CHAPTER 10

Transcontinental Journey of Magical Realism: 
A Study of Indian Literatures’ Response

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With its critical power and intensity, self-reflexivity, self-questioning, and keenness to experiment, Latin American literature has immensely influenced other literatures for over fifty years. By the mid-twentieth century, Latin America occupied a prominent geopolitical place in the world, and its literature began to travel across continents to be read and appreciated. Indian academic circles knew for years that Latin American’s literary canon included major writers such as Inca Garcilaso, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, José Martí, Andrés Bello, and Gertrudis Gómez del Avellaneda, et al. Latin American modernistas consciously proposed and utilized wider geographical imaginaries. By doing so, they opened the possibility of intense engagement between Latin America and other regions, particularly countries from the Global South. In later years, writers from China, Japan, and India, as well as those from Africa, Canada, Australia, and Europe, felt the impact of the works of Jorge Luis Borges, Pablo Neruda, Gabriel García

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Márquez, Alejo Carpentier, Vargas Llosa and, more recently, of Roberto Bolaño, Jorge Volpi, Laura Restrepo, Alejandro Zambra, among others. The literary works of these writers have led to discussions on a wide range of issues, from modernity, history, and language to aesthetics, the politics and power relations, and the varied nature of the human condition.

However, as we begin to chart the Hispanic world, we soon realize that it is heterogeneous and complex. On one side of the Atlantic is Spain. On the other side, with its multinational geography once colonized by Imperial Spain, is Latin America. Therefore, artistic production faced the challenge of providing expression to an enormous variety of people who had for centuries been deprived of voice and written language. But writers did not shirk from this challenge; they understood the power of literature and artistic expression.

Starting with the 1960s Boom, Latin American literary production began to give voice to subaltern aesthetic subjects that later proved to be important sources of representing alterity. This led not only to demand from the hegemonic international art scene aesthetic autonomy and freedom, but also helped destabilize the central discourse on rationality, aestheticism, and universality of European realism that had, until then, dominated.

My aim is to examine Magical Realism as an aesthetic mode of a literary creation that situates literatures from decolonial spaces as alternative modes of expressing the subaltern voice, therefore challenges the centrality of Euronorthamerican discourses on literature and art. I also intend to show how the transcontinental journey of Magical Realism is a marker of Booming alternative art and literature; this I will do in parallel with a study of Indian and Latin American authors and their works.

**TWO GEOEPISTEMIC SPACES OF MAGICAL REALISM**

With these objectives, I shall first place the mode and concept of Magical Realism in two geoepistemic spaces: Latin America and India. On receiving the 1982 Nobel Prize for literature, García Márquez explained the rationale for his writing mode: Latin America:

> I dare to think that it is this outsized reality, and not just its literary expression, that has deserved the attention of the Swedish Academy of Letters. A reality not on paper, but one that lives within us and determines each instant of our countless daily deaths, and that nourishes a source of insatiable cre-
activity, full of sorrow and beauty…. Poets and beggars, musicians and prophets, warriors and scoundrels, all creatures of that unbridled reality, we have had to ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable. This, my friends, is the crux of our solitude. (1982)

Writers like García Márquez and Carpentier were not only engaged in creative writing, but also reflected upon their forms and modes of expression. They pointed out that the issue before them was not to solve the ontological difference between Latin America and Europe or the Western world, but to evolve an authentic language that expressed the concerns and aspirations of their people. Different literary practices within Magical or Marvelous realism gave these writers the possibility of producing an original and mature form of literature. Boom writers were concerned about the place of their work in the world; they wanted to express an authentic voice that would create cultural treasure and foster a sense of identity across the heterogeneous continent. García Márquez’s pronouncement that his continent is more marvelous than any fiction clearly places itself in contrast to Europe’s understanding of the Latin American reality.

It is notable that the arguments presented by the works of the Boom writers are, in a way, rooted in the writings of colonial thinkers who demanded political as well as cultural independence from Imperial Spain. Colonial masters’ imposition of metropolitan values, institutional structures, and conceptual understanding of economic and political systems led to colonies’ demand for freedom and autonomy. Rejecting the argument of similarities between Spanish colonizers and the local population, these colonies demanded their right to difference. Therefore, when Guamán Poma argued in the seventeenth century that Incas were already Christians before the Spanish colonial rule, he not only rejected the project of evangelization, but also pointed out that even before the arrival of the Europeans, Incas already had their own, perhaps superior, conception of life. By the nineteenth century, the Liberators of Hispanic America like

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1 See Roger A. Zapata. *Guamán Poma, indigenismo y estética de la dependencia en la cultura peruana* (Minneapolis: Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literatures, 1989). As cited by Amaryll Chanady in “Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America: Self-Affirmation and Resistance to Metropolitan Paradigms,” in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds., L.P Zamora and W.B. Faris, 1995.
Simón Bolívar and José Martí reiterated the specificity of Latin American nations and what should be their characters. Simón Bolívar stated:

Let us give to our republic a fourth power with authority over the youth, the hearts of men, public spirit, habits, and republican morality. Let us establish this Areopagus to watch over the education of the children, to supervise national education, to purify whatever may be corrupt in the republic...³ (239)

José Martí had a clear understanding of racial and cultural heterogeneity of the people whose continent he described as Nuestra América mestiza (or mestizo America). He was of the opinion that an indigenous system⁴ should be developed:

To know the country and govern it in accordance with that knowledge is the only way to free it from tyranny. The European university must yield to the American university. The history of América from the Incas to the present must be taught in its smallest detail, even if the Greek Archons go untaught. Our own Greece is preferable to the Greece that is not ours: we need it more.⁵ (1891)

He argued, “The struggle is not between civilization and barbarity, but between false erudition and Nature.”⁶ What he meant was that the liberators of America certainly had an idea as to what kind of society they wanted to build, and in their view there was a clear rejection of paradigms that were not adequate for their people. They viewed with a critical eye the universality of European reason and knowledge.

