believes that the power of humanity lies in its choice to follow path of good or evil and thereby influence one's own and the humanity's fate and the ultimate destination of humanity is oneness with the supreme creator. The film emphasizes on human's free will to follow their faith. It advocates truth and honesty which is the feeling this film gives out to the audience. The magic realist films focus on the deliberate choices of the Anglo- native protagonist depicting their duality, latent in the contemporary culture. It presents the character's transcendence of boundaries, of ideology and identity showing the protagonists hybrid ideology.

Zoroastrianism is natively called *Mazdayasna*. Its main religious text is the *Avesta* and other texts are the *Yasna* and the *Vendidad*. The basic ethics or moral principles of the faith are to follow the path of Truth, to do the right thing and belief in only one universal,

supreme God but the most important one is of having “Good Thoughts, Good Deeds and Good Words” (*The Path of Zarathustra* n.p); thereby renewing the world and leading it towards perfection. There are no major theological divisions within Zoroastrianism but the changes in the modern era has influenced the values, practices, vocabulary and beliefs of individuals often merging with other traditions or displacing them. For example, nowadays even Parsi weddings have a mehndi ceremony which is not traditionally a part of Parsi weddings. Manichaeism was a form of Zoroastrianism which was quite popular in the late antiquity of the Sasanian Empire before the rise of Islam there. Its only difference from Mazdaism, the contemporary form of Zoroastrianism is that its teachings were based on dualistic cosmology and gnostic religion believing in abstinence, celibacy and philanthropy. Manichaeism is now extinct. Manichaeism is mentioned in film in form of the character of Mani representing the prophet Mani on whose teachings this religion was based. In the film and in real history the prophet Mani was executed for peaching a false religion when the orthodox form of Zoroastrianism, was dominant.

Magic realist films understand identity as hybrid and transnational. The plots, symbols and events of these films go beyond the one dimensional depiction which cinema is criticised of being. Magic realist cinema explores culture and subverts stereotypes. Critic Noelia Fernández asserts that such films are an original mix of two artistic realities. A kind of pluralism is latent in such films which sustains heterogeneity and cultural diversity. The hybrid urban space is constantly changing, in which multiple layers of reality crystallise is represented by the magical in the magic realist mode says critic Edward Soja. The contemporary Parsi speaks Gujrati, Hindi and English equally well and attends pluralistic schools now, though Parsi children still attend religious classes at their community’s Fire Temples or *Agiyaries*. Most of India’s Parsees reside in Mumbai. Parsi comedian Cyrus Broacha says that for most Parsees in Mumbai this is their hometown, they do not have any

homeland to go back to. This diasporic community has adapted itself well within the Indian culture but starting a new life does not mean having a new beginning as the beginning lies in the past heritage; at some point in one's life one has to address one's beginning as the present is built on the past. These facts lead to the inherent confusion and ambivalence of the identity and tradition of modern Parsi Zoroastrians. Many want to escape this dilemma by emigrating and becoming completely westernised; others want to retain their roots and essence of their traditions by carrying on their traditional rituals and celebrations like *Navjote*, the Parsi rite of initiation. During the British colonial rule, the Parsees enjoyed a good position and soon became the most westernised of all communities of India. They served as the business agents between the British and the locals of India, helped the British in communication. Though they adopted many of the British customs and costumes yet their essential beliefs and outlook towards life remained essentially Zoroastrian. They celebrated all the Zoroastrian festivals like the Zoroastrian New Year and the rituals like *Navjote*, etc. The Parsi life was westernisation externally not internally.

The film gives brief insights into the Parsi rituals like the scene of a *Navjote* rite, the official initiation of a child into the Zoroastrian faith and a funeral; these give the film a distinct Parsi cultural outlook including the scenes at the Fire Temple. Filming at a Fire Temple was probably been done for the first time, despite these. This is not a religious film asserts Oorvazi Irani. The spiritual framework, fantastical scenes and universal appeal to search for one's true self makes it appealing to all, regardless of being a Parsi or not. The main aim of a magic realist film is to gather together and connect a diverse variety of audience across the globe on the same platform on the same issues and on the same level. Perhaps this is the reason Oorvazi Irani chose to make a magic realist movie, instead of a documentary focusing on the Parsi community of India. The film tries to deconstruct the postcolonial, diasporic and postmodern identity of a Parsi Zoroastrian and find their true faith

and identity, such an endeavour transcends the limitations of labels and links to humanity on a greater level. These are dilemmas the people who went through the experience of colonialism and post colonialism, all over the world.

The film shows the relation of the individual with their community and how they are joined together through rituals, festivals and social practices. Rekha Nagwanshi claims that communities try to maintain a unique identity of their own through ethnic rituals especially in diasporic communities. The film explores the struggles and behaviour of this community trying to maintain its faith and identity. The westernised value system that the contemporary Parsi Zoroastrians follow is unable to maintain their community life and Faith's vision. The Zoroastrian faith is mysterious, having an interesting and intriguing history states *shaivikafunda* blogpost. This implies that in the modern world where information is available on the go the Parsees remain a closed community, whose basic tenets and rituals remain shrouded in darkness. The community itself is helping the ignorance by denying access to their places of worship and rituals like the Towers of Silence to all non Parsees. Oorvazi Irani explains that the film is a journey towards the roots of the faith itself, along with questioning of and finding answers which all human beings do at some point of their lives. This helps her find her own identity, being a part of the Zoroastrian faith. She feels it's her duty as an artist to contribute something, to ask such essential yet radical questions on behalf of the common people. Perhaps, using the form of magic realism made this film more acceptable and appealing to the public. She knew it was a radical, path breaking and a serious film aiming at a burning issue, maybe not within the whole arena of the Bollywood but in Mumbai where the orthodox Zoroastrians have a stronghold. She feared that such a film will not be well received by the audience and such a film will not be allowed or supported to be released in the theatres of metropolitan cities. Despite her worries the film was well supported by PVR a well-known brand of Cineplex and many industry insiders. The film was well received by the

audience who were able to get the message she was trying to spread. It would have been hard to be able to produce and release such a complex and religiously radical film in India, especially in Mumbai. Employing a magic realist narrative had cloaked its radical affect. Magic realism simplifies, smoothens and presents the radical matter in such a way that it's acceptable, appealing and palatable to the common audience across the world. The film has a mysterious element, the book and its interpreter which gets revealed in a beautiful yet ambiguous way, a trait which makes magic realist films universally appealing. Oorvazi Irani feared if this film could be released at all or not or will it be censored. But the use of the form of magic realism allowed her film to be released in major cities like Mumbai, Delhi- NCR, Ahmedabad and Bengaluru, having a rating of Universal from the Central Board of Film Certification, India.

The film explores the issue of identity through the fictional, personal and spiritual quest of a Parsi woman and concludes that one's faith is a very personal thing and all faith have the same basic principle which is to love each other. Hence the tag line of the film "does every search for god end in love?" (*The Path of Zarathustra* n.p). Tom Alter, the actor who plays the grandfather in the film in his conversation with Oorvazi Irani in the bonus track of the film's DVD, feels that the film is a personal take on religion, it's a love story of the character of Oorvazi with her grandfather, her cousin Perseus, her faith, her traditions, the real world and she shows this through her questions, gestures and conversations with these things. Oorvazi the character in the film, in the scene at the turbulent sea shore states that a life is not lived truly, if one does not ask oneself that why was he/ she put on this earth. She emphasizes that it's not important to get all the answers but searching for them and asking questions is essential. This perhaps implies that one should not follow one's religion with blind faith but with reason. The scene at the sea shore, reading her grandfather's book focuses on the violently clashing waves on the rocks, the noise of the turbulent waves and then moves

onto the protagonist. The clashing of the waves reflects the clashing of her own understanding of her faith which she gained by reading the book herself, her self-interpretation clashing with the ideas traditionally inbred in her mind. For instance, she was passed down the idea that Mazdak, the prophet was a heretic and immoral, he proposed that women should be common property but the film explains that he reminded others that *Ahura Mazda*, their God believes in classless society and equality. He asserted that woman being the property of one man is wrong and there should be no weak or powerful, questioning the authority and power of the high priests. His radical ideas were suppressed to protect the power of the high priests and he was executed.

Certain rituals are significant in the life of a Parsi like the rite of initiation into the Zoroastrianism, the Parsi New Year and the funeral rites involving the tower of silence. Such rituals are glimpsed into, in the film, piquing the curiosity of the audience but are never fully explained, another trait of magic realist films. The death of the grandfather is shown but the rituals are not performed precisely as he believed in his faith and tradition but believed that it was not limited to orthodox rituals which the conservative priests believe to be the essence of their religion. Backing this implication Tom Alter and Oorvazi Irani say that these rituals are not original to Zoroastrian faith, rather any religion is not original, they develop at certain points of time based on certain interpretations of the faith by certain people and was carried on being performed throughout the generations. Scholar Rekha Nagwanshi states that old rituals and customs of a religion changes as time goes by and some of may be discarded where required depending on the need of time. The discrepancy does not necessarily imply a change in the essence of the faith; seen in the scene where the intellectual proposes to the BPP, the radical idea of discarding the ritual of sky burial and allowing children of Parsi women who married outside the community to admitted into Zoroastrianism. Even though

the character Oorvazi is a true believer of Zarathustra she discards the rituals related to the funeral which takes four days, according to her grandfather's wishes.

The long contact with the Hindus in India led the Parsi Zoroastrians have adopted several Hindu customs and ceremonies like mehndi which is traditionally not part of their marriage ceremonies. But the marriage ceremony is strictly traditionally officiated by Parsi priests in the orthodox Iranian style. The funeral ceremonies are still a mystery to the non Parsees. The body of the deceased is treated with respect and is to be disposed in a way that it does not defile the elements of earth, water and air and does not cause any harm to the living. Hence in Zoroastrianism the dead is not burned, not buried and not disposed off in the water, its left exposed on a high hill, to the heat and the vultures in order to dispose it naturally. Though it is not mentioned in the scriptures and the film mentions that archaeological studies found evidence of burials in the Zoroastrian culture in Iran. The Zoroastrians abroad are unable to perform their funeral ceremonies using (Dakmas) Towers of silence, so they perform coffin burials although problems still arise in cities like Mumbai where the vulture population has drastically decreased over the years. Magic realism is intrinsically connected to cultural beliefs, tradition, folklores, reflecting a distinct cultural worldviews and capturing emotional states and the collective consciousness of the community. Hence magic realism in movies is explores issues of national and personal identity.

