

TRANSCULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF MAGICAL REALISM: A COMPARATIVE EXPLORATION OF PAKISTANI, AMERICAN, AND RUSSIAN FICTION

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Abstract

The study explores the use of magical realism in Pakistani, American, and Russian fictions, examining how this literary mode transcends cultural and geographical boundaries while preserving distinct historical, social, and spiritual dimensions. Adopting an exploratory research design, the study employs a comparative literary analysis of selected works from the three traditions, focusing on thematic concerns, narrative techniques, and cultural contexts. Drawing on postcolonial, socio-political, and mythological frameworks, it investigates how magical realism interacts with folklore, spirituality, and lived realities across diverse societies. The findings reveal that Pakistani fiction employs magical realism as a means of negotiating postcolonial dislocation, identity crises, and socio-political turbulence, transforming magical elements into expressions of resistance and cultural reclamation. In contrast, mid-twentieth-century American writers utilize magical realism to critique capitalist consumerism, challenge national myths, and expose the contradictions underlying the American Dream. Russian fiction deeply rooted in mysticism and folklore, channels magical realism toward articulating spiritual yearning and existential introspection, often reflecting a sense of metaphysical passivity. Despite these differences, the study identifies a shared impulse among all three traditions: the desire to dissolve the boundary between the real and the supernatural as a way of reimagining human experience. Ultimately, the research demonstrates that magical realism operates as a cross-cultural narrative strategy, enriching storytelling by weaving together myth, memory, and imagination. It underscores the mode's enduring versatility and its capacity to deepen intercultural understanding, inviting reflection on the nature of reality, belief, and the creative imagination.

Key Words: *Magical Realism, Pakistani Fiction; Russian Fiction; American Fiction.*

1. Introduction

The comparative analysis of real magic in cultures shapes the understanding of how different communities and cultures see, use and interpret 'magic' as a genuine and often, spiritual process. This form of comparison seeks for both similarities and differences in the aspects of incorporation of magic in the societies, beliefs and practices of many countries. Magic has been present in human societies all over the globe in assorted forms from the dawn of history. It represents various beliefs, practices and beliefs that are embracing possession of paranormal

powers in order to achieve certain aims and goals such as defense, foretelling or even healing and ill will. As much as modern scientists may dismiss magic as rather cute or passé, the fact is that magic has in the past and, indeed, still does today play a significant role in assisting cultures make sense of their world.

Cross cultural comparisons of 'real magic', that is, magic as practiced and perceived in culture show both similarities and differences in how magic can be appreciated and utilized across different cultures. These parallels often demonstrate the relationship between magic, religion and the social organization and allow researchers to study matters of concern to everybody, destiny, health, and the environment, among others. Pioneering works of Sir James Frazer and particularly Bronislaw Malinowski have introduced a range of concepts into the study of magic for anthropologists. Magic was divided into two categories in Frazer's seminal work *The Golden Bough* (1890): These are the Law of Contact otherwise known as contagious magic and similar, the Law of Similarity. The argument made by him being that there was a timeline evolution of thought from magical, religious, to scientific and that the magical was the foundation of the religious and the scientific. Nonetheless, the study done by Malinowski on the Trobriand Islanders debunking Frazer's civilization theory as magic does not assume a priori stage in the progression of man but is as rife as religion and science among the people. In *coral gardens and their magic* (1935) done by Malinowski, he pointed out that magic was used often as mental crutch, coping mechanism in situations where there is risk ambiguity, as in cases such as farming and fishing.

1.2 Background of the study

Magical realism as a literary form has enthralled the readers and critics across the world due to its ability to combine the prosaic with the fabulous in efficacious methods. Unlike the previous genres of realism or fantasy, elements of the supernatural or magic are mixed into the realistic without explanation. Magical realism as a literary style has its roots in the Latin American literature but has pervaded almost all cultures and all genres of literature. The analysis of magical realism in Pakistani, American, and Russian fictions presents a chance to compare how different cultural, historical, and societal factors determine the use of the genre. Every region has its literary tradition and its socio-political context that conditions the form of the genre. Pakistan has its major aspects of magical realism linked with folk tales, religious representations, and postcolonialism. Pakistani writers have embraced magical realism as a way of writing about a society, political events or culture and tradition using such literary masters like Marquez. Salman Rushdie and Mohsin Hamid especially use magical realism to paint a picture of existing realities which show post-modern societies are really compartmentalized. In contrast, American fiction has included magical realism to portray ethnical variety, abuse in American history, and philosophy of life. As the American continuation of Indigenous, African, and Latin American myth and narratives, magical realism in the context of America addresses social exclusion, loss, and self-some of the most potent tropes of the genre.

Researchers believe that magical realism in Russian fiction derives from the country's literary history of understanding and embracing the surreal and the absurd, as well as from its history of revolution and war and of authoritarian rule. Writing through the lens of magical realism: ways Russian writers address the psychological and philosophical tensions inside tyrannical sociopolitical regimes. Gorchakov's novel *Futility* is equally relevant as other socio-psychological reflections of the same period works by other authors, such as *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov that delves into express ligancy, Power and Reality and Human Condition. This study compares Pakistani, American, and Russian fictions where the circle of

magical realism has been drawn. The focus of the study is to identify how magical realism helps people of these regions to comment, describe, and narrate their culture and social realities. Its purpose is to know how, which, and why the magical set in the fictional utterance from multilingual worlds, enriches the real in the texts authored by different writers for the readers in different ways.

Categorizing the works of Marquez under the genre of magical realism it has been evident that such a literary device has the capacity has heaving impact on readers irrespective of the given culture and historical period. This global success is in its ability to take the ordinary and weave in the extraordinary into a realm where the two coexist. Thus, this genre is freed from the geographical and cultural context that the writers are in, allowing them to address social, philosophical, and ontology ascetics in ways than may not be possible in realism or other fantasies. Here in Pakistan, magical realism very actively interlinks the structure of postcolonial identity, cultural mythos, and ethnic turmoil. This the case with Bano Qudsia and Mohammad Hanif, both of whom use supernatural to capture the vices in society, challenge morality and describe relationships in the society in the process of transformation. In the American context, it investigates challenges faced by minority groups including people of color, ethnic minorities, indigenous communities etc. up to date. In her discussions, Toni Morrison and Leslie Marmon Silko use magical realism to rewrite history, distort the mainstream story and at the same time give the reader a dense and multilayered understanding of exclusion and trauma. In Russia, it only fully serves as the tool for the contemplation of the performed situations of the existence in the authoritarian state. Some of the authors attempt to explore the nature of power, truth, and the individual liberty, and explore they use magical realism to provide writers like Mikhail Bulgakov try to dissect the fine psychological and philosophic elements within repressive political structures.