² José Martí has been regarded by whole Latin America as their liberator even though he was not involved in the fight for their liberations with arms. However, he led the battle of ideas for an independent Latin America.
³ As quoted in Rise of the Spanish-American Republics as Told in the Lives of their Liberators (1918) by William Spence Robertson, p. 239.
⁴ “Indigenous” is not used here in the sense of Indian native population. It is used to show how the thinkers and liberators of Latin America pronounced in favor of creating their own original system which would be based on the local needs and local knowledge. In fact, the historical processes had exterminated the Indians and their autochthonous cultures.
⁵ José Martí, Paginas Escogidas, English translation on https://writing.upenn.edu/library/Marti_Jose_Our-America.html, Accessed on 13 June 2020.
⁶ Ibid.
By the twentieth century, many Latin American writers reacted perceptively to the warnings of liberators such as Bolívar and Martí against the Northern neighbor that had emerged as a neo-colonial power. In his well-known essay *Ariel*, published in 1900, Uruguayan essayist José Enrique Rodó takes inspiration from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and posits Ariel as a representation of the positive tendencies of human nature. In contrast, Calibán represented the negatives. The United States was compared with Calibán. However, in 1925, José Vasconcelos’ essay entitled *The Cosmic Race* (*La raza cósmica*) underlies the amalgamation of many races in Latin America. For Vasconcelos, the reason and rationality exemplified by North America’s progress and development had only led to spiritual barbarism. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the conclusion of this debate is aptly summarized by Roberto Fernández Retamar in his essay *Calibán*:

Our symbol is therefore not Ariel, as Rodó thought, but Calibán. This is something we see with particular clarity in the mestizos that inhabit these same islands where Calibán lived: Próspero invaded the islands, killed our ancestors, enslaved Calibán and taught him his language to understand him: What else can Calibán do but use that same language to curse, to wish the “red plague” to fall upon him? I don’t know another more successful metaphor for our cultural situation, for our reality.

Furthermore, Retamar states:

Assuming our condition of Calibán implies rethinking our history from the other side, from the other protagonist. The other protagonist of *The Tempest* is not Ariel, but Próspero. There is no true Ariel-Caliban polarity: both are servants in the hands of Próspero, the foreign sorcerer. Only Calibán is the rude and unconquerable owner of the island, while Ariel, an aerial creature…. (33–37)

To conclude, it is not strange that by the twentieth century, an increasing number of writers and philosophers challenged the superiority of rationality canon that had originated from Europe and the West as a whole. For instance, questions were raised regarding the rationale that fueled the barbarous extermination of the Indian population and the brutality against slaves. It is now clear that the so-called margins or periphery have asserted themselves, refusing to accept metropolitan concepts and knowledge without evaluating them. Amaryll Chanady, in pointing out the context of the resistance (as described above) from the Latin American
subject, underlines in her notable article, “Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America: Self Affirmation and Resistance to Metropolitan Paradigms,” that:

It is against this complex background of the colonised subject’s rebellion against imposed models, the resistance of the newly independent Latin American countries to neocolonial domination and the European philosophical delegitimation of metaphysical and epistemological paradigms that we must situate certain twentieth century literary practices. Artists have frequently been considered subversive figures, challenging official dogma in spite of various mechanism of control. (136–137)

The above discussion shows the movement to reflect, in multiple ways, on how to create an authentic and alternative mode of representation to express Latin American concerns after independence. Now independent, the newly liberated countries were faced with the task of coming to terms with the ideas of modernity, progress, and nation building that they had inherited from their former colonial masters. For them, it was crucial to establish their own identity, separate from that of the Western world. Therefore, public intellectuals and leaders of freedom movements were discomforted by the prospect of adopting paradigmatic Western concepts—realism, rationality, etc.—without critical evaluation. Yet I would like to examine a third view as a vantage point regarding the connections between literature of the Global South and what modernity means to us. I will explore these connections by juxtaposing the magical narratives of India and Latin America because, as mentioned by Ángel Rama, there is a process of “narrative transculturation,” which shows the similarity of worldview in the writings of the global south. However, before examining Indian novels, I will shed some light on the evolving concept and mode of Magical realism as seen in the Indian context.

**INDIA**

Magical Realism as an artistic mode of expression and stylistic device to describe the alternative reality emerging from the so-called periphery undoubtedly traveled to India from Latin America. Nevertheless, it must also be noted that India itself is rich with ancient cultural and aesthetic traditions, to which no craft or device seems unknown; this is also because the country has absorbed them all and presented them as her own. Thus,
any discussion on Indian Magical Realism cannot be divorced from the understanding that it had already existed in our culture. Later, I will show how this mis-understanding came into being. If we have to use the Latin American yardstick to study the elements of Magical Realism in Indian cultural practices, we need not look at them through the European theoretical prism; interconnectedness between Latin American and Indian realities has already created enough ground to examine them in parallel.