The film is clearly based on the Parsi Zoroastrians but what makes it magic realist that it explores the issue of identity through a fictional yet real, personal quest via the prism of the philosophy and heritage of Zarathustra. Thereby making the film personal, specific to the Zoroastrians, to India as well as universal, addressing questions related to God, Religion and even the meaning of life. Oorvazi Irani emphasizes that this is not a documentary film, not a historical film and not a religious one either. It is not preaching the Zoroastrian faith but like the country India, it's a spiritual film which makes it attractive and appealing to all

humanity regardless of their religion. Even the film's screenplay writer Farukh Dhondy, a Parsi Zoroastrian comments that he is an atheist rather than a religious Parsi but he does believe in spirituality and that is what the film tries to spread.

The Bombay Parsi Panchayat [BPP] is considered the highest cultural governing body or authority for the Zoroastrian population in India. "The BPP has become corrupt, greedy and its core values have eroded." (Jehangir Mehta n.p). Jehangir Mehta observes that the beliefs of the trustees of such religious governing bodies have turned dogmatic. They are "wasting their time and effort on banning priests who are actually doing welfare of the community" (Jehangir Mehta n.p) by offering prayers for the Zoroastrians who have been cremated or buried or those who have performed the *Navjote* ceremonies of the children of Parsees who married outside the community. Liberal priests like Ervad K. Mandon and Ervad Framroze who performed the *Navjote* ceremonies of mixed children like Perseus and funeral prayers of those who did not perform the traditional funeral, are banned the fire temple by BPP. Such instances have been alluded to in the film like the scene of the violent treats and ruckus made on the occasion of Perseus's *Navjote* ceremony. A true priest feels Jehangir Mehta loves all mankind as that's what god has instructed and that each human must find their own way to be in harmony with god. The behaviour of BPP trustees show their own self-interest and greed for power while falsely trying to establish themselves as the preservers of the Zoroastrian faith. The behaviour of the trustees in the community council scene in the film makes this evident, when the intellectual was rejected and branded as a heretic even before completing his explanation of a solution for the decreasing Zoroastrian population in India. The gullible and priest fearing Parsi population of Mumbai are easily swayed by BPP's threat of fatwas and religious excommunication. The film tries to make its audience realise that what matters most is not the light of the *Agairies* but the light of truth and faith in one's heart and this applies to all religions across the world. Blind obedience and unquestioned

faith in one's religion is not enough for the survival of one's community, reason based changes are necessary in order to make one's faith function efficiently in the modern era; this does not change the essence of that faith.

Such a dogmatic religion is nothing new to the contemporary world; the high priests of Zarathrust can be equated to the Catholic Pope. The film and its magic realist narrative portrays the unique aspects of the religion of Parsees, Zoroastrianism simultaneously drawing attention to the fact that how similar its beliefs, cultures and customs are to the other religions existing in India and the world. For example, the *Navjote* ceremony is rite of initiation into the faith which is similar to *Baptism* in Christianity. The film also shows how Zoroastrianism being an ancient faith has influenced many other religions like Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. In one of the ending scenes it is mentioned that Zoroastrians were the ones who influence the Greeks in astronomy, alchemy and philosophy. Therefore, the orthodox Parsees of Mumbai must move beyond their religious borders towards a social harmony which is there in Kolkata, Indore and Delhi. "The trustees of the fire temples in Delhi are much more liberal, the priests there welcome the non -Parsi spouses, children and relatives of those who married outside the community" (Mayank Austen Soofi n.p), coexisting happily and peacefully. The "Parsi dharmshala in Indore conducts a special condolence meeting ceremony in the hall outside the *Agiyari* after the traditional prayers are over, so their non parsi friends and relatives can pay their respects" (Mayank Austen Soofi n.p). Delhi Anjuman's chairperson, Mrs. Ava Khullar is married to a Hindu but has performed her religious duties and takes manages the organisation faithfully.

Ervad Jehan Bagli states that the collapse of the priestly hegemony left behind a class of ritual performing priesthood which was then depended on the grassroot community, for their livelihood. The priests today have become service workers who only mumble prayers rather than conducting welfare of the community. The beggar in the film comments that they

are not feeding the fire of the faith rather, “feeding the fire in their bellies” (*The Path of Zarathustra* n.p). Ervad Jehan Bagli proposes that the need of the hour is of a priest who can cultivate religious tolerance and harmony. As Ervad Jehan Bagli and the intellectual in the film claim that the solution lies in openness, tolerance and accumulation of funds which back such true priest which will free them from the worries of making ends meet. The Mumbai priest must become more inclusive in their mind-sets, allow conversions and the children of inter religious marriages into the Zoroastrian faith. Such institutionalised religion will lose contemporary followers who believe in the ideals of liberty, fraternity and inclusiveness. This fact is emphasized throughout the film in a unique way, “there is no belief without the believers” (*The Path of Zarathustra* n.p). In the free country of India, the Parsees are free people, free to practice their own religion, thereby respecting and being tolerant to all other religions as well.

In the *Vendidad*, one of the religious scriptures of Zoroastrians, *Ahura Mazda* says that he prefers a person with children to one without children, this makes apparent that Zoroastrianism is a religion that welcomes children. Out of the 69, 000 Parsees of India half of them are female and one third of that half is in the reproductive age. It is apparent from the census studies that the Parsees of India is an aged and dying race. In such a scenario female children are most desired unlike other religions of India, since on their shoulders lies the future of the ethnic race. Marriages within the Parsi community are encouraged and have its own advantages since the couple’s environment, traditions and way of life is similar. Inter religious marriages is frowned upon in the Parsi community especially Parsi women marrying outside the community, who are there by excommunicated and their children not allowed to take up the Zoroastrian faith. This is one of the major reasons for the drastic reduction in the Parsi population.

In face of the crisis of the Parsees of India facing extinction, the film is one of the ways in which the Parsees are trying to assert their identity in a diverse way. They are constantly struggling to create their own space in the diverse country of India and asserting their difference from being termed merely Asians. The film while addressing the diminishing population, points to the internal debate raging within the community itself. This tiny community which according to a NDTV report is decreasing by 12% per decade is internally divided on the lines of conservatives who believe in preserving the purity of the race's bloodline rather than preserving its existence and the liberals who believe in accepting new blood within the community to keep their race, their faith alive. This debate is alluded to in the film via real and seemingly fantastical scenes. There is a real debate between the conservatives and the liberal, intellectual and an imaginary conversation between the historical prophets and the protagonist trying to find a solution to the present issues of the community. The scene's setting, the three- way conversation between them, the background sounds of the clashing waves and a smooth transition from the imaginary to the reality makes the film magic realist. It is almost impossible to figure out if the character Oorvazi was having a vision, was imagining these figures of the past or if she had really conversed with them; since Perseus, her cousin who was never taught to "dream with his eyes open" could also see and hear them.

Theorist claims the extinction of this community in a period of a little more than a century. In the face of such a crisis the conservatives of the community excommunicating daughters who marry a non Parsi and their children is not helping the cause. This in turn makes one question the ambivalent behaviour of the Parsi men who marry outside the community and whose children are allowed in the Zoroastrian faith, even though they do not wear the *Sudreh- Kusti*. "The success of Parsees is hindering their survival, the Parsi youth wants to gain higher education, be professionally established and own a house and car before

marriage which means late marriages or no marriage. Out of the total only 30% Parsees marry and the rest remain single...this implies a correlation between the prosperity, literacy and the family size...having fewer children if the prosperity of a family is higher...Parsees being one of the most literate and prosperous communities of India seems to have fewer children every year.” (Sudha Ramachandran n.p.)

The 2001 Indian census report states that there are only 69,000 Parsees in India and that's a 40% decrease in the population from the year 1941. The theory established by Harvard university Ph. D candidate Dinyar Patel states the cause of the decline being their late marriages which lead to lower fertility rates, leading to lesser births in the community. According to a demographic survey the median age of marriage of Parsees in 1991 was 24 years and in 1999 is 48 years. It's apparent that the Parsees are an aged group and supposedly the highest number of single women belongs to this community. Dinyar Patel conducted a study across 600 Parsi families, 81% felt that the decline in their numbers is due to intermarriages and the second cause is emigration. Yet the Parsi trustees are optimistic and hopeful, conducting their weekly religious classes at the Fire Temple with their young pupils and performing *Navjote* ceremonies. Mr. Mehernosh Shapoojee, a trustee, believes that their faith has survived persecution many centuries ago and has survived in India and it will keep on surviving. “The BPP proposed the opening fertility clinics, sponsoring fertility treatments, financially supporting the third child of a parsi couple and even suggesting giving larger area for accommodation to Parsees to encourage them to have bigger families” (Sudha Ramachandran n.p.). Sudha Ramachandran observes that these solutions are weak and the best solution is to redefine the identity of being a Parsi in the modern era, liberally allowing the intermarrying Parsees children and spouses to enter the Zoroastrian faith if they wish to convert. The need of the hour is to continue the Parsi community rather than to continue the purity of the community. Along with this Dinyar Patel proposes doubling the efforts of

convincing Parsees to marry and conceive. Even the Indian government have woken up to this crisis and launched the campaign titled “Jiyo Parsee” to support the dwindling population of Parsees in India.

The 2001 Indian census report which the director Oorvazi Irani got acquainted with in 2006 community commission meeting had woken her up to the extinction of the Zoroastrians and was inspired to make this film. She admits that she is not a religious person but believes that she and all human beings are spiritual and their religion forms an integral part of their lives and identity. Hence she chose to produce a magic realist film which is able to depict her communities concerns while linking to the concerns of the greater humanity. The Mumbai High Court allowed children of mixed marriages, having a Parsi father being considered a Parsi, not the BPP. In 2003 some conservative priests passed a resolution invalidating the marriages between a Parsi and non Parsi and children of such marriages will not be allowed into the faith, earlier it was allowed under the Special Marriages Act. Since 35% of the Parsi population opt to marry outside the community, such a resolution of throwing members of the community does not help the threat of the community’s extinction.