Table 1: Background of the study

No	Author	Year	Topic	Findings
1.	Shaikh,F., Lakhan,R.A., Laghari, T., & Ahmad, A	2023	Magical Realism in Bano Qudsia's Novel RajaGidh	to get more involved with concept of love, destiny, and psyche of human being, where realities as well as preposterous stuff are interwoven to describe essence and every eerie of life, the hitherto untouched corners of socially acceptable norms or rather unsaid taboos.
2.	Sancheti.P	2023	Women, Violence, and Magical Realism in the Fiction of Mohammed Hanif"	to explore gender and violence in sociopolitical context applying the frames of magical realism, which constructs an otherworldly world where the everyday intersects with the magical to stage the battle for/over power, the struggle for a personally and collectively meaningful identity in a world that is violent to women

3.	Khalid.H	2024	A Thematic Analysis of a Firefly in the Dark and Midnight Doorways	of culture and ontology of being, the otherworldly and the earthly intertwined, where postmodernism may find its source in the premodern in a paradigm that can only be defined as postmodern magical realism
4.	Khan.A, Shamim.F	2024	"Transcending Realities: Analyzing the Mystical Aspects of Magical Realism"	avoids strictly defining itself, being a mixture of mystery and the supernatural incorporated into the realistic setting for the purpose of spiritual contemplation, subversion of the realistic perspective and discussion of the relativity of time and space continuum
5.	Khan.S, Zahoor.S, Khan.M	2023	"The Swan's Wife: An Examination from a Postmodern Angle"	to combine the fantastical with the real, and it seems to articulate a postmodern interest in the subject, self, and self-deception, insofar as the magical elements exist as a function of the character's inner self.

1.2 Rational of the Study

Though, the ambiguity of young women and readers and the critics are often puzzle with what the vagueness of interpretation is in the magical realism – the genre that intertwines mythological threads with actual personages. The presence of the two major forms of the extraordinary and the ordinary in this genre forms a question of how or to what extent writes are able to merge between the two. Maybe how magical realism is the mode to continue adding another layer of meaning rather more the method of storytelling and one will have to investigate it particularly when it comes to social-political as well as cultural & psychological truths. The function of narrative has since been the subject of discussion as to whether it is a more global type of narrative or one that is unique to Latin American culture. Additionally, there is always a strong connection between magic and reality within these novels and, therefore, meaning often gets lost somewhere between the lines between the metaphors, allegories, and literal sense of the stories told.

Magical realism, as a narrative mode, has long resisted confinement within national or linguistic boundaries. Emerging as a response to the inadequacies of realism in capturing the complexities of human experience, it blends the ordinary and the extraordinary to articulate truths inaccessible through conventional representation. While much scholarship has centered on Latin American and European traditions, the transcultural migration of magical realism into South Asian, American, and Russian literatures remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap by investigating how writers from distinct socio-historical contexts across Pakistani, American, and Russian, appropriate and transform magical realism to express their cultural anxieties, political tensions, and spiritual sensibilities.

In the Pakistani context, magical realism becomes a vehicle for negotiating postcolonial identity and historical trauma, where myth and folklore reassert indigenous epistemologies against colonial rationality. American fiction, particularly from the mid-twentieth century onward,

employs magical realism as a critical lens through which capitalist excess, social alienation and the fragility of the “American Dream” are exposed. Meanwhile, Russian writers integrate the mode into a long-standing tradition of mysticism and metaphysical reflection, reconfiguring the supernatural as a commentary on faith, fate, and existential endurance. By situating these literatures within a comparative framework, the study underscores the transcultural adaptability of magical realism and its power to mediate between the material and the metaphysical. Ultimately, this exploration redefines magical realism not as a regional aesthetic but as a dynamic global discourse that bridges cultures, dismantles binaries between reality and imagination, and reveals the shared human impulse to mythologize experience in the pursuit of meaning.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How does Kamila Shamsie employ elements of magical realism in *Salt and Saffron* to represent cultural identity, memory, and postcolonial experience in Pakistani fiction
2. In what ways does Toni Morrison utilize magical realism in *Beloved* to reconstruct history, trauma, and the collective memory of African American experience?
3. How is magical realism manifested in Katherine Arden’s *The Bear and the Nightingale*, and how does it reflect Russian folklore, spirituality, and cultural consciousness?
4. What are the key similarities and differences in the use and function of magical realism across Pakistani, American, and Russian literary traditions?

How is magical realism used in different literary traditions?