Contemporary Indian vernacular literature has witnessed a conscious application of the magical realist mode both as a craft and as a radical tool for linguistic innovation and experimental forms of writing. In this process, as I will discuss later, magical realist narratives have produced a discourse that challenges the literary realism dominated by the social realist elements of the early twentieth century European writings. Notably, this craft has been used to critique a social condition full of disappointments and disillusionments in post-Independence nations. In the Indian context, Western novels and short stories made inroads into Indian vernacular literature during the colonial period. Thus, these Western literatures replaced the indigenous form of shorter and longer narratives of the Panchatantra or the ancient Epics style. The genre of the novel began to develop throughout the nineteenth century, along with the short story. However, it was Premchand’s novels, published in the early 1920s, that shaped the modern form of Indian novel-writing. Premchand’s realist narrative moved away from the domain of fantasy, moralizing, and frivolous entertainment. Instead, it made literature a serious medium that reflected people’s problems and causes of suffering. In these works, the peasants, the workers, and the downtrodden became central figures and agents of change. Other parts of India appreciated and adopted this trend, bringing forth a “progressive” phase in vernacular fiction. This was a time that witnessed, as Palakeel from Kerala puts it, “the resurgence of the novel as the pre-eminent genre follow[ing] the social and political transformations taking place in response to Western humanist tradition, increasingly drawing its energy from Marxist philosophy and aesthetics” (Palakeel, 191). The social realists challenged the feudal-themed narratives and historical romances of the early twentieth century. In Kerala, located in the South of India (later I will discuss a novelist from this region), Basheer uses subtle humor to foreground the lives of villagers in a Muslim dominated area that bordered with modern cities. Other writers—Orissa, for example—whose works were inspired by social causes and realism, centered their attention on other marginal groups such as those who belonged in lower castes.
However, by the 1950s to 1960s, Indian vernacular literature experienced a paradigm shift. On the surface, it appeared to depart from the old, decadent, over-romanticizing, emotional reality. In fact, it was a departure by "Progressives," whose works use to contain themes of political and social inequality and who use literature to expose the failures of the state after independence. Now, even the Progressives’ literary style and craft took a turn towards a more avant-garde mode. They began to demonstrate an idiomatic sophistication that deployed such tropes as irony, satire, nonlinearity, and use of myth and history, all done with the aim of manipulating the parallel between antiquity and modernity.

It is here that we compare the two magical realist modes of writing of Latin America and Inia. We should remember García Márquez, who often mentioned that while we are praised for our imagination, we ask very little of our imagination beyond what is narrated based on our reality (Nobel Lecture). The amusing factor is that our reality reassembles the wildest imagination of those who have not experienced it. Therefore, what seems to be magical imagery is actually a circumstantial reality of a particular time and space. We only have to glance around India, and a specific cultural element will pop up before us. We know hundreds of tales of ghosts and witches who are supposed to play a role in our daily life. The imagination of an Indian would not, in their daily life, separate from the ghost residing on the big peepol or banyan trees, or from the witches roaming around to harm the one who has been cursed for some reason. There are even prescriptions on how to overcome these ghostly creatures. For instance, one has to pray some specific deities to counter their effects. A true description of someone being cursed by a spirit or by an enemy, or a curse turning into a reality, may appear unreal to any rationalist. But in India it would not be considered such an unrealistic event. Rather, it would fit the idiosyncratic sphere as something perfectly usual.

The idea that people cohabit alongside such marvelous realities is quite unrealistic. A story cannot separate these elements from the narrative situated in an Indian reality. If it attempts to do so, it would amount to distancing itself from something fundamental. We live in a country infused with a most varied mix of religions, cultural traditions, multiple ethnic groups, and a rich topography. In the prologue of his novel, *The Kingdom of this World*, Carpentier recalls ‘Because of the virginity of the land, our upbringing, our ontology, the Faustian presence of the Indian and the black man, the revelation constituted by its recent discovery, its fecund
racial mixing [mestizaje], America is far from using up its wealth of mythologies’ (5). This can be directly applied to India.

For thousands of years, Indian writers and critics have emphasized the existence of Indian magical realism. They claim that we have been telling magical and marvelous tales from time immemorial. Indian experiments with the long narratives like the novel have incorporated magic and realism together. The Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, are quite fantastical. Many narrations have an extensive use of mythological characters with supernatural powers—demons who can burn someone just by putting his hand on their head, a woman who is turned into stone by the curse of a saint, or a snake that can curse a prince as revenge. These stories are told by the elderly grandparents of every household. Therefore, they are common knowledge, used as tropes and metaphors by contemporary writers.

However, to consider Indian epics and other ancient stories only as Indian magical realism will be wrong as it will merely amount to looking at this mode in an ahistorical manner. This viewpoint is insufficient. Most ancient literatures have these characteristics. Thus, there is a need to differentiate between these forms of literature and modern Magical Realism. Magical Realism today is embedded in a time and space with specific history and a political aim. Its objective is not only to make the narration aesthetically strange and uncanny. Rather, it has an ideological motive: to make space for questioning the hegemonic discourse of realism that promotes singular/universal reality, whereas the reality is diverse and plural. It foregrounds a program that disrupts centralized discourse and puts forward an eccentric (Zamora and Faris 3) or de-centered discussion on the nature of reality and its representation. It also challenges the rationality and literary realism of a singular kind. We need not repeat the fact that the fictional world created by the writers includes characters for whom the magical world is real and the real is magical; they already draw upon a cultural system that is no less real than what the realist writers claim. I wonder, therefore, how one explains the event that took place in India several years ago, in which the idol of Ganesha (the deity with an elephant head) was made to drink liters and liters of milk as a sign of good omen and mark of reverence across the country. How did this superstitious event also cause the urban intellectuals to join the throngs offering the idol milk? Or why, if a child is born with a deformity in a village, he or she is taken as a divine avatar of some god or goddess, and the crowd begins to gather and pray to this strange creature? Even now, during a time when
COVID-19 is spreading throughout the world, some politicians belonging to rightwing Hindu fundamentalism are calling upon the Indian people to take cow urine and use cow dung (in India, the cow is a sacred animal) to prevent and cure the deadly virus. It is as much bizarre as it is magical.