The principle tenets of Zoroastrianism are as mentioned before is to have *Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds* and follow the path of Truth. The *Avesta*, their religious text says that human beings have the free will to choose between the path of good and evil and according to their choices they will reap its effect. Such teachings are universal and are common to all faiths; the film tries to give out this message as well. Such a universal strain is a feature of magic realist films. India has rich mythological, cultural and spiritual bases serves as an ideal foundation and raw material for a magic realist narrative, to which people of diverse cultures may be attracted to. Those who do not know about this will be interested and curious about this mysterious faith. Writer Yezad Kapadia writes in his article, that in Norway he met a Kurd cab driver and his friend, who had converted to Zoroastrianism

with which the Kurdish faith shares many traits. Wikipedia reports that in 2015 around 10,000 Kurds converted to Zoroastrianism, in Afghanistan. They say that though their wives are not Zoroastrians but they are keenly interested in it.

Kojeste Mistree Parsi religious scholar states that the Zoroastrian belief is to spread *Good Thoughts, Good Deeds and Good Words*, to spread an ethical awareness in the world and these are the need of the hour. The film tries to bring out this essential message subtly through the message of the mysterious book. The book has been called the book of life, the book of faith and the book of religion but perhaps it's the book of one's mind. It's the essence of all religions. It's not complex, it's the basis of all religion, and it's what one understands of one's faith which is love and understanding for each other, for humanity. One does not require written books for that; hence the book is shown to be gradually swept away with the waves. In a scene the character Oorvazi answers Perseus confusion of not understanding religion from the books he was reading in to understand it, that maybe religion is not something to be understood through books rather its understanding comes from within oneself. The unique and subtle treatment of history, culture and religion within the cotemporary world without the losing focus of its specific issue makes the film magic realist.

The film is not a conventional plot driven film, it carries two layers of meaning which are carried together, simultaneously throughout the film. The whole narrative is shown through the eyes of the protagonist Oorvazi with occasional voice overs, which were perhaps necessary to explain the premise of the narrative since the audience is relatively ignorant about the Zoroastrian faith. Shishir Kumar, the actor who plays the character of Zurvan in the film observes that the film demands complete, serious attention from its viewers, to be able to understand in the first place. Yet it is not the type of film which could be understood, it is confusing to distinguish between the protagonists' visions and what's really happening with her, the dual identities of the characters of Zurvan/the clockmaker, Mazdak/the intellectual

and Mani/the beggar does not help the understanding as well. Each viewing of the film reveals a new dimension of it, which is another trait of being a magic realist film. The film has a calm and composed demeanour even in the scenes of serious misery, Oorvazi Irani points out that the protagonist has a dual presence at the one at the level of the common human being and the other at the spiritually higher level, which she may have achieved by her down to earth and solitary life in the hermitage like cottage, in the village, while learning the teaching of her meditative grandfather. The film begins with daybreak, showing images of the rising and setting sun. The sun is shown not in its raging heat but as a superior, kind, universal, life giving force which many religions including the Zoroastrians worship. Zoroastrians view the sun as a symbol of the deity *Ahura Mazda* and as a manifestation of the elements of fire and light, which form the universe and everything in it.

The film is deeply entrenched in the cultural myths, legends and symbols of the Zoroastrian culture as well as the Indian culture, showing how these cultures have the same roots and influence each other throughout history. The scenes of the protagonist lighting the fire allude to their Iranian heritage, to the holy fire from Iran when they escaped. The fire represents the present, past and future of their faith. It represents the faith one has in one's religion, one's god and most importantly one's own spirit. Fire is sacred in Hindu tradition, though it is seen as a medium of linking or transporting one's thoughts to the deity while murmuring it in front of the fire, whereas in Zoroastrianism the fire is one of the manifestations of their deity itself. Zoroastrians are called *Fire Worshippers* and their place of worship is called the *Fire Temple*. In the film the grandfather keeps saying "keep the fire burning", though at first the audience may think he means the fire in the house which all Zoroastrians keep burning in their houses, a manifestation of their god. But as the film progresses one starts to understand that what he meant was the keep the fire of faith alive in

their hearts and continue doing the task Zarathustra had begun, defeating evil by following the path of Truth and honesty.

The film shows the external and internal journey of the protagonist simultaneously. It shows the past, present and future of the community at the same time. All these events are happening in the real world and not in the protagonist's dream or her surreal consciousness; it is not shown through a flashback or a time travel technique as it is generally done in science fiction or fantasy movies. This can then only be achieved via magic realism. The film reminds us something that we already know but had forgotten in the chaos of the modern world. It reminds us that life is a journey, a linear movement towards a destination but its path originates from the past and its foundations for the future must be laid in the present. The film traces the external journey of the protagonist from the village to the city of Mumbai, from the solitude to the civilization where her people, the Parsees reside. Her journey may be equated to the journey the first prophet of Zoroastrianism, Zarathustra undertook a journey to find this true faith when he was 20 years old, and he meditated in solitude, away from civilization and returned to preach the wisdom he gained when he was thirty. Similarly, Oorvazi, the protagonist had left the city and lived and meditated with her grandfather in the secluded village and returned many years later as a grown woman. The protagonist may not be the manifestation of the prophet himself but her character is a metaphor of every person who is in search of their faith. She becomes a representation of all Parsees who are confused about their faith and are living in ambivalence. It's not a physical journey rather it's the spiritual quest to one's spirituality, in which one can reach one's destination by searching, questioning and doing rather than by finding answers. The journey is important not the destination, since the process itself will ennoble the traveller.

It is interesting that the protagonist played by the director herself is named Oorvazi which is the name of the director in reality. This may imply that the director is not merely

playing a fictional character in the film rather it is an aspect of her real personality which like all contemporary Parsees is confused about their faith and want some practical answers. The quest she undertakes is to find her roots, her true identity and find answers to the questions she has regarding her faith while her community faces the threat of extinction. The motif of the journey used by the film as a process and as a change serves the purpose of magic realism by redefining the meaning of one's surrounding environment and one's cultural identity. The film like any magic realist film re-orientates one's perception of the world and its matters. In her quest she is guided by real yet imaginary characters from the past, who may still be present in the present. The recognition comes to her not merely from the grandfather's teachings or from reading the book but from the amalgamation of both of these and examining them herself in the light of her recent experiences with the beggar, the intellectual and the clockmaker. The mysterious book only gives her the moral ethic of *Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds*, but she herself links it to the basis of one's faith, to follow those ethics while loving others and walking together on the path of truth. Her experiences amongst her people in the contemporary reality, makes her realise that practicality and liberal acceptance is the way to exist and live in this modern world. Negotiations and tolerance with other cultures is necessary for existence, after all *God*, be it *Ahura Mazda*, *Christ* or *Deva* all teach love for all humanity.

While making a magic realist film the director must have a solid understanding of the country its basing its plot on, of its cultures, customs, myths, legends and traditions as these in turn will weave the magic realist narrative which will thereby enrich the understanding of its viewers. She being a Parsee presents the personal aspect of the issue, though it is not to propagate the Zoroastrian faith but merely to record its unique identity and existence. Under the threat of the community's disappearance her concern is to preserve a record of its existence, its heritage and its influence on many other major religions like Christianity and

Islam. The way the film approaches its climax is not through actions or responses of the characters like an ordinary Bollywood film rather affect is brought about through the combination of the conversations of the characters, the setting frame and background sounds.

The film has many silent scenes and pauses in between of sentences; the magic realist form fills these silences and gaps with mystery and meanings. It's left to the audience to solve these mysteries and meanings which ambiguously unravel themselves as the movie progresses though not through actions but through gestures, settings, tones and sounds. For instance, the scene where Oorvazi carts her grandfather's dead body to the hill for sky burial, there is no conversation, no voiceover rather a solemn yet calming music plays in the background while she settles his body on the ground, tears off his clothes and takes off his watch which has stopped running like his breath. It is later that the viewer understands the significance of the watch or rather the significance of time, when the character of Zurvan, the manifestation of Time itself appears. The watch which had stopped signifies the community and the faith that is dying, stagnant and needs revival desperately. Zurvan, the manifestation of eternal time which sees all shows Oorvazi the past and present of their faith and implies its eminent end. True faith is not afraid of rational questioning and when she questions if time is relative, if Zurvan only exists in her consciousness. She discovers that faith itself lies in one's consciousness, in one's heart; it's abstract and can only be continued by practice of its ethics which is to follow the path of Good Words Good Thoughts and Good Deeds. It does not require these staunch orthodox rituals or blind obedience.

The film is not a historical film, not a religious film and not completely a philosophical film. The film enquires into the Iranian heritage of the Parsees and shows the how they are learning to cope with their diasporic and postcolonial identity in India as well as a philosophical enquiry into the human existence. The film's magic realist narrative reworks the community's history and represents it in an unconventional way with real places, real

events and real people. Religion is an issue the modern people view very superficially but it still is a fundamental part of one's life and identity. This film by using magic realism deals with the concerns of one specific faith while addressing the universal issue of people forgetting the main purpose and essence of faith itself. The film's issue is applicable to any faith and the use of magic realism makes it universal. It is not religious in the sense to propagate one particular religion rather presents the individuals relationship with one's religion and community. It is a slow paced film matching the seriousness, depth and fragility of the issue, unlike the fast paced Bollywood films. It is apparent that this film is not for those who come to a theatre for entertainment and to escape the troubles of the real world. It targets an intellectual, sophisticated audience who is able to evaluate the issue rationally. It is the directors desire to present the audience with something which is appealing as well as contemplating, which stays with them even after they leave the theatre. Magical realist narratives target a sophisticated group of the population across the globe. The title of the film is symbolically significant; it may appear deceptive making the movie seem religious but it merely serves as a guide to the spiritual quest on which every human being goes at some point of their lives. Oorvazi Irani claims, "I don't claim to give you answers ...the film is trying to question certain facts, rituals, practices interpretations because any religion is about what it was and what it has become.it evolves over centuries of time...every generation is born with a certain interpretation and everyone has moulded it in a different way." (Oorvazi Irani interviewed by Shweta Kulkarni n.p.). "Going back to one's roots is a meaningful experience for any individual" (Shweta Kulkarni n.p). The film is about the universal question of existence and the direct involvement of the director in the film, putting a part of her identity in a fictional character makes this film quite postmodern making it even more magic realist.