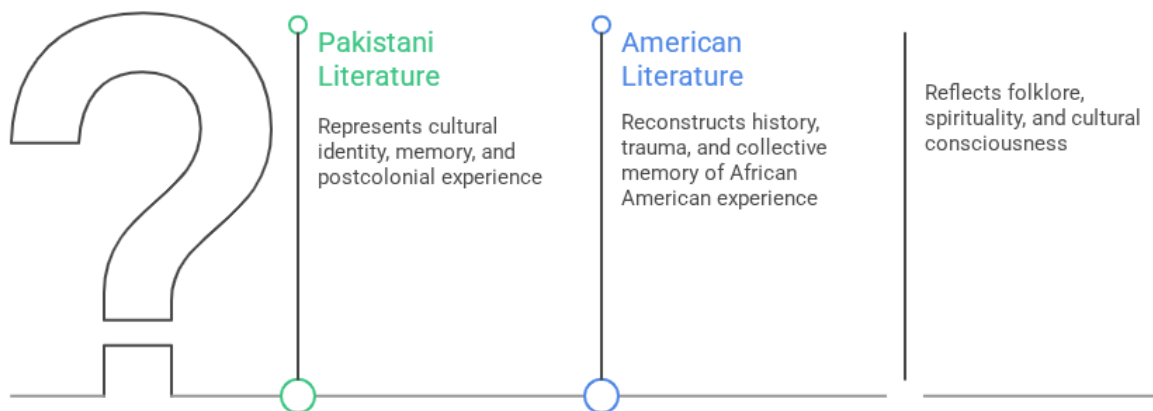


Figure 1: Research Objectives

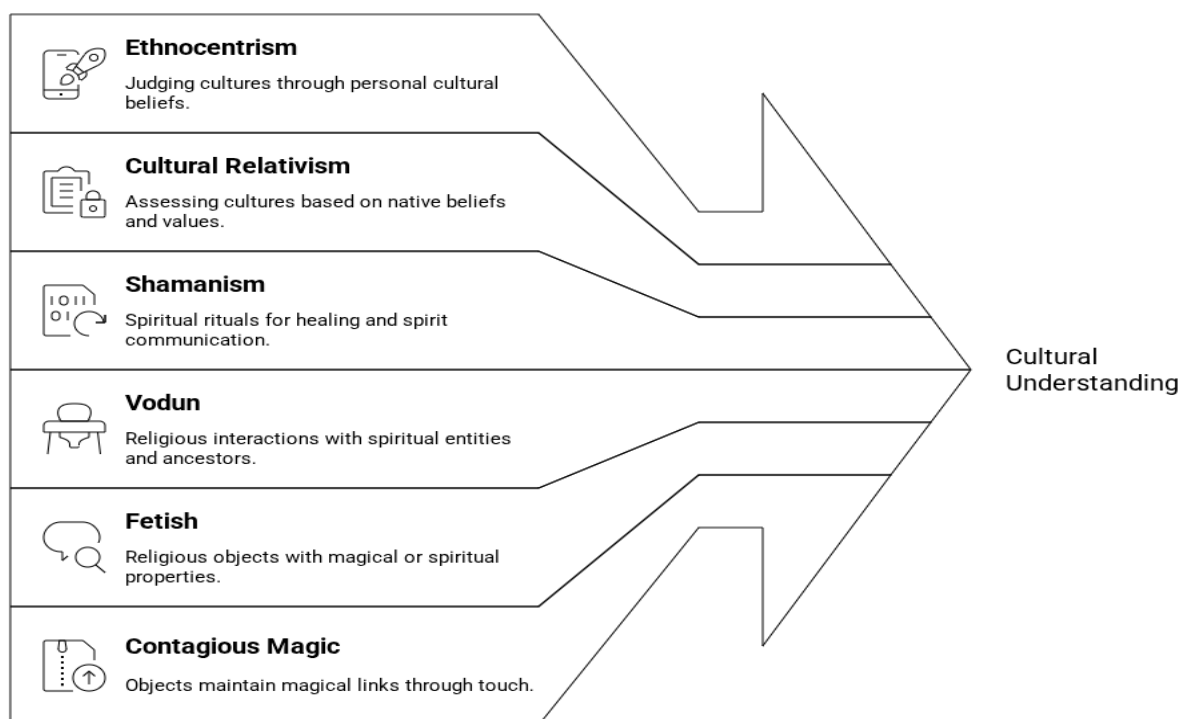


Figure 2: Anthropological literary terms in Magical Realism

2.Literature Review

Magical realism as a literary and artistic form was also a reaction against the restrictions of realism in that it combined the ordinary and marvelous. The term was originally used to refer to post-expressionist paintings, and it was first coined in 1925 by German critic Franz Roh to refer to paintings that depicted mundane subjects with a sense of mystery or uncanniness. By the middle of the 20th century, magic realism became part of the literary arsenal of the Latin American writers and combined myth, folklore and history to confront colonial trauma, cultural hybridity, and identity. The *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Marquez and *The Aleph* by Borges were the embodiment of the main principles of the movement; the authorial restraint, the overlay of history, and the normalization of the extraordinary. The genre diffused in the world, creating stories in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the United States. African writers like Ben Okri, and Asian writers like Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy redefined the form through postcolonial terms with the magical reveal the fissures of colonial modernity, the conflicts between myth and history. Magical realism subsequently became not just an aesthetic style, but a philosophical position - challenging the dichotomy of reason and supernatural in the West, and also re-establishing the boundaries of truth, identity and cultural experience.

The most important idea in magical realism is that nothing can be considered as fixed, but it is all culturally and perceptually constructed. The magical is not handled as illusion but as parallel truth which exists alongside the rational. They are very close to the worldview of societies in Latin America, Africa and Asia where myth and spirituality are part of everyday existence. The magical realist narratives tend, thus, to become the counter-discourse to colonial rationalism, which reinvents indigenous epistemology and oral traditions. They also do not conform to strict

genre boundaries by blending the social conscience of realism with the mythic and metaphysical as well as creating hybrid literary spaces that interrogate power and representation. There are a number of theoretical elements that characterize magical realism. These are real world setting, supernatural events as prosaic, and narrative tone of acceptance which straddles the line between the supernatural and the fantastic. Time tends to be cyclic or distorted, which contemplates the fluid memory and history. The suspension between the disbelief and the belief is maintained by authorial reticence the unwillingness of the narrator to explain the magical. The symbols and metaphorical tools are important in bridging the realms of the mystical with the psychological or socio-political realities; and, hybridity enables the simultaneous presence of the conflicting truths which summarizes the complexity of the human condition. This narrative mode does not only provide entertainment but the prism through which it is possible to examine postcolonial identity, collective trauma, and rebellion against the mainstream ideologies.

Recent criticism has shown that magical realism is still flourishing in world fiction as a way of questioning identity, race, and belonging. The allegory of the racial anxiety and the instability of identity as a theme, Hamid (2022) use the surreal change of the skin color of characters in their reading of *The Last White Man* as an allegory. Based on the theory of epidermalization by Franz Roh and the writings of Franz Fanon on the concept of stylistic clarity, Hamid constructs the concept of race in a performative and dynamic way. The transformation of the protagonist into the white to the dark makes the reader face the arbitrariness of the racial hierarchies and fluidity of privilege. This discourse breaks down the divide between self and other as a discourse of hybridity as per Homi Bhabha. The minimalist prose of Hamid without any explicit explanations enables the magical to work in a highly realistic psychological context so as to turn magical realism into a sociopolitical critique of race and representation in the postcolonial world.

Likewise, the book *Chocolat* (1999) by Joanne Harris uses magic realism to disrupt the dogma of the social norms and patriarchal organization. Harris balances sensuality, spirituality and rebellion through the intuitive gift of Vianne Rocher who knows desires based on chocolate. The critics observe how her story fits in the framework of the Carpentier marvelous real because it permeates the mundane with sleepy magic, and it also plays with the concept of in-betweenness as discussed by Bhabha to emphasize cultural conflict between the tradition and the transformation. The magic spread throughout *Chocolat* is symbolic of liberation and new beginning, as it breaks moral rules of good and evil, sacred and profane. Such a mixture of sensory realism and moral fable is the typical example of how magical realism works as aesthetic and moral protest against the tyrannical order. The debate between the magical realism and the fantastic, as presented by Rehmani and Navel (2024), highlights the distinctive quality of the genre to make the supernatural normalized without breaking the reality. Although the fantastic makes one question things, the magical realism remains assimilated thus creating stories that reflect the hybridity of myth and modernity in postcolonial societies. Both modes are a rejection of traditional realism and broaden the literary representation to the psychic, the cultural and the historical. To writers, such as Rushdie and Roy, this intersection is a vehicle with which to deal with identity, displacement, and power within the postcolonial setting and which has made magical realism an international language of hybridity and resistance.

Magical realism has emerged as an essential narrative practice in South Asian literature, especially Pakistani fiction, to express political criticism, spiritual awareness and gender opposition. This is illustrated through *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Mohammed Hanif (2011) in which magic realism is applied to portray the plight of the marginalized women in a patriarchal society. There is an element of reclamation of agency through miraculous in the description of a

Christian nurse, Alice, by Hanif (as discussed by Shaheen et al., 2014), who acts with miraculously, in a repressive system. Female empowerment and resistance against social and religious hierarchies is turned into a metaphor of the magical. The funny and ironic aspect of Hanif reveals the absurdity in society and miracles are now used as a means of social criticism instead of divine intervention. In this case, magical realism overcomes the gap between the spiritual and the sociopolitical, and allows other visions of justice and dignity. Once again, Hanif uses magical realism to deal with postcolonial trauma, war, and displacement in *Red Birds* (2018). The talking bird and the absurd setting of the war in the novel are interpreted by Murtaza (2023) as the means of the combination of realism and the surreal in order to criticize militarism and the dehumanization of refugees. The indistinctness of absurdity, humor and fantasy enables Hanif to illustrate the psychological displacement of the post-colonial subjects who are between the past and modernity. Magical realism is thereby a way of reaching the anarchy of modern wars and the moral vagueness of authority. According to Murtaza, this approach of Hanif is a way of how the genre responds to reflect globalized postcolonial reality without losing its humanist essence. The diasporic narratives of Leila Aboulela bring a new twist into the theme of contemporary magical realism with the element of spirituality. As Akbey (2024) states, Aboulela reworks displacement and identity through Sufism and frames the concept of home as a spiritual and not a geographical place.