Thus, our cultural practices privilege the use of myths, folktales, legends, rituals, and popular beliefs and wisdom over the realist system of narration. These are the modes of writing that bring together a collective that sees these systems as their own circumstantial reality. Indian vernacular literature self-consciously reclaims the indigenous (non-European) mode in order to express their social and political reality. It must be noted that the magical realist mode in India encourages the negotiation of local issues and social contrasts; it highlights the problems of the marginal and the oppressed.

In what follows, I will focus specifically on Indian and Latin American cultural dialogue through the study of specific Indian vernacular novels. I will show how an intercontinental conversation has been taking place between writers of the global South. This conversation has been carried through the writers’ literary creations that are located in a particular mode of expression known in literary criticism as Magical Realism and lo Real Maravilloso. In an earlier article, I examined the process of entangling this dialogue among us which started from the 1930s and continues to this day. I mentioned that there were two very important moments of this intense engagement that we in India experienced. The first moment was the reception of the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda’s poetry (from 1930s onward). The second was Indian writers’ and artists’ overwhelming response to Magical Realism invoked by Gabriel García Márquez’s novel One Hundred Years of Solitude. On one hand, there has been an unprecedented response to and reception of Latin America writings across India in vernacular languages. On the other hand, Indian literary criticism has also been deeply involved in rereading older texts in the light of the debates on magical/marvelous realism. I have included both types of writings in the present study. My interest in examining this area is embedded in

7 See my article “Las demografías literarias y el encuentro sur—sur (América Latina e India)” in América Latina y la literatura mundial: Mercado editorial, redes globales y la invención de un continente, eds. Müller Gesine, Dunia Gras, Iberoamericana, Madrid, 2015, pp. 249–59.

8 My interest arose thanks to my long years of teaching Latin America and its literature to the postgraduate students at the University of Delhi. I would like to specially acknowledge
the mass reaction to Latin American writings. Therefore, it is important to
discuss the developing conversation between our writers and artists with
those of Latin America, particularly in relation to the creative expressions
and the use of alternative mode and style of writing.

**Horizontal Dialogue Between Senapati and Márquez**

Literary works produced during British colonial rule, or the ones being
written today in India’s peculiar socio-political condition (i.e. a feudal-to-
neoliberal society) can be interpreted as belonging to the magical mode of
writing. One of the most well-known works amongst them is a novel by
Oriya writer Fakir Mohan Senapati, entitled *Six Acres and a Third*. This
text was originally serialized from 1897–1899 in the Oriya language.
However, its 2005 English translation, published by the University of
California Press, made it available to the wider global public. This late
nineteenth century novel is often compared to García Márquez’s *One
Hundred Years of Solitude* despite the gap of over sixty years between their
publications. I will briefly refer to this remarkable text, originally written
in Oriya, to carry out a parallel reading of it along with that of Márquez’s
novel. Jennifer Harford Vargas has also studied these two novels in an
article entitled “Critical Realism in the Global South: Narrative
Transculturization in Senapati’s *Six Acres and a Third* and García Márquez’s
*One Hundred Years of Solitude* (2011). It is quite a coincidence that the
two novels, despite their different time frames, have found a common ter-
rain for comparison. It is possible, as Vargas points out, that both respond
to a colonial and neocolonial situation of exploitation, socioeconomic
relations, and certain ideological positions. She states: ‘Colonial India and
neocolonial Colombia share a position of economic dependence within a
transnational system of capital that exploits the periphery and benefits the
center in an uneven modernity’ (26). I would also like to allude to Aníbal
Quijano, who, while discussing the relationship between time and his-
tory, argues:

the intense interaction and exchange of ideas that I have had with my two research students
Ravikant Sharma, working on contemporary writer Uday Prakash, who writes in Hindi,
included in the present essay and Prasanna Deep, who has taken up writers of Telagu litera-
ture. In the course of my teaching and supervision I got insight in how deeply Latin American
writers have been impacting contemporary Indian Literary circle.
It is a different story of time. And from a different time in history. That is what a linear and, worse unilineal perception of time, unidirectional of history, like the one that characterizes the dominant version of Euro-American rationalism, under the hegemony of instrumental reason, fails to incorporate into its own ways of producing or to grant “rational” meaning, within its cognitive matrix, from its own perspective. (61)

It is true that, taking place in the colonial India of the nineteenth century and the so-called Banana Republic of the twentieth century Colombia, both novels do provide devices for examining ways of cultural intervention in the Global South, showing us how the peripheral subjects negotiate and challenge the colonial and neocolonial modernities. Fakir Mohan Senapati’s text is deeply rooted in Oriya’s colonial context, and it has an “autochthonous” quest of magic narration concerned with the class/cast that Senapati looks at. 

*Six Acres and a Third* narrates the exploitative relationship between feudal landlord Ramchandra Mangaraj and his poverty-stricken peasant workers. The text details and describes with humor the larger social landscape, switching back and forth between the main issue of land grabbing and the subsequent punishment of the landlord. This vast canvas lends itself to a variety of topics, including religious practices, people’s beliefs and superstitions, cast division, British land tenure law, and the British education system that aims only at preparing a subordinate class of English-knowing Indians. It vividly sketches an Oriya village life under the British Raj, as well as under a local despotic landlord. While minutely detailing all this, Senapati underlines the vested and economic interest that manipulates human relations. As the novel is written to give voice to the lowest strata of villagers, women, and the poor laboring mass of peasants, it contains a hard criticism of colonial rule and local political and social administration. All this is narrated by an omniscient narrator in a popular satirical