It is an ongoing debate about cinema's transformative powers. If it is able to change people's lives and to what extent? The answers to such questions tilt in the favour of cinema, acknowledging cinema being an agent of change. The film looks at the internal debate of the Parsi community from the personal perspective of a confused but faithful Parsi woman. The perspective presented to the audience may not be a completely objective but its neutral in the sense of an ambivalent individual trying to understand one's faith. Regardless of the faith one is born into one must rationalise and question it and then chose to follow it or not. The film stresses on free will of an individual, one is free to choose what path to follow. Such an external yet internal perspective is portrayed by magic realist films. Oorvazi says in the film, "our choices are our final prophecy" (*The Path of Zarathustra* n.p). The director in an interview with Shoma Chatterji states that her aim was to dispel the myths around the faith and educate Parsees and non Parsees about it. The storyline of the film may seem very abstract and spiritual but its portrayal is very realistic and visual, richly layering the reality with inner, poetic, spiritual realisation. It shows nothing which is practically impossible.

The main characters including Oorvazi have a double presence; she is an ordinary Parsi woman as well as an individual in search of her identity and her faith. Other characters like the intellectual also represent Mazdak, a religious reformer. The radical prophet of the Sasanian times who challenge the orthodox myth of Zurvan (Time), which was dominant then. This myth denies the existence of *Ahura Mazda* as the supreme creator. His teachings were regarded as heresy as the BPP regards the intellectual's solutions. On Mazdak's beliefs Mazdaism is established, which is the current form of Zoroastrianism, followed in India. Oorvazi Irani claims that her scriptwriter Farrukh Dhondy was able to "bridge that gap between the past and the present beautifully, with artistic devices to bring out little known historical and heretic characters, from ancient Zoroastrian past." She adds that the character of Mazdak "appears in the modern times symbolising magic realism that the medium of

cinema offers” (Shweta Kulkarni. n.p.). Characters like Zurvan, Mazdak, Mani and Kardir symbolise the past and the present, the director feels that was the only way the protagonist could converse with them without being pulled into a fantasy world. Although Kardir does not have a precise dual identity in the present but the BPP represents the orthodox ideas which Kardir had in the past. The BPP like Kardir took upon the title of the defender of faith without actually evaluating if that will truly be benefitting the community. The film overall is a learning experience for all its viewers.

The mystery of the book is revealed in intriguing layers but never revealed completely. The book represents the unravelling of the meaning religion holds to each individual, a personal interpretation. This is apparent from the scene when Perseus tries to read the book and it seems to him that it’s written in different languages and the writing on the page disappears and changes into another page by itself, that’s because Perseus is still confused about his faith. In the end the book is washed away as Oorvazi no longer requires a book to understand her faith. The film begins with the ripples in the well water and ends with the waves of the sea, implying that the beginning and the end are connected like humanity is connected with each other through love and understanding. Magic realist films render such ordinary things significant in the larger universe. Unlike surrealist films, these are real things which are not distorted by one’s psyche yet hold meaning for them.

The viewers at the end of the film may realise that the film was about love, religion ultimately teaches love. The crisis Parsees are facing may ultimately find its solution through love and acceptance. Shoma Chatterji implies that the relationship between Oorvazi and Perseus which had not formed due to issues of their youth and because he is not a pure blooded Parsi, may be revived now and the change coming from such a marriage between a pure blooded Parsi woman and a child of a Parsi and a non Parsi couple. The director

supports such a union and explains that her own sister is also married to a non Parsi. She asserts

. . . faith should not be shot sighted and cling to its superiority complexes...one needs to question the foundations of beliefs and practices that might have outlines their time in today's world...discuss and decide which practices to improve upon...to reinvent and which to let go. To remain true to one's faith is not to follow and practice rituals that have outlived their meanings and significance . . .follow what one's heart holds to be true, without paying...importance to what's written in some book. (Oorvazi Irani interview with Shoma A. Chatterji n.p.)

The film like most magic realist films has an open ending, leaving it to the viewers to decide its end. Magic realist films present its audience with multiple possibilities and viewpoints of the reality. The film presents an open conclusion regarding myths, legends and traditions of the faith. The audience and the protagonist do not find out what's actually written in the mysterious book, which is implied of being an amalgamation of all the religious texts regarding the Zoroastrian faith. But the essence of it is understood; the message we get at the end is what the protagonist understood of her faith and implies that one must self-interpret one's faith with rationality. The film has a gentle, calming, slow paced yet understanding mood and outlook, implying that religion is not something to be understood vigorously and hastily. It requires patience, openness and understanding.

The director made special efforts to film at real, local places which match the philosophical and mystical mood of the film visually and carries on the soft, peaceful content smoothly. It's not a typical in-studio produced film for instance the cottage where the grandfather dies are a real cottage in the peaceful, solitary village of Vasai. It is actually an ashram used for meditation and study of religious texts by a Parsi gentleman. Tom Alter claims that the spiritual aura and peaceful surroundings of the place inspired in him spiritual

feelings which helped him in acting out this role. The shots at the sea which capture the rise and fall of the waves point to the turbulence that is happening in their minds and faith. The actors were chosen from Parsi and non Parsi backgrounds in order to disperse the message in an even way without making the film over exaggerated and melodramatic, the form of magic realism helped a great deal in achieving this. Being a magic realist film a great deal of attention is given to the scene frames, the background score of the scenes and the lighting which implied the mood and direction of the scene itself. The scenes do not transport its viewers to another world rather it shows them what's happening in the real from a different angle. The mystical world blends into the real one, giving common, everyday scenes a mystical aura. For instance, the scene where Oorvazi is reading a book on the Zoroastrian religion to look for answers of the questions she has regarding her faith and Perseus asks if it was helpful as the book has not helped his understanding of the faith he has chosen to follow. The scene of early morning, a new day, new light, and the bright sunlight pierces through the coverings of the window, from Oorvazi's direction towards Perseus in slating beams. Illuminated by this light Oorvazi states that maybe religion is not something to be understood from the books, rather one has to self-interpret it under the light of one's experiences and observations. It's as if the God's light illuminates Oorvazi, who imparts it to Perseus.

Shoma Chatterji asserts that even the indoor locations are chosen with care, giving insight into the personal and cultural lives of Parsees. The aunt's house, has markers of Parsi culture, Oorvazi is served dal ni poori, a traditional Parsi dish. The scenes shot in the fire temple, focusing on the fire burning, are carefully chosen to leave a deep impression on the audience. It is apparent the film is not plot driven, there is actually no concrete story rather it's filled with scenes which are in them complete and impactful. Nevertheless, the base message of the film ties these scenes together in stream of consciousness form and presenting

a continuous story, this is possible due to magic realism. The film is not limited to the Parsees and can be appreciated by all. It portrays a responsible and progressive outlook to life.

The popular movie site IMDB categorises this film as a mystery, drama and many blogs categorise it as a philosophical drama, others call it a Docu-drama. But the director and those who interviewed her categorise it as magic realist. It is not an Art film, at first glance it may seem as a documentary type of dramatic film but it's not that completely and it's certainly not a fantasy film. It is a film which touches upon all these genres but does not fit perfectly in any. She believes that cinema is a medium through which the artist can express their thoughts and share it with its audience. The form of magic realism enables her to connect with her audience through her personal, honest expression while exploring the humanistic aspect of one's faith. Keyur Seta views it as a contemporary, new age film which is at the level of international cinema. The bold intensions of the film are handled well with magic realism, producing an enlightening end product. Oorvazi Irani asserts that magical realism is not considered a film genre but it helped her define the film most appropriately as magic realism at one level is very real, it has real locations, real characters and real situations. It does not require making a set and being transported to a fantastical world which happens in case of fantasy movies. The story takes place in the real world yet it's not the conventional, everyday world we live in. She claims that the locations chosen have a surrealist quality which makes the film seem as if taking place somewhere between the real and the imaginary world. Through the medium of cinema one can take the audience into such a world while staying rooted in reality. Oorvazi Irani asserts that the definition of magic in magic realism is relative. It is not the magic which makes things appear and disappear or portrayal of special effects like it is in science fiction films rather magic is created within the real dimension through dynamic characters who personify larger than life, abstract characters like Zurvan. Opening of such dimensions in the reality we live in, is magical. Magic realism is an historic

mode which has its own legitimacy and validation as opposed to the pre-established realist and documentary methods.

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Chapter – III

Beasts of the Southern Wild:

America's Magic Realism

Beasts of the Southern Wild is a 2012, American film, directed by Benh Zeitlin, listed under the category of magic realist films by Wikipedia. The film has been globally acknowledged and acclaimed as a magic realist film. It has won several awards at famous international film festivals like *The Sundance* and *The Cannes* film festivals. It won four *Academy Awards* and the Camera De Plame' award at *Cannes Film Festival*. The film is inspired by the play titled *Juicy and Delicious* by Lucy Alibar who has jointly written the screenplay with Benh Zeitlin. It is important to point out that the location, premise, aim and even a few characters have been drastically changed for the film. For example, the location was changed from Georgia to Louisiana and the protagonist Hushpuppy who was a boy of 9-10 years has been turned into a girl who is only 6years old. It was done to suit the character of the 5-year-old actress Quvenzhané Wallis, who had impressed the production team.

Scholar Kevin Stoda asserts “many films which regard adult issues utilises the magic realist form to deal with the darker side of childhood, where the child is powerless in the adult dominated world, whose rules do not make any kind of sense to them...films like *The Butcher Boy*, *The Mighty*, *The Tin Drum* and *Pan's Labyrinths* well as *Beasts of the Southern Wild* fall into this category” (Kevin Stoda n.p). The universal message the film tries convey to the world the “a unique perspective and self-sufficient things that should be fought for and preserved” (366wierdmovies.com Behn Zeitlin n.p.).