Hanif uses magical realism to critique South Asian society and empower marginalized groups.

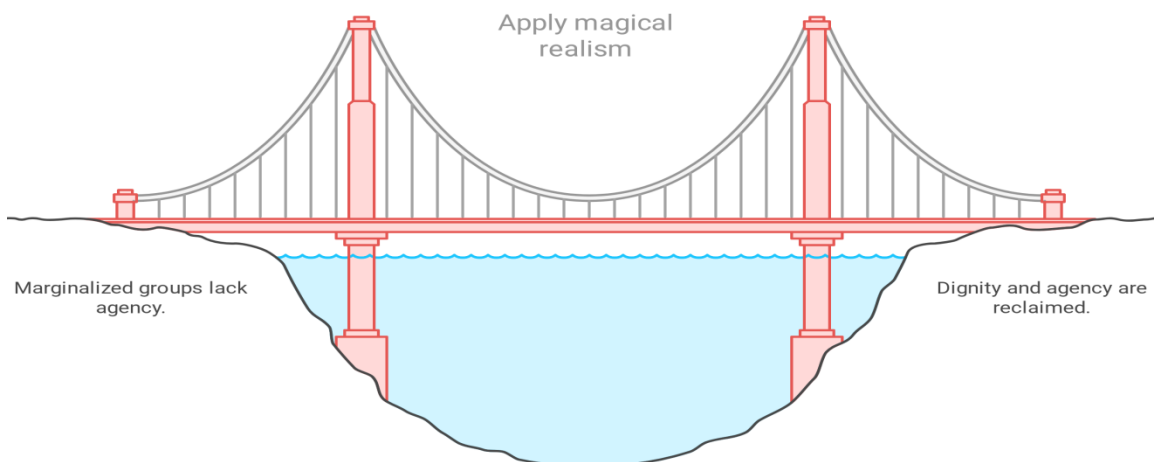


Figure 3. Magical Realism in South Asian societies

Magical realism has also been used by other Pakistani authors like Bano Qudsia, Usman T. Malik, and Mazhar ul Islam as a way to unite folklore, history, and social comment. Their works emphasize the indigenous mythic structures and local mysticism as models of explaining the present existential dilemmas. The novels of Zulfikar Ghose studied by Hussain (2016) and Azim (2018) address the issues of identity and displacement by representing the hybrid narratives of memory, landscape, and myth. His ecological symbolism makes nature a living consciousness

and shows the interdependence of ecological and human history. To the Pakistani writers, magical realism then serves as an instrument of decolonization - recovering the suppressed voices, reconstructing spirituality, and addressing socio-political disillusionment.

According to Bushra et al. (2024), the *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Márquez is seen to have significantly influenced American fiction with the understanding that myth and history could exist together as two different truths. American writers adopted fragmented identities through non-linear temporality and hybrid storytelling via its influence. Magical realism has also been a reaction to the post-truth age in modern times. According to Hart and Hart (2021), the fact that the genre can combine reality and illusion is similar to the control of truth in the contemporary society. Showing the incredible as plausible, magical realism reflects the way power and perception discourses are being formed, and presents an analytical tool with which to challenge the notion of authenticity in the digital and political era. In these literary traditions, magical realism becomes more than just a literary style it is an act of epistemology, of reiterating the complex in a simplifying world. Whether they are of race as in Hamid racial metamorphosis, of absurd wars as in Hanif, or of haunted memories as in Morrison, the genre insists on the existence of opposites including faith and reason, myth and history, self and other.