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9 Ramchandra Mangaraj, is a greedy landlord who exploits the poor villagers, peasants and grabs their lands. Mangaraj along with Champa, someone who is more than a servant maid in his house, plots a heinous plan to grab from childless couple, Bhagiya and Sariya, their land property. Champa convinces Sariya that she would bear a child only if she built a temple and suggests to her that she take loan from Mangaraj for this purpose. The weaver family falls in this trap and ends up losing everything to Mangaraj. Unable to bear the loss, Bhagiya goes mad and Sariya starves herself to death. Her death brings the downfall of Mangaraj. This is followed by the death of Managraj’s wife, and every finger points at Mangaraj. The sad side of human nature reveals how nobody stands by you in your bad times and that exact thing happens with Mangaraj. Once respected and feared man is booked for murder charges.
parlance, following oral storytelling in the Indian tradition. Satya P. Mohanty, translator of the novel, points out that the role given to the novel’s narrator is central to Senapati’s literary method. The narrator is “wily, loquacious, and often unreliable. The narrator challenges the reader to be on the toes, looking for subtle cues behind the humor and the garrulousness” (7). I would argue that it is about much more. It is about challenging the European realism and their notion of modernity by using native tradition as a tool to represent what is, according to them, the local rational institutions of law and governance. Therefore, criticism of the society is embedded in the narrative strategy itself. The story is told in such a complex manner that, along with exposing the corrupt deeds of the landlord Mangaraj, it tells us about the dozens of other issues that pervade people’s lives in feudal-colonial India. It is here that the text resonates with García Márquez’s mode of representation that emerged from Latin American imaginative writings. One Hundred Years of Solitude is also about transforming realism under the local Colombian neocolonial modernity. Even though Márquez’s novel was published several decades later, it is still possible to place these two works in one conversation due to colonial/neocolonial periphery’s relation to the metropolitan masters. The two works attempt to write realist novels, but their intent produces a kind of realism that, grounded as it is in geopolitical and social reality of the respective countries, paints a canvas that looks magical and extraordinary. Vargas points out that:

…both are produced under conditions of sociocultural domination and economic dependency as well as the oppositional narrative tactics marshaled in response. Both authors reimagine colonial society from below, and construct an alternative way of telling and seeing. They employ underground types of storytelling—mainly oral, ironic, dialogic, parodic—developed by those on the underside of power to resist, negotiate, and transform relations of oppression. (27)

10 In the introduction of the English translation of the novel Satya. P Mohanty describes the narrator as touter (a bit like a Fool in European drama) ‘who has indisputable wit and he inhabits lower rung of the society and is always a bit unreliable. Senapati transforms this rather unsavory type into a new kind of social agent (…) is the only one who can survive Mangaraja’s oppression and chicanery’. (Six Acres and a Third, trans. Satya P. Mohanty et al. Penguin Books India, Mumbai, 2006, p. 6).
It is true that two cited texts by Mohanty and Vargas emphasize different aspects. However, in my view, the two writers’ narrative strategies and magical modes of expression differ to some degree. I would place García Márquez more in the ontological version of magical narration, while Senapati seems more inclined towards epistemological narration. García Márquez imagines and evolves original “schema of our own.” Senapati depends more on indigenous knowledge percolating down from Indian mythical and mythological traditions. For example, in *Six Acres an a Third*, the sly, clever, intelligent narrator describes:

There was only one pond in Gobindpura, and everyone in the village used it. It was fairly large (...). We are unable to recount the true story of who had it dug, or when. It is said that the demons, the Asuras, dug it themselves. That could well be true. Could humans like us dig such an immense pond? Here is a brief history of Asura Pond, as told by Ekadusia, the ninety-one year old weaver.

The demon Banasura ordered that the pond be dug but did not pick up shovels and baskets to dig it himself. On his order hosts of demons came one night and did the work. But when the day broke, it had not yet been completed: there was a gap of twelve to fourteen arm-lengths in the south bank, which had not been filled. By now it was morning and villagers were already up and about. Where could the demons go? They dug a tunnel connecting the pond to the banks of the River Ganga, escaped through it, bathed in holy river and then disappeared. (77–78)

Senapati makes use of the legends and narrative tradition of oral history through the mouth of a village historian. In fact, the so-called *narrative-historian* makes use of parody to question the official source and its epistemic value. That is why he depends more on unauthoritative sources that emanate from people’s beliefs and practices. Thus, the narrator’s role in *Six Acres and a Third* makes him an oral historian who is very mobile, roams around from place to place, and spreads sometimes real incidents and sometimes rumors about the landlord and other upper strata of people, thus sharpening the social critique of that time and producing a political subtext by giving perspective of the subaltern subject. In this process, the narrator makes extensive use of superstitious belief, folktales and mythical elements, religious scriptures, hearsay gossips, etc. His articulations allow people from the lowest rungs of society to take the central stage in the novel. In contrast, García Márquez uses a completely different set of resources: peculiar natural incidents, such as a deluge lasting several
years, people suffering from an epidemic of amnesia, showers of yellow flowers from the sky, cups of chocolate that make a character levitate, out-sized humans, etc.

My parallel reading of the two authors and examination of their narrative tools and geopistemic convictions demonstrate that their indigenous forms and techniques of narration facilitate access to the archives of knowledge preserved and produced by the subaltern subject. The writers do not underestimate epistemic significance of the expression of the marginalized. On the contrary, they consider the subaltern, as Ileana Rodríguez points out, “as political, social, and heuristic agents” (Vargas 36). Therefore, what Márquez calls *our own schema* is now extended to other locations. Together with Senapti, the two produce a *translocal* (Vargas) effect, reaching out to larger community of Global South that naturally produces a conversation between theses creative expressions.