The Bathtub Teacher Ms. Bathsheba tells her class the story of the fierce pre historic creatures called the aurochs who ate babies of the cavemen. She also tells them the reality of

the food chain, reinforcing the fact that the humans as well as the animals are nothing but meat, this fact the humans had forgotten and started thinking of themselves as being at the top of the food chain. But the fact remains that humans cannot win against nature; nothing can defeat the forces of nature like the storm that happens in the film.

These monsters of the prehistoric past combine with the various lessons that encircle in the mind of the young girl, Hushpuppy who is just starting to make sense of the world around her. She is able to predict the catastrophe which the present actions of the humans can cause; she in her innocence is able to link their present decadent actions and lack of concern for their environment with the resulting global warming and its adverse effects. She is able to understand that such damage to the environment is irreversible, as she comments in the film “sometimes one piece is broken so bad that nothing can fix it” (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p). While the teacher is warning the children and telling them to wake up to reality by preparing themselves to survive, the aurochs are thawing out their frozen abode, moving southwards towards hushpuppy. Hushpuppy imagines them coming soon while the warning of Ms. Bathsheba echoes in her mind “... the fabric of universe is coming to unravel...y’all better learn to survive”. It seems like the echo of the environmentalists warning to the mankind (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p).

“The aurochs based on the cattle like pre historic creature...[in] the cave paintings seen in Lascaux, Pech Merle. The film brings alive these extinct creatures entwining their real existence with the mythic tales of Ms. Bathsheba.” (Benh Zeitlin interviewed by Jeremy Berlin n.p.). This makes the foreboding of the storm and its devastating effects look more frightening, specially viewed from the point of view of a child. Magic realist films which interlink real events with myths, traditions and fantasy elements, forming a story which is rich and layered yet rooted in reality. Benh Zeitlin points out that Hushpuppy is presented as the last of her kind, where her community is at the brink of extinction. This fact draws a

parallel between her and the aurochs, especially in the scene where she faced them head on and seems to be conversing with them. The scene ends with an assumed understanding struck between Hushpuppy and the aurochs, acknowledging her as someone who they can relate to. Behn Zeitlin adds that Hushpuppy seems to link her situation to the cavemen Ms. Bathsheba had told them about, she like the cavemen needs to protect her community. She wants to leave behind evidence of her existence like the cave paintings, by which we understand how the cavemen lived. The aurochs coming to destroy her and her community maybe a fantasy or her imagination but it's never clear in the film. The lines between what is fantasy and what is happening in reality is blurred; another characteristic of magic realist films.

Michael Gottwald, the producer of the film, proposes that the myth of the aurochs, frames the film's tale of being on the brink of extinction and its devastation. The film forms its own internal myth and shows the teacher as a representation of a wise person passing down knowledge to the future generation. Behn Zeitlin states that the meaning the aurochs hold changes as the film progresses. In the beginning Hushpuppy understands the cycle of nature as eating and being eaten by something that's greater, more powerful than you and that she is tiny in comparison to the force of nature. She realises that everything that has created her is going to be overtaken by something more powerful, her father is dying of an unknown illness, her house has been submerged in water due to the storm and the aurochs are coming. But as the film progresses she evolves and comes to understand that nature is a flowing cycle where everything has its own right place and function, of which she is also a part. She acknowledges this cycle of life and death by coming to terms with her father's death and gains peace and determination to move forward in her life. Michael Gottwald observes that the aurochs represent the devastation and turmoil of Hushpuppy's life which she must face and cope up with in order to move on with her life. The smooth flowing life of hushpuppy is suddenly turned upside down by the devastating storm which damaged property, loss of

vegetation and even lives, along with her father's terminal illness. Without a home and without a parent, Hushpuppy is left helpless in the world. She learns from her experiences, the teachings of Ms. Bathsheba and her father, gaining confidence to face the adversities of the adult world.

The scene of Hushpuppy coming face to face with these beasts is intense whose intensity is heightened by the triumphant music played in the background and the fearlessness facial expression on Hushpuppy's face clearly shows her unshaken determination, now and for all the adversities that may come her way in the future. The moment before the aurochs' growl at her is filled with pregnant silence. Silence alone could heighten the intensity of the scene. Such utilization of silences, pauses and gaps is a feature of magic realist films, here the real meanings and mystery of life lies. Hushpuppy confronts the aurochs with resilience and determination is very significant. The scene condenses the message that rings throughout the film. The scene shows the aurochs as being gigantic, larger than life almost supernatural having the aura of indefeatability. It is shown via the view point of Hushpuppy, the camera is at her height, the aura of innocence and unable to capture the whole mass of the aurochs in one look. It is important to note that the message the film wants to give out to the audience about reality can only be impressively given out though such a fantastical scene. The scene is intense, showing the two nature created animals, the auroch and Hushpuppy, on the brink of extinction, where one is supposed to devour the other. That is the rule of the animal kingdom but these two wise animals at the end have understood that, the greatest sin which one can commit toward s nature is to kill the last of its kind. Humanity is reminded of the extinction of so many species of animals and plants due to their not caring about this fact, from this film. The film ultimately shows that nature functions on a balance of things, as Hushpuppy tells us "the whole universe depends on everything fitting together just right. If one piece

busts, even the smallest piece, the whole universe will bust.” (*Beast of the Southern Wild* n.p.). One must remember that we must allow each other to grow and survive.

The characters and locations of this film like any magic realist film are real locations, not fictional. Though the name of the town and the character’s names are fictional but the description of such people are real. The events depicted in the film are also real, though presented in fantastical way. Hushpuppy is as critic A.O. Scotts claims “a force of nature” but she is also a little girl who is losing her father and facing a major natural disaster. The bunch of orphaned kids in the film represents the children who have lost their families and their homes in the major nature disasters like the storm in the film. Benh Zeitlin claims that he wanted to show the after effects of the hurricane Katrina that happened 2005, and its effects on the Louisiana bayou that damaged the people physically and mentally. The director wished to show how the people of the bayou coped up with a storm like the hurricane Katerina physically and emotionally which happened in that area. Hushpuppy reflects the genuine sincerity, lovableness of children and the toughness which we hope to inspire in children when faced with challenges. the character’s cores are based on real people and their real feeling for instance when Benh Zeitlin asked actress Quvenzane Wallis, who plays Hushpuppy that when faced with such a situation what will she do? She replied that she would brush her teeth and listen to her parents. That’s the core of Hushpuppy she is a good and obedient child. In her imaginary conversation her mother asks her if she is being good and she replies yes. Hushpuppy’s good and responsible behaviour towards her family and her environment is how Benh Zeitlin feels natural balance can be restored.

Hushpuppy as a child is very observant and sharp. Though Wink (her father), lacks parenting skills, is mostly drunk and disappears for periods of time leaving her alone. Yet she understands that he truly loves her and is trying to teach her to survive in this world through his own harsh but effective way. She understands that the bayou is very important to Wink

and she too feels it to be an essential part of her own identity. When she along with the bayou people are captured in the shelter, although they have better facilities and healthcare, she feels out of place. The shelter she says is like a fish tank without water. They feel trapped and realises that the bayou is where they truly belong. The dim and dull lighting of the medical shelter conveys these 'civilised' people's intentions. The film does not show the doctors of the shelter behaving badly but the mood and lighting of the scenes convey how they do not really care for them. The warmth and care with which Ms. Bathsheba cares for the children is lacking here. Therefore, they escape on the first opportunity they get. The city and its institutions are shown to be uncompassionate and insensitive of such people. In the scene where the doctor discusses the bad news about Wink's health in front of his little daughter who is unaware of his terminal illness. Magic realist films subtly point at the issue, never directly showing or criticising it the viewers to decipher the message and contemplate on it. Such a treatment of the bayou people by the city people could also be because they 'live on the wrong side of the levee' (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p.). The film also points subtly to issues of lousy treatment the economically lower strata of society gets from the higher classes. The rich are not concerned about the condition of the poor and only give sympathetic donations, without empathy. Despite their poor living conditions, the bayou people make the most of it. They live happily the Bathtub and where there are no divisions of class, race or religion; everyone is given equal share in the catch and treated equally. They are living in the lap of nature, living off the land and for them this is the prettiest place on earth. Unlike the city filled with their oil processing plants and factories, where there are no trees or rivers and where people eat packaged fish.

Wink may use abusive language and quite hard on Hushpuppy but the audience understands, what he does he does out of love. He tries to make Hushpuppy tough and independent enough to survive alone. When he learns he was dying, he behaves like any

frustrated man would but soon he realises that he has to toughen Hushpuppy up even if it means being rough to her. He loves her and acknowledges that she is his responsibility, while protecting her from the storm he says “I am your daddy and you do what I tell you to do. It is my responsibility to keep you from dying...” (*Beasts of the Southern Wild*). He never abandons her and encourages her to stand up to the adversities of life. Wink acts as any dying father would, telling their child to stay strong and not to cry. Hushpuppy behaves like any child would whose parent is dying, she feels helpless but tries her best saying “when you are small, you gotta fix what you can” (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p.).

The performance of these two main characters are quite real as both Wink played by Dwight Henry and Hushpuppy played by Quvenzhané Wallis are first time actors. It is Quvenzhané Wallis debut film and Dwight Henry is actually a baker in New Orleans who was convinced by the director to play the part. The director and the crew lived in the area on which they based the fictional Bathtub bayou on, for eight months and they discussed the casting and details in the bakery owned by Dwight Henry. While conversing with them Henry read out the lines for them once and it kind of fit. Henry feels that his own personal experience of the hurricane Katrina and the hurricane Betsy while living in the area helped him act out the role effectively. “I was in hurricane Katrina in neck high water...have an inside understanding for what’s the movie about...in a flood or faced with losing everything ...I was two years old when hurricane Betsy hit New Orleans and my parents put me on the roof of the house. An outsider could not bring the passion I brought to the role...” (Dwight Henry interviewed by Scott Marks n.p). Both of them are amateur actors making them ideal for a film about the about unconventional people. It’s an intimate, grassroots level film as the non-professional actors bring their experience with life to the screen and the crew and props for the set is procured locally.