3. Research Methodology

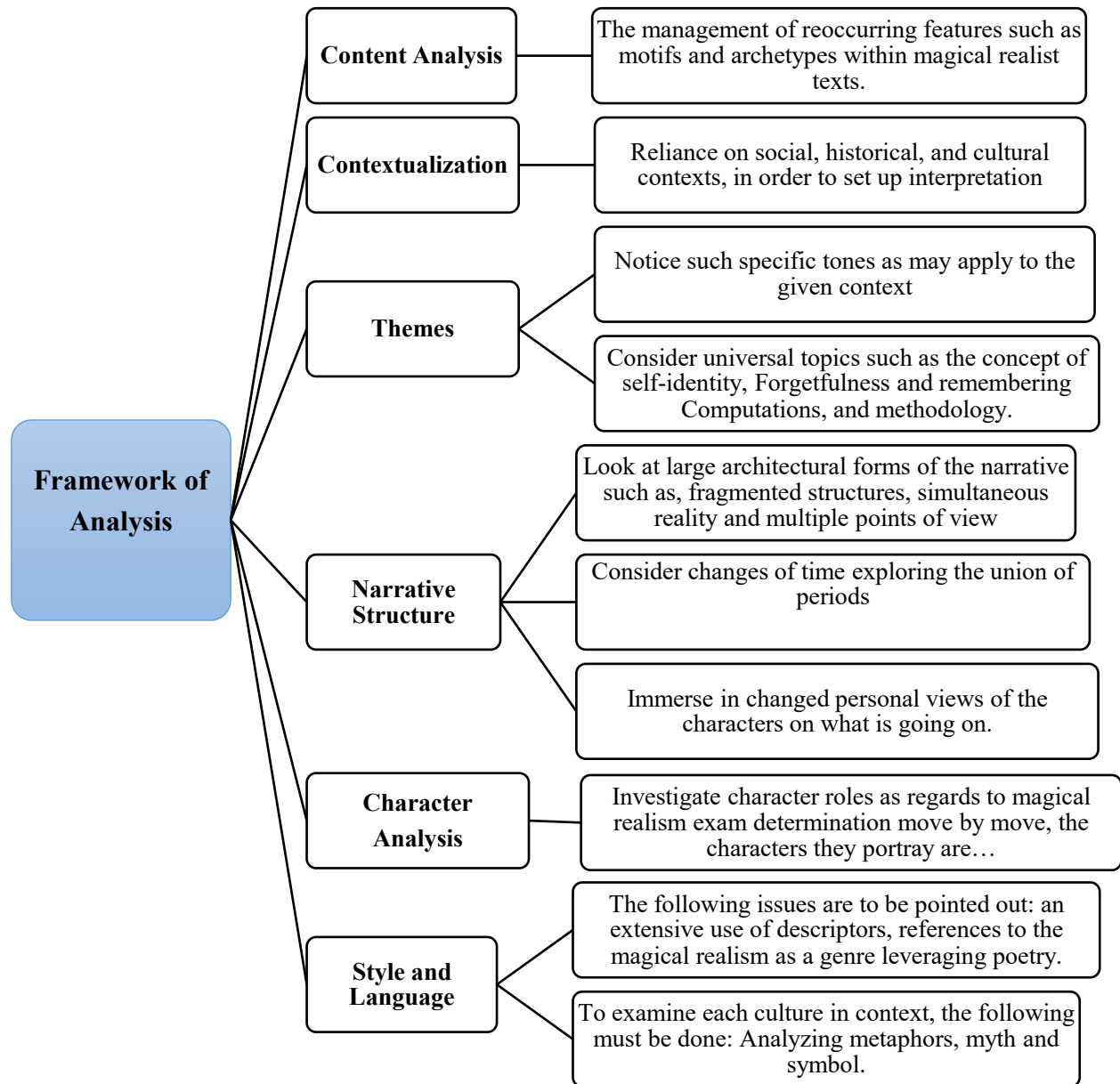


Figure 4. Framework of analysis

The research takes a qualitative and comparative approach of literature style to study magical realism in the Pakistani, American and Russian fiction. Such design allows studying cultural, historical, and stylistic differences in the genre in detail. In a close textual analysis and comparison of themes, the study establishes similarities and differences in magical realism when depicted in various literary cultures. The study is based mostly on the textual and thematic analysis, which are accompanied by intertextual interpretation and close reading. These tools

enable a very detailed analysis of narrative devices, symbolic patterns and motifs. The paper is based on the functioning of magical realism as a narration tool that blends historical, social, and spiritual space. The use of magical realism as a literary mode, the effects of the sociopolitical and psychological contexts, and the narrative techniques of such dimensions are core variables that are represented in the narratives.

The study uses a comparative analytical model that incorporates the postcolonial, postmodern, and cultural theories to explain the performance of the magical realism in the three traditions differently. This cross-disciplinary method has acknowledged the genre as being both worldwide and localized narrative phenomenon that mediates myth and modernity without the loss of regionality. Triangulation of various sources, repeat readings, and coding processes are done to ascertain validity so that reliability and interpretive rigor are met. Ethical considerations are upheld during the study and these include being culturally sensitive and respectful to intellectual ownership. Interpretations don't overgeneralize, but rather strive to be true to the cultural narrative in its socio-historical setting. Overall, it is possible to conclude that this cross-cultural and qualitative approach offers a consistent structure to the analysis of magical realism as a dynamic mode of narrative. It embodies the ways in which the role of the mystical and the real in the genre is used culturally, politically, and philosophically differently in Pakistani, American, and Russian literature, to both the general and the local purposes of the marvelous in modern fiction.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The findings obtained from the content analysis offer the exploration and comparative analysis of the three chosen novels Kamila Shamsie, *Salt and Saffron*, Toni Morrison, *Beloved* and Katherine Arden, *The Bear and the Nightingale* to study the way magical realism is used as the literary mode, a mixture of the real and the fantastic. All the novels are based on their cultural and historical context, which are Pakistan, post-Civil War America and medieval Russia and they are guided by elements of mythology, folklore, memory and spirituality to bring out deeper realities about identity, trauma and resistance. The chapter is broken down into summaries, characterization, plots, settings, themes, and discussion of magical in both works.

In *Salt and Saffron* by Kamila Shamsie, Aliya Dard-e-Dil, who lived in the United States before coming back to Karachi, gets involved in the mysterious past of her family. Aliya is a daughter of aristocratic family, and she doubts the myths of aristocracy, status, and family which shape her identity. Shamsie creates a world in which there is a blurring of memory and myth through family legends, particularly the notion of not-quite twins. The story is filled with postcolonial themes, living as an immigrant, and social strata, as Aliya finally realizes that being truly noble is all about compassion and sincerity, and not heredity. The *Beloved* by Toni Morrison is the tale of Sethe, an African American woman who cannot move past her experience of slavery and becomes a symbolic allegory of shared trauma of slavery. Sethe, the main character, together with her daughter Denver is living in a haunted house where the ghost of her dead child *Beloved* comes back to haunt her in the form of a human being. The novel plays with space and time, showing how the trauma disintegrates the separations between the past and present. Morrison employs the supernatural not just to shock but also to express the unspeakable painfulness of slavery as well as the multifaceted process of finding freedom, the maternal and redemption. Vasilisa or Vasya Petrovna is born in *The Bear and the Nightingale* by Katherine Arden to have the gift of seeing household and nature spirits in medieval Russia. Her ability which she inherited through her mother is both her blessing and curse in a society that was becoming hardline in Christianity. Once the people living in the village leave their traditions behind under an

enthusiastic priest, the dark power, which is the demon Medved, comes to life. The friendship of Vasya with the frost demon, Morozko, is the symbolism of life and death, nature and faith. The novel is a blend of Russian folklore and the journey to adulthood of a young woman who rebelled against the repression of society.

All the three stories dwell on the theme of women walking on the edge between convention and change in relation to their experience with the mystical. In *Salt and Saffron*, Aliya travels between Karachi and the mythic past of her family and finds suppressed narratives of love, exile and shame. The uncovered fact that Mariam was disowned assists her in challenging the issue of classism and myths that perpetuate social orders. The novel ends with her coming to terms with complexity and her privilege to redefine her. The narrative structure in *Beloved* is non-linear with a mixture of memories and current activity. The haunted house is a symbol of the trauma persistence of Sethe. The re-emergence of *Beloved* brings Sethe back to the terrors of slavery and motherhood and finally, through an exorcism, which symbolizes a healing act by the community. Morrison personalizes a haunting and turns it into a mass confrontation with history. In *The Bear and the Nightingale*, the battle Vasya goes through is similar to the spiritual change of Russia. With the pagan faith giving way to the Christian orthodoxy, the guardian spirits in the family fail, and evil creeps in. The rebellion of the social norms by Vasya and the collaboration with Morozko result in the victory of the Bear brings the balance back, but makes Vasya an outcast in the society. The novel leaves us happy that Vasya has accepted her position of being a transgressional figure between worlds.

The environments of both the novels serve as allegorical terrains that show psychological and cultural instability. Karachi, in *Salt and Saffron*, is a representation of a territory of memory and contradiction, as there are echoes of colonialism, migration, and silence in aristocratic houses. This nostalgia and loss is heightened by flashbacks to pre-Partition India. In *Beloved*, 124 Bluestone Road is a physical residence and a haunted place, the physical representation of traumas. Sweet Home plantation is the source of his pain to Sethe, where freedom is an illusion against psychological captivity in Ohio. *The Bear and the Nightingale* uses the wilderness of medieval Russia as a magical and dangerous place where folklore is abundant. The woods, small town, and Moscow court represent the conflict between the freedom and social control, nature and civilized world.