**Narrative Transculturation in Uday Prakash**

Now I will move on to a more contemporary writer, Uday Prakash (1952–) who is considered one of the most acclaimed and original storytellers of Hindi literature today. I will discuss two of his shorter narratives, as even though he claims that his inspirations fundamentally came from such writers as Hazari Prasad Dwivedi,¹¹ he has been closely reading and following Latin American writers such as Borges and García Márquez. In my opinion, Uday Prakash’s stories are undoubtedly written during a time when translations of Latin American writers were available in India, and when the Indian literary world had animated discussions about their narrative modes. Therefore, Uday Prakash, as an informed writer, would not have remained unconcerned about it. Central to his writings is a total exposure of the post-independence India’s failure to bring about any change to the life of the downtrodden and ordinary people. Therefore, his main concern is to articulate social critique in such a way that it will represent the lower strata of the society. Critics consider his works “unbearable” for being grotesque, psychic and direct. Some have dubbed

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¹¹ Hazari Prasad Dwivedi (1907–1979) was a novelist, literary historian, essayist, critic and scholar. He wrote in Hindi numerous novels, collections of essays, historical research on medieval religious movements of India, and as also history of Indian Literature. He served as professor and was contemporary of Rabindranath Tagore. His writings influenced a whole generation of Indian writers.
them as chaotic and terrorizing. This type of criticism is unfair to an author who is grounded in his milieu and who possesses political views and has developed a narrative style of his own. He is considered an unusual storyteller, as neither his characters nor his plots are written to give emotional or aesthetic joy to the readers. Instead, it forces us to think about the society we live in. The condemnations of the exploitative people and class almost serve as a statement on the material world. Prakash’s narrative form emanates from indigenous oral and written traditions; it aims at giving agency to the subaltern by exploring subtle expression of common usage at a very local level. Sanjiv Kumar, a leading critic of contemporary Hindi literature, underlines the fact that Uday Prakash’s stories break traditionally inherited form of narration; that is why they do not seem to fit in the usual frame. Sanjiv further states that these texts are abound with minute details of the life of poverty stricken peasants and workers, and for that, the author has created an ever alert and candid narrator who uses extremely passionate language. The author is also fond of directly addressing his reader in second person narration (Kumar 2012). Uday Prakash mainly writes short stories, but even his shorter narratives adopt multi-generic form that facilitates the presentation of rural and urban life.

I will examine two of his stories that have important impacts: Hiralal’s Ghost (Hiralal ka Bhoot) and Tirichh. Both stories, published in 1999, deal with the very bottom of social strata. Hiralal is a protagonist with some extraordinary qualities, such as being born with all his teeth. He was also born laughing. Even as his mother dies during his birth and the family cries out of grief, he continues to laugh. However, in the later part of his life, he adopts a complete silence that remains until a day or two before his death. The plot is encrypted with unbearable human miseries and incomprehensible practices of exploitation and torture. It portrays parochial rural life, its miseries, and superstitions in most vivid manner. Hiralal is the poor of the poorest and works for a landlord. The landlord and the village administrator grab Hiralal’s lands and regularly abuse his wife. Unable to suffer anymore, Hiralal and his wife die in most abject conditions. After Hiralal’s death, his ghost starts taking revenge on the landlord, ultimately bringing about the complete devastation of the landlord’s family. The landlord’s palatial house soon becomes a ruin and is considered haunted. The village administrator also runs away. Exploitation of the peasants reaches such heights that Hiralal is left with no alternative but to rebel.
after his death. It is notable that the author creates these grotesque and gripping situations to shake readers’ conscience deeply.

Similarly, in *Tirichh*, the protagonist is a victim of social belief and the human indifference to peoples’ pains. Tirichh is a reptile who bites humans to death. However, the death can occur only after a certain behavior of the reptile; if the bitten person can avoid that situation, then their life can be saved. The condition is this: if the victim’s vision meets directly with that of the reptile, then the victim can no longer escape. Now it is obvious that this is a complete nightmarish fantasy of the villagers. A villager comes across the reptile, and by chance stares directly in his eyes, which becomes the moment when reptile chases him. To save his own life, he runs in zigzag (that way, reptile may lose his way), but he is still bitten. There are other prescribed measures that must be adopted to save life. The protagonist has done all that, but still could not be spared. The villager dies when he is in the nearby town where, despite his miserable condition, no one comes to help him. The entire narrative is a lament on the prevailing condition of the rural as well as urban society. This story once again is a powerful narrative, rich in both content and form.

Uday Prakash’s stories and its forms are interpreted as an Indian version of magical realism, which can be accepted as such by popular understanding. However, in the Indian critique that encodes him as magical realist writer, what is completely overlooked is the epistemic dimension of literature. As Mohanty points out, a literary text is a continuation of prevailing social, moral, and epistemological theories and practices. In fact, it is a revision of the prevailing ideas and ideologies of the space from where it has emerged. Therefore, I would argue that the author is simply not borrowing and copying a literary strategy from other literatures, which will indeed unjustly undermine the creativity of the author. Uday Prakash’s stories are embedded in an organic manner in the social reality that feudal India, even after independence, faces. His endeavor is to achieve a suitable form of narrative that represents the most naked subalternity. Therefore, social critique and narrative forms of his works are not only closely linked but are located in certain histories and geography. As for the magical element in *Hiralal ka Bhoot* and *Tirichh*, I would draw attention to the fact that the unusual and magical are woven into the normal and ordinary life. In *Hiralal ka Bhoot*, as the title itself suggests, Hiralal’s ghost is used to make his absence present. As an oppressed and exploited subject, Hiralal can take revenge only in the form of his specter that empowers him to act. His ghost embodies an extended reality that reappears after his death,
allowing the impossible to happen and thus filling the time gap. It also makes us look beyond the limits of knowable reality. At a socio-political level, the narrative corrects the wrong and becomes the weapon of the weak to fight against injustice. *Tirichhi* deploys the myth of the reptile to critique not only the false belief of the villagers, but to show the helplessness of a peasant before the urban monster. One may take the reptile as a metaphor for the feudal lord who continues to exploit the poor peasant. Uday Prakash’s powerful narrative is directed to expose the machination of the upper class. Therefore, he self-consciously selects a particular strategy and technique of narration, wherein magical elements (Hiralal born laughing with all his teeth) de-familiarize the common and usual.