The character of Hushpuppy represents the spirit of a survivor of a major disaster. Her courage, wisdom and fortitude make her one of the most poetic heroines which graced the screen. Her character becomes relatable and unforgettable because such a situation can occur in anyone's life in reality. She inspires people to have courage in case of such a situation arises. She is very observant and she does not run from the truth she accepts things the way they are without hoping for some external help to come to make it better which happens in fantasies where some fairy comes and makes it better. She has to cope up with the challenges and make it better herself. She realises that the working of the universe is made up of many little visible and invisible pieces which includes her as well. She recognises her place and function within the universe.

Magic realism is used to create the absent character of hushpuppy's mother Marietta. She exists in the fantasy of Hushpuppy, functioning like an imaginary friend, invisible to all except her. But this is layered with the awareness of her mother not being there in reality, as she looks at the beacon of light coming from far away and asks "is that you mamma?" (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p.), the mother's presence although invisible is a source of strength and confidence for her. It's a manifestation of her conscience which keeps reminding her to be good, obedient, sharp and responsible in lieu of her crazy, irresponsible and heartbroken father. When faced with the devastating news of her father's impending death she embarks on a quest to search for her mother. When cook of the catfish shack tells her that everyone has to take care of themselves she becomes determined and confident enough to stand by her father and her community to the point of facing the aurochs fearlessly. The mother and her presence works as a mythic heroine from which the future generations gain confidence, strength and her legend of being upright and fearless woman, who can shoot an alligator about to attack.

The angry moment, where Hushpuppy frustrated and fed up with her circumstances, and the rough behaviour of her father punches him on the heart. Caught up in the moment she wishes he was dead but when he falls down with pain which is accompanied by the ominous sounds of nature deteriorating and ice caps falling; she realises that she has done something very wrong. She says “I broke something” (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p.), she feels that what she did something against the laws of nature. The film presents her personal wrong committed as linked to the greater wrong humanity is committing against nature. It is something that has broken the regenerative cycle of nature so bad that it cannot be fixed. The natural crisis that comes brings Hushpuppy and Wink closer in the film. It reflects the filmmakers desire for humanity to come together, forgetting their internal differences and help each other to care for what is left of nature now. Hushpuppy’s favourite activity seems to be listening to the heartbeat of the animals, seems to remind the audience that even though it is food, still they are an important part of the universe we inhabit. They are living and must be given that respect of being a valuable part of the natural cycle. To the outsiders view the natural, happy world of Hushpuppy is one of poverty, deprivation and ruin. But in her view the world is a spectacular place where every being is a living breathing effective part of the universe. Nature is a much greater force than us, Wink fails to realise this when he decides to ride out the storm than evacuate to a safer place. Regardless of the devastating result the film ends at a positive, optimistic note where the coming generation understands the functioning of nature’s cycle and their own place in it.

Drew Mcweeny observes that uses the form of magic realism is very effective when telling a story about a child as it’s the way a child views the real world. They are optimistic and their worldview comprises of magic. Portrayal of real events from a magical real point of view inspires the optimism that we have lost, somewhere while living our regular lives. Children are open to new ideas and believe in the power of nature. The scenes in the film that

seem fantastical serve as an allusion to real events and states of consciousness of normal people. The film's choice of the protagonist makes it even more magical realist, most of the film is viewed from the point of view of Hushpuppy and the audience seems to understand what Hushpuppy understands. In some scenes the point of view shifts to Wink but it is to enhance and elaborate Hushpuppy's point of view. The smooth transition and unique of viewpoints shows the different yet similar aspects of the reality we are living. The scene where the aurochs are tailing Hushpuppy and Wink looks at her getting surrounded. Hushpuppy and Wink look at each other, the view point shifts from Hushpuppy's to Wink's for some moments, but both depict the same message; to face the aurochs/ adversities head on with determination. Stephen Selmon says that magic realism reflects speech and cognition within the social postcolonial culture. The scene has no conversation, no voiceover; the silence is enough to communicate their feelings to the audience. Magic realism brings out the drama that exists between the gaps, hesitations and silences in life. It helps the protagonist transcend dualities and hybridity's and convey a common human spirit.

Beasts of the Southern Wild not only shows a 6yr old child's worldview but also shows her sensibilities and the understandings. The protagonist is at an age where we start to understand the difference between reality and fantasy but also believe in the secret workings of the universe where each heartbeat of being living being beats with the heart of the earth itself. She acknowledges these workings and tries to understand it by listening to the heart beat of each being, the chick, the crab and her father. The magic realist aspect of this film connects this fact with the exceptional existence of Hushpuppy as the last of her kind. The strange behaviour and lifestyle of the people of Bathtub is not strange to her but to us as we are aware the conventional way of life. Though she may not have anything to compare it with but the ugly scenes of the city of the city filled with smoke releasing factory chimneys. The film shows bayou people's viewpoint not the city people', the city viewed with a mix of

hatred and fear of encroachment. The fear of destruction by a force greater than herself most probably will manifest in form of a monster of whom a child has heard frightening tales. The magic realism of this film combines the mythic tales with the rich imagination of a child to manifest the present danger into huge, fierce and monstrous aurochs.

The visual features of the location the story and the use of these settings in the context of specific scenes is an important part of magic realist films. Since the lighting, setting and sounds combined together with the actions and conversations bring out an aspect of the scene which is impressive and unexpected for audience. Magic realist films which are mostly independent films portray a combination of the traditional scenes in a modern way. The understanding the audience gains by viewing such scenes grants them a new perspective to reality. The audience come to know that the bathtub which was formally the Isle de Charles Doucet, formed when the city constructed a levee to separate themselves from the bayou and its people. The city does not care about the people of the bayou until they encroach upon their territory by blowing up the levee. City people do not realise the plight of the bayou people they only stick them in shelters rather than help the bayou people re-establish their lives. The audience comes to understand the difference in their basic values that the city people are self-centred and are not concerned about “caring for people smaller and sweeter than you...” (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p.). The director tries to show that the poor have their own ways of taking care of their families and go about their lives. He tries to challenge the audience’s preconceived notions about people living in poverty, it’s not necessary that all of them are drunk, violent and irresponsible about themselves and their families. They have their own system and their own things that they value, which may not be money or material possessions. The director wants the audience to recognise the poverty and the percentage of people living in squalor without health care in developed country like America. Magic

realism shows this through the wondrous imagination of a child making it impressive, attractive and unforgettable.

The fictional bayou, Bathtub is inspired by the real area in southern Louisiana, called Isle De Jean Charles. Benh Zeitlin initially thought to shoot the film abroad but in 2006, when he visited New Orleans he felt the city's post Katrina period was the site the movie aimed to capture. Pat Forbes, Executive Director of the Louisiana Community Development states that the area is located on the frontline of the Louisiana coastal land loss area and the risk loss of their ancestral home is very apparent and they are trying to rebuild and resettle their community while facing extreme coastal land loss. It's similar to the Bathtub community rebuilding a settlement after the first storm, storing plants and animals till the flood recedes. These scenes reflect the Isle de Jean Charles effort of resettlement which includes green building practices, sustainable economic development, an indigenously developed food market, a community which teaches and learns to adapt itself to the natural adversities and preserves their own culture. Benh Zeitlin and Lucy Alibar point out that the aim of the film was not to simply capture the land loss and the damage caused by the hurricane but to show the whole experience of loss.

The Bathtub shows an alternate world different from the conventional American way of life but this does not mean that such a way of life does not exist in the world. The city, Louisiana on which Bathtub is based is a place where the mood is always celebratory. The Louisiana bayou is inhabited by many fishing communities whose way of life surrounds the sea and its produce. They feel the same attachment to the land, the bayou people feel and value. The triumphant, celebratory music score produced by Dan Romer adds to the feel of the location. Bathtub, the strange but beautiful wetland has a high risk of flood as it's located below the levee wall. It's a place consciously forgotten about by the government. The fearlessness, freedom and acceptability of the Bathtub people may come from the attitude the

Southern Louisiana bayou inhabitants have towards life, living so close to the destructive forces of nature. The world the film shows is not a post-apocalyptic world nor is it a dystopic world like in *The Hunger Games* 2012. Such a world may come up if the government continues to ignore the state of the poor. The Bathtub is a self-sufficient place; they depend on the land for their settlement and subsistence.

Magic realist movies are acknowledged for accurately depicting the essence of a community's existence and it's not escapist in nature because even in its humorous scenes, it tries to convey alternative perspectives to reality. Magic realist films engage and explore reality and are not merely for amusement and entertainment. Magic realism imbues ordinary things with significance, which indirectly shows the people values, lifestyle and behaviours to the audience in a unique way. In this film food is one of those things. Critic Anne L. Bower states "food is often use to convey the character's emotions, their personal and cultural identities and philosophies in a film" (Anne L. Bower 1). She adds that food is universal, displayed on screen for global consumption. Sidney Mintz claims "food that's eaten have a certain historical background, with regard to people who eat it and the techniques of cooking and eating it" (Sidney Mintz 7). Critic Diane Negra claims that food is culturally relative and its consumption has cultural meanings behind it. "In the postmodern world, food becomes the most non-threatening way one can experience the other's culture." (Diane Negra 71)

The people of the Louisiana bayou are living off the water, for their livelihood and subsistence. Food is entwined with their culture in the most basic level, "the food they eat; the way they eat it defines the community itself...It is interwoven with all aspects of their lives, their approach to food, how they eat it and what it means to them is different from other communities." (Elena N. Kelly n.p.). For instance, in the scene when someone shows Hushpuppy how to break the shell of the crab with a knife and eat it, Wink says that's not the way to eat it. One needs to break it with their bare hands, touch their food and eat it with their

hands and the bayou people agree with him. Producer Josh Penn points out that the food scenes in the film link to the characters drive to survive and to fend for themselves; it shows Hushpuppy's coming of age and evolution. Only when we learn to take care of ourselves can we start to take care of others who are smaller and sweeter than ourselves. In the earlier scenes when she is unable to cook for herself and searches for her father at the "feeding time" (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p.), shows her helplessness but later when she procures those nuggets, shows her independence and growth. The feast scenes in the film does not glamourize food in order to encourage hunger but to show the evolution and journey of the character and their relationship with the land and its resources. Josh Penn claims that food is a universal part of one's life and how they approach it shows their lifestyle and societal background. Magic realism of the film uses food to trigger nostalgia, the scene of Marietta frying gator nuggets in dust particles suspended in the sunlight parallels to the fantasy like scenes on the catfish shack where the cook, cooks the same dish for Hushpuppy in a surreal lighting like her mother. This makes the audience wonder if these events were merely in Hushpuppy's imagination.