Magical realism works in different ways in both novels but serves a similar purpose, to blur the reality and imagination to be able to voice the repressed experience. In *Salt and Saffron* Magic is present not in the supernatural deeds that are apparent but in the mythical narration and symbolism that form identity. The blending of the past and the present is revealed in the legend of the not-quite twins, the metaphorical worth of salt and saffron, and the merging of the memory with the myth. The stories of jinns and omens which are told by Dadi remind the Islamic mysticism, whereas the myth about the royal origin of the family is the symbol of the magic of the tradition. Time and memory move in the same direction forming dream-like narrative structure, which represents the diasporic consciousness.

In *Beloved*, Morrison makes the historical trauma of slavery into a supernatural phenomenon. Psychological haunting exists in the ghost of *Beloved*, the sentient house and the notion of re-memory. The time fades away, and memory becomes someone alive. The resurrection of *Beloved* and the subsequent disappearance of collective grief marks the weight and the liberation

of the collective grief. Magical realism in this case is turned into an ethical weapon, something to put the form to the horrendous unspeakable horror of slavery and the necessity of healing collectively. In *The Bear and the Nightingale* Slavic folklore is literal truth used by Arden. The Domovoi, Rusalka, and Bannik are spirits that exist in the normal world, whereas the Morozko and the Bear represent moral and natural equilibrium. The magic is associated with faith, nature, and tradition, which shows that a deficiency in belief is a weakening of the harmony of the world. The capacity of Vasya to see spirits is what creates a gap between the holy and the human, and magic is likened to courage, self-recognition, and anti-repressive methods. Data further shows that, in the three novels, magical realism serves as a storytelling border in between individual identity and social memory. The familial myth used by Shamsie gets to the postcolonial heritage, the supernatural haunting used by Morrison refers to historical trauma, and spiritual ecology and control of the female are revealed in folklore used by Arden. The magical is not an escape over reality but it is a way of reclaiming silenced histories and a way of redefining belief systems. Both heroes break boundaries set by their circumstances, Aliya between the East and the West, Sethe between two worlds, and Vasya between religions and realities, which portray the universal nature of human strength. The data signify that magical realism on these texts is a process of cultural and emotional truth telling. Shamsie, Morrison and Arden express identity struggles, historical haunting and belief retention through a combination of the mystical and the mundane. The magical offers language to the unspoken whether it is the Pakistani family legends, African American spiritual haunting, or the Russian folk cosmology. Both stories end not with a solution but with a realization, with the knowledge that the reality in itself is overlaid with some invisible powers, recollections, and possibilities.

4.1 Meta Synthesis

This comparative analysis brings together the supernatural, gothic, and the magical realist through three culturally diverse but similar novels with similar themes: *Salt and Saffron* by Kamila Shamsie, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and *The Bear and the Nightingale* by Katherine Arden. As narrating tools, the supernatural is not simply applied to each of the texts as a component of fantastical decoration but they use them to actively encounter history and self and cultural memory. The novel follows a magical realism direction in order to explore the concept of and jinns and ancestor's curses as ways of questioning displacement and intergenerational inheritances in the diaspora Pakistani/Islamic context. Morrison uses the tragic haunting ghost in *Beloved* as a gothic tool of the trauma that slavery endured and the magical realism finds its way of bending reality and causing blur amongst the living and the dead in order to make the readers challenge their memories and grieve over the maternal loss. On the contrary, Arden is steeped in Russian oral folklore and the religious feelings of Elizabethan Christianity, with Domovoi, Chyerti, and Morozko standing in an intermediate space between myth and religion, a darkness of the woods and portents with magical realism of co-existence between the spiritual world and the human. Through these stories, the roles of women become prominent- Aliya who takes up the challenge of dealing with the modern world, Sethe who is a mother with a past full of trauma, and Vasya who defies the patriarchs with her connection to the otherworldly. Collectively, the novels reflect how supernatural and magical realist elements can convey the means of creating cultural identity, criticizing oppressive systems, articulating trauma and survival, and the elements of gothic add to the feeling of unease, destiny, and facing the unknown.

Table 2. Meta Synthesis

Aspects	Salt and Saffron (Kamila Shamsie)	Beloved (Toni Morrison)	Bear and the Nightingale (Katherine Arden)
Magical Realism	The daily life with the myths of ancestors; unclear border between the past and the present	No disbelief in the ghost of Beloved, but it coexisted with ordinary life; other people are part of the background;	Folk spirits who were incorporated as a normal aspect of peasant life; the borderline between fantasy and the real was small.
Cultural Context	Pakistani/Islamic heritage	African-American slavery past	Medieval Russian folklore/Orthodox Christianity
Themes	Identity, displacement, memory	Trauma, memory, motherhood	Faith vs folklore, survival, female power
Role of Women	Aliya navigating tradition vs modernity	Sethe as central maternal figure	Vasya defying gender norms
Gothic Traits	Ancestral haunting, fate-like inheritance	Haunting, death, uncanny return	Forests, omens, dark spirits
Supernatural Elements	Family curses, jinn's and legacies of ancestors.	Ghost of beloved, haunted house	Domovoi, Chyerti, Morozko
Purpose of the Supernatural	Explore identity, cultural continuity	Confront historical trauma & healing	Preserve old beliefs, critique patriarchy

5. Justification of Research Questions

5.1 How does Kamila Shamsie employ elements of magical realism in *Salt and Saffron* to represent cultural identity, memory, and postcolonial experience in Pakistani fiction?

Magical realism as a form of narrative has a long history of Latin American fiction in which it evolved as a way of reconciliation between native mythology and colonial histories (Carpentier, 1995; Garccia Márquez, 1970). Nevertheless, its incorporation into South Asian and more precisely Pakistani fiction indicates that magical realism is not a global aesthetic but instead presupposes unique versions due to local histories, identities and communal recollections (Bowers, 2004). The book *Salt and Saffron* (2000) by Kamila Shamsie can be regarded as a prime example, with magical realism also being a setting of a family saga that combines the mythology of the ancestors with the intergenerational narration. The fantastic, in this piece, is not an ornament but a story engine and an engine that expresses the hybrid identities, broken lineages and blurry boundary between remembrance and myth. According to Luo (2013), South

Asian magical realism tends to serve as a bargaining between the disjointed postcolonial identities and the novel by Shamsie is no exception as it combines the myth of the ancestors and the diaspora anxiety.