In this part of my essay, I am not comparing Uday Parkash’s narratives with those of Márquez or any other Latin American writers. Nevertheless, this narrative strategy is definitely adopted to make a strong and loud political statement that will not fall on the deaf ears of the rulers. By using this mode, Uday Prakash undoubtedly shares with García Márquez his political view and representational technique. That is how they establish a conversation. It also serves as a means to question the Indian State (which now has replaced the colonial rule) as to their form of modernity, borrowed as it was from European political and social practices of the idea of equality, liberty and fraternity. The story about a village folk’s life in free India is told by adopting a particular narrative technique aimed at revealing the reasons for the failure of the historical process that was supposed to bring radical change. The power relation between different social classes remains static, and at the end of the day, the ordinary people’s struggles continues. What Uday Prakash’s narrative form is unfortunately missing is humor. As I mentioned earlier, he adopts a more grotesque technique of narration than humor that would provoke laughter.

**Marvelous Realist Novels of Vijayan and Carpentier in Conversation**

In this part, I shall discuss a South Indian novelist from Kerala, O.V. Vijayan (1930–2005), an author of six novels, nine short-story collections, and many collections of essays, memoirs and reflections in the Malayalam language. His best known novel, *The Legends of Khasak*, was written in Malayalam in 1969. Its English translation was published in 1994. These days, Kerala is celebrating the 50th year of its publication. Like Senapati’s
Six Acres and a Third, The Legends of Khasak was first serialized in a literary weekly. It was subsequently published as a book in 1969. Notably, this work remains to this day the bestselling novel of any Malayalam writer, marking the highest popularity ever achieved by a Malayalam writer in terms of intense narration and the inventiveness of the Malayalam language. I believe that Vijayan’s novel can be read parallel with Alejo Carpentier’s The Kingdom of This World (El reino de este mundo, 1949) because it is closer to the mode of writing of lo real maravilloso, thus finding much common ground with not only Carpentier’s form of writing but also with Carpentier’s subject of narration, conceptual understanding of history, and myth, facts, and fiction. I am not aware if O.V. Vijayan ever read Alejo Carpentier’s writings. However, I presume that he had read García Márquez’s novels. It is noteworthy that he made available to us a text that can be certainly considered written in the marvelous realist mode. Thus, I look at the two novels (Vijayan’s and Carpentier’s) in conversation. The Legend of Khasak was written two decades after the Kingdom of This World, but the Malayalam text is as much rooted in the local incidents and history of Kerala as is the Kingdom of This World in nineteenth-century Haitian history.

Carpentier, as we know, travelled to Haiti in 1943, where he witnessed and experienced all of what he later called in his 1949 prologue of The Kingdom of this World marvelous reality. The novel relates the story of the late eighteenth century slave rebellion in Haiti. The ruins of the Sans-souci and the fortress la Ferrière built by the black king Henri Christophe was, to him, an extraordinary architectural marvel. He finds the presence of the marvelous in every corner of the country, and in every moment of his journey, so he describes, “I had breathed the atmosphere created by Henri Christophe, monarch of incredible efforts, much more surprising than all the cruel kings invented by the surrealists (…). At every step I found the real marvelous. But I also thought that this presence and validity of the marvelous real was not the only privilege of Haiti, but the heritage of the whole of America, where it has not yet been established, for example, a count of cosmogony” (4–5). Thus, Carpentier first coins the term that describes the Haitian reality and later, as a metonymical expression, extends to Latin America entirely. The major part of the story is narrated from the perspective of the slave laborer Ti Noel, who directly witnesses all the dramatic historical events of the Haitian revolutionary struggle for independence. In fact, all the events are witnessed by the internal gaze of a Negro slave through the narration of his personal and
local history. Therefore, lo real maravilloso is also inspired and produced by the internal reality of Haiti. Carpentier’s prologue serves not only as a guide for the readers of the novel in question, but also for as a guide for understanding the term itself. Colonizers’ imposition of catholic religion on the colony did meet resistance of the slaves; nevertheless, the intermingling of religions also happened. On one hand, there is the practice of voodoo rituals in the slave community; on the other, catholic religion. Thus occurs a syncretic mixing of faith. King Christophe imitates the European and practices Christian faith, while black slaves have a different practice. That is why they believe in the lycanthropic power of Makandal, who is their leader and whom slaves repose their faith for liberation in. The combination of different cultural practices, incredible topography, existence of various races, and people’s beliefs in extraordinary phenomena that are part of their life moved Carpentier to term it marvelous. The interesting aspect of this understanding is that Carpentier underlines “the feeling of the marvelous presupposes faith.” And he sees this alternative reality of the Haitian people as a miracle. Therefore, the inclination, disposition, and faith of the subject who gazes and perceives all this in a particular way is central to Carpentier’s statement. Yet, his final sentence—“but what is the history of all of America if not a chronicle of marvelous reality” is so ontological that seems to question it.