The film creates a richly layered, imagined universe which is rooted in actual locations, events and people. The young protagonist is trying to make sense of the mysteries around her. The film can be seen as an allegory of hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, focusing on the feelings of such a disaster struck community and its hope of resettlement. Their way of life comments A.O Scott of *New York Times* is both harsh and idyllic which is threatened by the authority of the city dwellers and more importantly by a greater force of nature, the storm. The multicultural community that lives there are based on the value of ethnic solidarity and inclusion. Critic Tom Shone states that maybe myth and magic is the form through which America should look at reality on the screen, making magic realism film genre of America now. Film critic Phil Hoad observes the shift from realism to magic realism

in America in films and literature. He questions if “American audiences feel the use of magical realism is an effective way to contemplate on America as a nation or [if] America is retreating into the recesses of magical realism” (Phil Hoad n.p.) to avoid confronting the harsh realism. Regardless of the defining features a magic realist film, American movies show a trend to move towards magic realism in films rather than the conventional realism. This film seems like children’s parable warning adults of the adverse effects of destroying nature without thinking of the future. The end part of the film is the most conventional and realistic, ironically portrayed fantastically. Wink and Hushpuppy are captured by the city dwellers and put in a shelter. It seems unnatural when they are included in the civilisation, Wink is hospitalised and Hushpuppy is dressed as a conventional little girl in a dress. In a realistic film this would be the end where the child gets into foster care and the father dies. Magic realism of the film combines this real event with the myth of the aurochs and the nostalgic presence of the mother to give it maybe not a happy but a hopeful end.

The ending like most magic realist films is ambiguous and open ended. Hushpuppy seems to gain the determination and confidence of surviving and protecting her community, opening multiple possibilities of how the story could end. The worlds of fantasy and reality seem to coexist in the ending scenes. The scenes of Hushpuppy in the catfish shack/brothel are confusing and ambiguous, it’s impossible to know if it’s real or just an imaginary wish fulfilment of these orphaned children. The film seems suspended in the space between what’s inside her head and what’s outside. The storm, her trailer home and the fictional bayou’s existence is questionable. What really exist are the emotions and the relationship. Wink and Hushpuppy are father-daughter. He fulfils his duty of making Hushpuppy self-reliant and able to fend for herself, by imparting core values of the community to her. Ultimately the film seems to be a tale of survival, defiance and strength giving love which maybe imperfect unlike the pure and perfect loves in fantasy movies.

Critic Slipa Kovvali claims that the film may seem an American Indie film at first but it depicts how people's worldview is linked to where they come from. It forces the audience to expand their worldview and observe such people by abandoning their pre-conceived prejudices. Generally, Hollywood films present the poverty in America as bleak and hopeless but the director tries to show that it may not be that hopeless after all. The film hopes to appeal to open minded viewers who would understand that complicated histories of a country can make the common public distrust government institutes like the shelter hospital in the film, which is conventionally and universally are seen as good. Being a magic realist film it targets the sophisticated portion of the population, who demand to be intellectually stimulated by what they watch although "some of the magical realism imagery may not work for everyone" (Christy Lemire n.p.). But most film critics accept the magic realism in the film as the inherent magic that is a part of the reality a six-year-old lives, this helps the director achieve the ultimately hopeful end despite the bleak reality of the situation. The director asserts, the film is not supposed to be interpreted literally or scientifically. The whole story is allegorical and symbolic of real contemporary. The storm was a retelling of 2005 hurricane Katrina in the area of southern Louisiana and the film depicted the after effects of the hurricane and how the communities dealt with it. Thomas Hackett notes the film "turned the tables on the conventions of Hollywood aesthetics and storyline" (Thomas Hackett n.p.). He adds that the film may not win the Oscar but has earned a respectable spot in the international film festivals and won cultural, humanistic prizes as it observes the nuances of human life in meaningful way. The film does not push the harsh realities and the plight of these people in the audiences faces rather skims over them, making the audience feel guilty, virtuous and indifferent all at once. The film allows the viewers the critical distance from the characters and observes them simultaneously making the audience feel that they have witnessed such things in reality.

The film lacks the regional realist feature of the American Indie films instead the magic realism points to the threatened enjoinder, where their subsistence and livelihood depends on the land and water itself. The B.P (British Petroleum) oil spill 2010, affected the Southern Louisiana bayou where the shooting of the film was happening. The real event became a part of the myth of the story. The message that the film tries to convey of being a part of the whole universe and achieving fearlessness comes from acceptance of such happenings. The importance of being self-reliant and facing an adversity as a collective, cultural community was actually happening when the residents of the southern Louisiana bayou were facing the real risk of closing fishing, their sole livelihood for several years. The Deepwater Horizon Oil Rig exploded spilling almost 4.9 million barrels of crude oil in the sea, causing a major destruction to the marine environment. The risk of damage caused to the people and the bayou was huge. “The story’s actually happening...I was rewriting the scenes...based on the moments we were experiencing with this sort of dread.” (Behn Zeitlin interviewed by Rachel Arons n.p.).

The film shows the independence and power of a subculture, reflects what America truly stands for: freedom, utopia and rootedness. The internal struggle is uniquely depicted in the external world with a childlike inventiveness. The story has a progressive plot being a mainstream Hollywood film but its scenes stand out separately, seems glued together as a part of one progressive story, forming a visionary tale of a community collectively trying to survive and sustain itself. “At times the film looks like a global natural disaster happening in the future and at other times it seems to be a shabby re-enactment of the biblical flood.” (Peter Bradshaw n.p.). The devastation of storm and its aftermath is similar to a war zone, stressing on community survival. The film is therapeutic and poetic, giving the message of surviving against all odds. It shows that the victims of disaster do not want others charity but respect and empathy as such events can happen to anyone. Being an allegory on the hurricane

Katrina the film is inspired a mix of sadness and happiness, gives insight into the lives of a collective community who live off the land and are directly affected by the changing climatic conditions. The film renews the debate of the sustainability of such areas. The film questions the duty and responsibility towards your family and your home when there is the risk of losing it.

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Chapter – IV

Summing Up

The above two films have been analysed along the lines of cinematic magic realism and demonstrate that magic realist films are indeed a trend of the present global cinema. Most magic realist films are independent productions made on a limited budget but it's not an Art film targeting a tiny part of the audience and depicting location specific limited issues. *Beasts of the Southern Wild* is an independent film made on a limited budget by a New Orleans film collective called Court13. The film was nominated for four *Academy Awards* including best actress and best director. Critics review is generally positive and appreciative of the film. Though it is not an American Indie film but the tagging has helped it find better sponsors and distributor like *Fox Searchlight Pictures*. Unlike American Indie films it targets the global audience; as a magic realist film targets a sophisticated audience who can understand the film's content and its underlying message. Sponsoring of a major Hollywood company made the film adopt some Hollywood aspects and inclining towards the fantastical but that does not take away its magic realist nature. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam claim that in the arena of media and ideology Hollywood has a hegemonic position even though Hollywood produces a small number of feature films annually in comparison to the rest of the world. Ironically all these non-American films are not easily available across the world in video stores or for academic film courses and only featured, nominally via of the Oscars, under the category of foreign films but only Hollywood productions are promoted. Currently globalisation has opened the world culturally and economically, making it a two-way process.

Magic realist films are generally situated in Third World countries or areas which have a rich traditional, cultural and mythic history. Mixing fantasy with reality is a part of the

narrative and storytelling technique. Most of these nations have gone through the process of colonialization which includes New Orleans, a former centre of white plantation owners employing black slaves and India, a former British colony for over a century. These nations want to resist western influence on their indigenous culture and traditions. They deliberately use magic realism, a non-western way of representing their own native world yet which is acceptable to the western critics. The global and native world seamlessly combines and crystallise in the form of magic realism. Magic realist films renew diverse cultures and histories globally, making them universally recognisable and appealing,

Every film which does not employ realism is not magic realist. *Beasts of the Southern Wild* is imaginative, rooted to reality and has a lively critical content, says critic Phil Hoad. He adds that is aesthetic game changer in mainstream Hollywood. The question arises that who is labelling these films as magic realist, when magic realism is not an officially recognised film genre. In case of *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, the director does not call his film magic realist although he claims the film layers' fantasy with reality and admits that it does not fit any pre-established film category properly. The film's features and methods of portrayal liken it to a magic realist film. Most film critics who reviewed it call it a magic realist film like A.O. Scotts and Phil Hoad. Benh Zeitlin was influenced and inspired by many directors who have used cinematic magic realism like John Cassavetes, Terence Malick whose recent magic realist film *The Tree of Life* 2011 was a quite successful. Emir Kurlurica director of the famous magic realist film *Time of the Gypsies* 1988 and Czech director Aleksandr Sokurov whom critic Frederic Jameson considered as a magic realist filmmaker. *Beasts of the Southern Wild* was an eye catcher at the *Sundance Film Festival* claims Monohla Dargis and was declared to be the best film played at the festival after two decades. The film according to the popular movie review website *Metacritic* has the high score of 86/100, proving its universal appeal. Even *Rotten Tomatoes* another famous movie review

website claimed it to be “certified fresh” and was liked by 86% of the reviewers. *The New York Times* declared the film to be the “critic’s pick of 2012” and was included in the top five of the top ten films of 2012.

The 2015 Bollywood magic realist film *The Path of Zarathustra* was not as globally successful as *Beasts of the Southern Wild* but it managed to gather the attention of the Indian movie goers and appealed to their contemplative powers. This film too was an independent production but managed to gather sponsors which had influence in the Indian film industry. *The Path of Zarathustra* was a production backed by the famous cinema franchise PVR and released under the *PVR Directors Rare*, “it’s an extremely important film to be seen by all. The reflections on the deeper perspective of Parsi faith... lost identity” (Reza Noorani n.p.). *Muviz.com*, a database for a variety of films, a platform for viewers to access and watch cinema and has acquired the streaming rights of the film, helping such independent films to reach audiences across the globe. “The path of Zarathustra is an excellent addition to our catalogues... we are pleased and proud to give it a digital platform which helps it reach a wider audience... a platform for independent cinema...” (Abhayana Singh, *wikinewsindia* n.p.).