This is thus a valid question since it seeks to establish how magical realism works in Pakistani fiction as opposed to other literary traditions. Whereas Toni Morrison uses magical realism to discuss the ghosts of the past in *Beloved* (1987) (Zamora and Faris, 1995), and Katherine Arden uses it to describe the Russian folklore and spirituality in *The Bear and the Nightingale* (2017), Shamsie uses it to raise the issue of diaspora, postcolonialism and the concept of displacement. The motifs in *Salt and Saffron*, including the myth of the not-quite-twins, family curses, and the combination of oral history and lived experience, demonstrate the intersection of the magical and the real to tell the cultural truths. This regionalized magical realism therefore expresses the Pakistani experience of having to reconcile colonial pasts, migration and modernity and of maintaining the narratives as a cultural ground (Srivastava, 2006). The other reason behind this question is because it is a blank in the current scholarship. Although there has been a lot of critical interest in magical realism in Latin American and African American literature (Slemon, 1995; Faris, 2004), very little has been written about the way South Asian writers, especially Pakistani writers, use this type of narration. The analysis of *Salt and Saffron* presented in the given light provides contribution to the postcolonial literary studies by placing Pakistani fiction into the discourse of world literature and demonstrating its cultural specificity. According to Srivastava (2006), magical realism has been used in south Asian fiction as a form of decolonize and this rewriting of the history of colonialism takes place through myth and family memory and oral tradition, which is evident in the story by Shamsie. The relationship between magical realism and identity politics in the fiction of Shamsie is also presupposed in the research question, specifically how the diasporic characters coping with the intersection of memory and history, mythology, and reality. This renders the study pertinent since it shows that magic realism as a form of expression in Pakistani fiction does not just serve as a stylistic device but also serves as a form of expression through which postcolonial identity and intergenerational memory are portrayed. Lastly, the thematic richness of *Salt and Saffron* makes the importance of this question more apparent: magical realism in this case is not escapist, but revelatory; it reveals concealed truths about family, history, and belonging.

5.2. In what ways does Toni Morrison utilize magical realism in *Beloved* to reconstruct history, trauma, and the collective memory of African American experience?

Toni Morrison resorts to magical realism as a strong narrative tool to challenge the dark side of slavery history, trace the dynamics of memory, dramatize the passing of trauma across generations, and reclaim forgotten histories and silenced voices in the American literature of *Beloved* (1987). Morrison transcends the folklore or myth, and through the supernatural, most prominently the ghost of *Beloved*, she portrays historical trauma that cannot be well represented by conventional realism. Zhang (2021) says that magic and realistic touches in the novel are interlaced in such a way that the characters boldly confront the trauma of the past and show the sins of slavery and their significant adverse influence. On the same note, Bhardwaj and Menon (2020) stipulate that magical realism in *Beloved* is used as a counter-narrative to Eurocentric historiography which has traditionally suppressed the voices of slavery. This role is exaggerated by the phantom character of *Beloved* which breathes form and existence to repressed pasts and that which is not to be spoken. The key concept in the story by Morrison is her vision of re-memory. Sethe says in one of the most referred passages of the novel: Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places do persist, It is a picture that I recall was

floating out there outside my head even after I die, there is still the picture of what I did, or what I knew, or saw, somewhere outside my head (Morrison, 1987, p. 35). It is this memory articulation which shows how the past is continuing to haunt us spatially and psychologically in the present, a characteristic of magical realism that is resistant to linear, rational time. Zhang (2021) understands the said mechanism as something that allows the characters to come to terms with history and accept the reality instead of suppressing or denying it. Magical realism in *Beloved* does not make itself culturally neutral but grows out of African American folklore, spiritual beliefs about the permeability between life and death, oral tradition, and collective memory. The supernatural aspects of the novel, including hauntings, ghostly appearances and the actual physical resurrection of *Beloved*, as explored in *The Elements of Supernatural and Magic Realism in Toni Morrison's Beloved* (Bhardwaj & Menon, 2020), are based on the cosmologies of Africa and spiritual comprehension of ancestry. This basis makes such magical realism application a decolonizing and de-traumatizing approach by Morrison, as it allows African American writers to reclaim narrative space and resist the silencing of dominant historiographies. The haunts of *Beloved*, including the rattling doors and floating items to the physical coming back of *Beloved*, are the outward expressions of guilt, trauma, and also the unavoidable weight of memory. According to critics, the supernatural aspects of it turn psychological and emotional reality into a physical phenomenon that would not have been possible to convey without realism (Bhardwaj & Menon, 2020; Zhang, 2021). By merging the true and the wonderful, Morrison forces readers to feel what they cannot otherwise say and thus, makes the novel a place of historical and emotional confrontation. Morrison breaks the traditional anticipations of American fiction by combining realism and the supernatural. The magical realism in this case is not only an aesthetic decision but also a political and cultural intervention - a way of changing history, of reclaiming silenced voices, of opposing general amnesia. According to Bhardwaj and Menon (2020), Morrison obliterates the Eurocentric and mainstream versions of history, broadening the scope of American experience and proving that history must take into account spiritual, emotional, and supernatural aspects of experience. Therefore, magical realism is not an optional element of the narrative but a necessity: it is the way of healing, the means of facing the trauma, and the cultural response that disrupts the history of the United States, and its hegemonies.

5.3 How is magical realism manifested in Katherine Arden's *The Bear and the Nightingale*, and how does it reflect Russian folklore, spirituality, and cultural consciousness?

The study of the magical realism presented in *The Bear and the Nightingale* (2017) by Katherine Arden demands a systematic blend of the close textual reading, the background research, the theoretical framework, and the comparative approach because the novel works in the area of folklore, historical fiction, the gothic atmosphere, and narrator positioning the wonders as the norm. This study would start with the definition of magical realism, which will use such canonical theorists as Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, who described the main characteristics of the mode, i.e., the presence of the marvelous and the mundane without the author being flabbergasted by it, a neutral attitude to the supernatural narrative and the fact that the marvelous is anchored in a social and cultural context (Zamora and Faris, 1995). This theory makes this project acceptable because Arden experiments with his novel and challenges the genres. *The Bear and the Nightingale*, despite being adverted as historical fantasy, recurrently introduces Slavic ghosts like the Domovoi, Bannik, Rusalka, Leshy, and Morozko, as being part of the household as normal to the house and its activities, the impact of which is ingrained in its rituals and social requirements. It is because of such normalization of the supernatural that an exploration through magical realism is fitting. It raises the question of whether or not Arden

creates a narrative world in which the supernatural is ontologically co-exists with the quotidian-not to be explained or generalized through the conventions of fantasy. This style has led to continued discussions on whether magical realism can be continued to be associated with its Latin American origins or can be effectively applied to the Anglo-European folkloric tales thus adding to the comparative genre theory (Bowers, 2004; Slemon, 1995).

The methodological strategy of the given work is close readings of the most significant passages in which the marvelous is not framed in explanations, like the offerings made by villagers to the spirits inhabiting their houses, the prophecy of the Bannik, the dialogues of Vasya with the spirits and the interference of Morozko. These episodes must be marked to point out at the points where the narration is matter-of-fact about the supernatural, without any incredulous metaphors or rationalizing asides (Faris, 2004). Focalization should also be noted carefully: in most magic realist works; the reader is the one who shares a point of view with a character whose perception justifies the miraculous. The story in Arden tends to take after Vasya, where there can be several registers of perception in the same stable world, which is a major characteristic of magical-realist ontology (Zamora and Faris, 1995). The perspective of narratology also explains how the text constructs magic realism by bringing out voice, time and space. The omniscient commentary and lyrical interiority of narration are switched; the temporality, the past rituals and seasonal cycles are incorporated in the narrative present; the threshold areas, hearth, bathhouse and forest, are the locus of marvelous. These characteristics indicate the way magical realism grounds the supernatural on material and cultural practices (Faris, 2004; Bowers, 2004).

