

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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