The film was made on a limited budget and managed to be a semi hit on the Indian Box-office. Being an Indian, independent film it was not able to gather as much attention as big mainstream Bollywood films, nonetheless it is a feature film made for mainstream Indian cinema not an art film. It targeted the sophisticated set of movie goers like most magic realist film and was appreciated across India. The film is a worthy entry in the domestic and international film festivals. Magic realist films are able to bend reality in unimaginable ways and combines performance, visual effects and topography seamlessly, inspiring awe. Cinematic magic realism establishes magic in reality in a way that they seem to work logically. The fantastical reality the film introduces to the audience is eerily familiar to them,

observes critic Drew Mcweeny. It depicts a socio-political allegory, a reflection of a struggle of the protagonists with personal, interpersonal and even international issues which are specific to that culture yet are common in the lives of people across the globe.

Beasts of the Southern Wild was categorised as fantasy drama film by major movie websites and *The Path of Zarathustra* was categorised as mystery, drama. The director of the path of Zarathustra Oorvazi Irani asserts her film being a magic realist film and seems to know what exactly the phenomenon means. She tried to use this form to tell her narrative and tried to achieve the effects of cinematic magic realism. The medium of cinema itself has interplay of the fictional and the real and the employment of magic realism within it makes even more transgressive and interpretive. Magic realism helps cinema engage into a diegetic, dynamic dialogue with its audience which is not possible in ordinary cinema. Both these films are inspired by personal experiences of the directors' life, giving it a documentary aspect; it has a basic message to convey, giving it an aspect of an Art film and employs fantasy in its storyline. All these aspects combined forms a film which is impossible to fit into a particular film genre yet it demands the attention of the contemplative powers of its audience. Magic realist films rather than targeting an audience tries to create its own audience, steering them to contemplate on the issue which is needed in the modern world. The impressions these films give out are mixed.

It is interesting that both these films are the debut of the director into mainstream cinema. It is important to notes that these directors themselves are a product of the postmodern, postcolonial and globalised world have chosen to produce a magic realist film as their debut. What is that they wish to convey by producing such a film rather than a commercial entertainment film which make have earned them more revenue. Regardless of their perspective on films they have managed to appeal to the audience and leave their mark on the cinema industry through their work. Their vision seems to be to communicate a

message which is universally important by depicting the specific conditions and issues of their own specific situations. Magic realism is appealing and acknowledged across the world because of its unique feature of connecting cultures without erasing their own culture specific aspects. It highlights the diversities and simultaneously making everyone realise that we are not so different after all. Critic Wendy B. Faris asserts that the sources of magic realist works are the cultural myths, beliefs and superstitions so it may seem to commodify primitivism but magic realism recognises urban as well as rural cultural centres. She adds that it addresses contemporary issues like sexual / cultural colonialization hence the possibility of the viewer retreating into the nostalgic past is made impossible. Magic realist films depict a confrontation between the past and the present confrontation thereby helping the characters face their dilemmas. They are not carried away by their past memories as magic in the narrative underscores the effect of the past, only possible in the magic realist mode. Here reality is disrupted and the history is reimagined, destabilizing authority, power structures and identity, aligning magic realism to postmodernism which also views identity as fragmented and hybrid. The ultimate messages these two films seem to give out prove this point.

Oorvazi Irani contemplating on the threat of extinction of the Zoroastrian faith says that through this film she wants mark in history that their faith existed and influenced many other major faiths like Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. Similarly, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* which depicts a situation where the community maybe the last of its kind wants to leave evidence of its existence for the future. The protagonist Hushpuppy says “million years from now, when children go to school, they will know once there was a girl called hushpuppy and she lived with her daddy in the bathtub.” (*Beasts of the Southern Wild* n.p.).

The above analysis has proved that there is a thing called magic realist films, though its features have not officially been put down but majority of contemporary film reviewers, movie goers and even film critic acknowledge its existence. They may not be able to define

what a magic realist film is but they definitely know what a magic realist film is not. Cinematic magic realism has become popular recently, maybe because the conventional realist movies have failed to draw attention of the audience to current issues. The audience evolved and are no longer satisfied with dumb, illogical escapes of fantasy or rubbing of harsh reality rather are interested in seeking new, alternative ways to solve real problems, which magic realism seems to offer. Frederic Jameson in his article "Soviet Magic Realism" (1992) seems to label films as magic realist which does not seem to fit neatly in the pre-established cinematic genres like documentary or Avant-garde films. He seems to view magic realist films as "metagenric" which combines fantasy, science fiction, surrealism with the authorial in this case the director's intention. Magic realist films explore the beyond by subverting, juxtaposing and transgressing these genres. The Surrealist film and the magic realist are often similar and are overlapping because magic realism has its roots in surrealist Art but later magic realism acquired its own distinct features, separating itself from Surrealism. It was deliberately developed to challenge the conventional view and rules of Realism. Magic realism is not new in cinema; earlier films like *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Blue Velvet*, *Stairway to Heaven*, *Wings of Desire* etc used magic realism only in few scenes. Such films can be called proto magic realist films but recent films employ magic realism from the beginning to the end without being adaptations of magic realist novels.

Scholar Felicity Gee feels that cinematic magic realism is not merely the juxtaposition of the real and fantastical worlds rather it should be seen as an alternative postmodernism. Cinematic magic realism is based on innovative, modernist strategies thought by the directors. The director's critical and artistic theories, practices and visions ultimately shape a magic realist film. In the present hybrid world, only a transgressive, contradictory and hybrid form such as magic realism can represent the multi-ethnic, multicultural, multinational and poly religious reality. A complex reality needs a complex form to represent it, even in

cinema. Felicity Gee claims “magic realism is not formally a genre and exists as an analytical approach... [There are no] groups, collaborations and circles of artists who work together under the title of magic realism...” (Felicity Gee 16). Magic realism and cinematic magic realism indicate an international, intermodal mode of criticism and antistatic practice. Maggie Bowers states the term magic realism is mentioned in film reviews and websites and often equated with Surrealism. These films explore a particular version of reality which is disruptive, oneiric, abstract and irrational yet it is the everyday life we know of. Transformation of reality is the core of magic realism, transformation of one’s perception of reality by revealing its hidden or unknown side. Cinematic magic realism is not limited by geographical or temporal boundaries hence it functions at the narrative level.

Films are potentially magic realist asserts Robert Stam; they can make dreams realistic and reality dreamlike. Magic realist film can explore multiple possibilities via its odd portrayal of objects and events. It is ideal for story telling since the film’s artistic outlook and narrative technique improves the visual quality of the film and makes it subjective and objective simultaneously. It results in a film which is able to stand with its unique features on the international platform and is a work of art which has a sense of timelessness as it raises issues and questions which were valid in the past, are valid and will remain valid in the future. Magic realist works are not complete mimesis neither is it tied to primitivism. Many technological aspects of the modern society are almost magical. Magic realist film narratives are a product of the intermingling of modern and primitive magic enabling audience to indulge in the nostalgic past critically.

Although magic realism is an obscure category and not an established cinema genre yet in the history of world cinema, most internationally well-known filmmakers have used magic realism. It is inherent in Cinema’s nature to cross many limitations and boundaries, reaching, deep into the cross cultural space despite its initial intention of production. A film

may be produced for commercial success and profits or to gain recognition in international film festivals but it's an Art form which ultimately shows the essence of cultures different from the dominant ones. Edmund Haeng asserts magic realist films present a new perspective to reality, engaging its audience with the cultures depicted regardless of the audience's cultural and national background. He claims that magic realism is an effective and efficient tool for visual narration as its ability to portray a variety of cultures and traditions is essential in cinema to be cross cultural and be recognised to have a global presence. Magic realist films aim to highlight the hidden political subtexts. Magic realist films depict postmodern realities by bringing the past into the present and the rural into the urban and distorting time & space. It's more appealing and effective than historical movies and documentaries which end up replicating historical past with a sense of nostalgia. They do not exoticize a culture rather portrays a heightened reality which gives the global audience information about lesser known cultures. These films establish dialectic, a discourse between a particular community and rest of the world. Noelia Fernández proposes that the capability of ontological disruption that magic realism lends to the medium of cinema offers a new perspective that redefines and legitimises the native point of view. Through magic realism the marginalised can explore new possibilities and gain power by gaining universal recognition & acknowledgement.

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APPENDIX

THE ORHPANED CHIDREN OF THE 2012 FILM BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD



HUSPHUPPY THE 6YR OLD PROTAGONIST, LISTENING TO THE HEARTBEAT OF LIVING BEING. HER FAVORITE ACTIVITY.



HUSHPUPPY FACE THE FIERCE, MYTHICAL CREATURES AUROC



THE FEAST SCENE, WINK TEACHES HUSHPUPPY THE VALUES OF THE COMMUNITY, THAT FOOD MUST BE “BEAST IT”



THE LIGHT OF GOD ILLUMINATES OORVAZI AND SHOWS THAT RELIGION
NEEDS TO BE SELF INTERPRETED NOT UNDERSTOOD FROM BOOKS.



OORVAZI RETURNS TO MUMBAI, THE SUN SYBOLICALLY BY HER SIDE.

A GENTLE BENEVOLENT SUN



OORVAZI IN THE CLOCK SHOP WHERE SHE MEETS ZURVAN, THE PERSONIFICATION OF TIME AND A CLOCK REPAIRER.



THE SKY BURIAL SCENE, FOLLOWING THE FAITH BUT DISCARDING THE UNNECESSARY, ORTHODOX RITUALS.



MANI AND MAZDAK RESPECTIVELY, IN THE SEASHORE CONVERSATION SCENE.



INSIDE THE ZOROASTRIAN FIRE TEMPLE, WHERE COMMERCIAL FILM SHOOTING PROBABLY HAPPENED FOR THE FIRST TIME.



KARDIR, THE HIGH PRIEST. ORTHODOX AND PROUD, SELF PROCLAIMED
DEFENDOR OF THE ZOROASTRIAN FAITH, ON AN ELEVATED SITTING AREA