The Bear and the Nightingale can be comparatively read alongside Salt and Saffron (2000) written by Kamila Shamsie and Beloved (1987), written by Toni Morrison because these are varying versions of magical realism. The uncanny in Shamsie novel is integrated into the family myth and diasporic memory, and turns myth into the cultural transmission (Luo, 2013), whereas in Morrison novel, the uncanny is represented as the haunting and supernatural as the embodiment of historical trauma and racial memory (Bhardwaj and Menon, 2020; Zhang, 2021). The text by Arden is placed between the two: it also normalizes folklore as social practice, as Shamsie does, but it also performs the overt supernatural interventions of the story of Morrison. Such a comparative framework would give the study a greater theoretical payoff by showing how magical realism addresses certain cultural exigencies, namely preserving belief, expressing trauma, or resisting institutionalized religion. Possible counter arguments should also be identified. The audience might say that the work of Arden is a part of fantasy as opposed to magic realism.

Finally, the interpretation of The Bear and the Nightingale in terms of magical realism deals with such important theoretical issues as the flexibility of the genre, cultural particularity, and political role of the marvelous. It exposes the ways in which narrative position, ritual action and folkloric intertext constitute a world in which the spirit is not an allegory, spectacle, but a living part of social life. In this way, the novel written by Arden is part of a more general literary debate on the mediation of the simultaneous existence of multiple realities through fiction as a way of maintaining the cultural memory and affirming female agency (Zamora and Faris, 1995; Bowers, 2004).

5.4 What are the key similarities and differences in the use and function of magical realism across Pakistani, American, and Russian literary traditions?

Magical realism is not a homogenous genre of literature but an element of narrative that is presented in various forms based on cultural history, collective memory, and socio-political

tension. The question of what the differences and similarities are in the magical realism of Pakistani, American, and Russian fiction begs the question, justified, as it were, in three significant ways, first, it challenges the elasticity of the term magical realism outside its Latin American context (Zamora & Faris, 1995); second, it sheds light on the ways cultures depend on the marvelous to negotiate identity, trauma, or tradition (Faris, 2004); and third, it puts the comparative spectacle in place as a way of not only demonstrating. Magical realism in the fiction *Salt and Saffron* by Kamila Shamsie (2000) is used to address the issues of history, lineage, and displacement. The uncanny elements such as the myths of the family, the stories of the not-quite-twins, the unclear line between the memory and legend are all incorporated in the identity of the diaspora. In this case, magical realism is applied to question the way in which the national, family, and cultural history is remembered and repeated across generations (Ahmad, 2019). It is a myth, held on oral tradition, but eventually tied to postcolonial problems including identity fragmentation, cultural hybridity and historical discontinuity (Bowers, 2004).

Magical realism is enlisted on a new front among American fiction, including that of *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (1987). As an alternative to folklore or myth, the supernatural turns out to be a result of historical trauma: the ghost of *Beloved* renders slavery readable through its ghosting of the memory of a collective (Zamora, 1998). Magical realism in this case is politicized and moralized a way of expressing repressed pasts and imagining trauma which cannot be put into purely realist language (Faris, 2004; Warnes, 2009). Whereas the myth and ancestry is the theme of a Pakistani fiction, the haunting, the memory, and the perpetuation of violence across generations is the theme of American magical realism. What is similar to them is that normalizing the supernatural in everyday life is something that takes place, but they vary in their actualization: the former is focused on belonging and cultural memory, the latter is determined by the historical trauma burden. Magical realism in the Russian fiction is reported in folklore, spirituality, and cultural transformation, as in the case of *The Bear and the Nightingale* by Katherine Arden (2017). Famously, such spirits as the Domovoi, Bannik, and Morozko are not described as fantasy figures, but as naturalized members of the peasant family. The miracle is founded on the cycles of seasons, the family customs, and the contradiction between the Orthodoxy and the faith of the peasants (Arden, 2017; Prokhorov, 2021). This is similar to the Pakistani fiction in a sense that it also depends on myth and oral tradition but as opposed to the diasporic and postcolonial approach of Shamsie, Arden uses the magical realism within cultural context of preserving and combating the institutional repression of folk spirituality (Hegerfeldt, 2005). The magical realism that Arden creates as opposed to the trauma-focused version of Morrison is created due to cultural belief systems that justify the coexistence with spirits and reaffirm the pre-modern world perception. This study is based on comparative reading of Pakistani, American, and Russian writing on highlighting culturally dependent as well as the transnational possibilities of the magical realism as a mode of world literature. It reveals the way in which magic realism balances various cultures whilst maintaining their uniqueness hence the way the marvelous still acts as an intermediary between the real and faith in the world literary imagination of the whole world (Faris, 2004; Zamora and Faris, 1995).

6. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of magical realism in Kamila Shamsie *Salt and Saffron*, Toni Morrison *Beloved*, and Katherine Arden *The Bear and the Nightingale* show that, although the mode of magical realism is centralized in the denial of the distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the role of magical realism and narrative meaning vary significantly in cultures.

Magical realism is a method through which Pakistani fiction examines the problems of displacement, hybridity, and negotiation of history. The text of Shamsie demonstrates a postcolonial situation when the myths, ancestral legends and unnatural family stories are turned into the means according to which the characters address their fragmented identities and separation. The wondrous is entrenched in oral culture and acts as a narrative mediating moment between the past and the present, myth and memory, home and diaspora. Conversely, the magical realism employed in the American story by Morrison is used as the main tool of expression of the haunting spirit of historical trauma. The spirit of *Beloved* and the indistinct line between the alive and the dead are a reminder of the unavoidable legacy of slavery and shows how trauma does not succumb to silence and needs to be noticed. In this case, magical realism is not merely regarding cultural belief systems but rather concerning the supernatural in its metaphoric form of grief, memory and endurance. Contrary to the focus of Shamsie on the role of lineage and ancestral narration, the magical realism Morrison envisions is concerned with the political need to remember, the moral need to give voice to the voices that have been silenced.

The results show that magical realism is not a rigid or standardized genre but a pliable mode, which obtains new functions in relation to its cultural context. The flexibility of its concepts brings out its universality and specificity: it is universal in its capacity to naturalize the uncanny in the real and specific in the issues it focuses on: identity, trauma, or spiritual continuity. The comparative study demonstrates that magical realism even overcomes its Latin American origins and emerges as an international literary phenomenon, which does not neglect to be adjusted to the traditions and history of the specific land, still preserving the common aesthetics of the marvelous-real. Finally, the findings of the study can add to the larger literature by showing that cross-cultural examination of magical realism is worthwhile. The positioning of Pakistani, American and Russian fictions to a conversation will reveal the fact that magical realism is not just some narrative strategy, but a cultural expression that was influenced by history, belief and social memory. It sheds light on the way the interaction of the real and the magical is employed by literature in different countries in order to deal with what cannot simply be conveyed in realism. It ends up being concluded that magical realism is both a unifying and a culturally diverse mode of literature that attests to its perennial appeal as a universal narrative form in a way that connects myth and modernity, trauma and survival, tradition and change.

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