O.V. Vijayan’s *Legends of Khasak* is considered a remarkable piece of writing in Malayalam because it uses new aesthetic expression and narrates the story of a remote village where modernity attempts to step in, but is instead subsumed by the powerful existence of local tradition, myths and belief. Renowned poet and critic of Malayalam literature K Sachidananandan has described it thus:

> Its interweaving of myth and reality, its lyrical intensity, its black humour, its freshness of idiom with its mixing of the provincial and the profound and its combinatorial wordplay, its juxtaposition of the erotic and the metaphysical, the crass and the sublime, the real and the surreal, guilt and expiation, physical desire and existential angst, and its innovative narrative strategy with its deft manipulation of time and space together created a new readership with a novel sensibility and transformed the Malayali imagination forever. (Mohan, 2012, 116)

The story of *The Legends of Khasak* starts when the protagonist Ravi, who is an outstanding student of astrophysics, possesses groundbreaking
ideas and brilliant knowledge of scientific discoveries but is disenchanted with the urban life, decides to quit all that, and instead take a very long journey that ends in a small village, “a kind of a nowhere land,” named Khasak. The novel is set in the backwaters of southern India in the middle of the twentieth century. In the village, the District Board has established a single teacher school in an effort to give the local children access to basic education. Ravi is to be their first teacher. The author in his *Afterword* describes the protagonist entering the village as “atonement,” and finds himself unable to return to the city… “Ravi, my hero, liberation’s germ carrier… would no longer be the teacher… he would learn… and stay” (204–208).

The novel has many narrative plots related to the ways that myths and superstitions are valued in Khasak. Vijayan also explores encounters of the past through myths and stories as recounted by the people, all of which in turn enable Vijayan to have a unique view of social and cultural milieu of the place across time and space. There is a confrontation with the scientific and rational world outside that is trying, without success, to make inroads into the Khasak through Ravi’s single-teacher endeavor. Innumerable myths are related to nature, mountainous landscape, and backwaters, and other locale secrets are passed down generations through oral narratives. Ravi learns from the children in his school these legends of Khasak—“of those who had come back from the far empty spaces, of the goddess on the tamarind tree, of Khasaks ancestors, who, when their birth cycles ended, rose again to receive the offering of their progeny…” (135).

In the school when Ravi tells the tale of the earth, moon, sun, and sky in scientific manner, he is interrupted and is told a counter story about Khasak and its creatures, as Khasakians believe that their village is the whole universe. Thus, Ravi finds a vast collection of marvelous tales, like how dragonflies fluttering over the hills are planes of Khasak that are believed to be the memories of the dead. No child in Khasak, except Apukili, dares to catch them. The crows in Khasak also possess mystic powers; they are offered food in ancestral pacification rites. The silver-crested fish that hibernate in the cracks of Chetali Mountains is the messenger of the Sheikh. The palm-trees of Khasak are the resting places of flying serpents journeying through the mysterious skies. In earlier times, the toddy-tappers did not climb the tree; instead the palm bent down for them. It was when a tapper’s women lost her innocence that the palm stopped bending down. The religious convictions of Khasakians are entwined with these fabulous stories. They follow mainly two
religions—Hinduism and Islam. The Hindu community of Khasak consists of caste and tribal groups worshipping numerous deities and guardian spirits in their local mythology. What is also remarkable about Khasak is that many of the local deities are worshipped equally by both the Hindus and the Muslims. Thus, the history of Khasak is presented as a collection of various legends about the local deities. It revolves around the myth of Sayed Mian Sheikh, whom the Hindus and Muslims of Khasak worship as their protector. Khasakians learn their history from Alla-Pitcha, the illiterate Muslim priest of Khasak. He narrates it to the children gathered around him in the Madrassa. Thus, the Muslim tradition and beliefs are percolated down to the common people, even as Hindu myths and beliefs are also told by other groups of people like the tribal etc. Vijayan obviously shows the miserable failure of the protagonist Ravi, a revolutionary, who is supposed to transform Khasak. Instead, it is Khasak and its inhabitants who act upon him and succeed in transforming him.

Ravi also carries the guilt of his incestuous relation with his stepmother. This guilt forced him to skip his examinations and leave Madras. In Khasak, Ravi leads quite a liberated life. Any moral or ideological questions do not discourage him. He visits prostitutes and drinks illicit liquor. He shares a bed with Maimoona, the village beauty, and Padma, his live-in lover. So much so that he becomes indifferent to the rising currents of peasant insurgency in different parts of Khasak and the “class war” that is looming over the horizon under the leadership of revolutionary groups. One witnesses how modern ideas are constantly brushing with the age old mythical beliefs.

The remote world of Khasak, with its enigmatic life and legends, myths and superstitions and a rich topography, has given Ravi unlimited possibilities of perceiving things differently and paradoxically, and of rationalizing the secrets of life. What Ravi actually finds there is an archive of amorphous knowledge and native wisdom. Even though he sees Khasak barter system and strange tribal practices, hearing stories of ghosts and witches, he finds that they have their own logic and rationale for existence. This immense epistemic location overpowers his scientific knowledge that Western modernity has brought about. The enduring narrative of Khasak could only be incongruous and absurd to the modern world. Ravi is an astrophysics scientist equipped with modern knowledge; nevertheless, all

12 For more discussion on native wisdom and knowledge in O.V.Vijayan’s novel see https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/64056/11/11.chapter%205.pdf.
that knowledge seems to fail him. It shows how the eternal journey in search of knowledge continues. Ultimately, Ravi leaves Khasak to return from where he has come. But he never reaches there, as the novel ends with “Ravi lay waiting for the bus” (203). Thus, it turns out that he is not a hero of this social realist novel. He is neither a builder of a new place nor a romantic hero who dreams of change. In fact, he succumbs to the traditional way of living and believing. As critics and many research papers suggest, Vijayan is challenging the universal claims of Western rationality and the scientific knowledge based on it.

The author also argues that modern science is incapable of explaining all the mysteries of life and existence. The logic and mathematics constituted by Western science have meaning only in this solar system. This system of knowledge and rationality is invalid in a different cosmic system where the speed of the particles is greater than light. As for writing its history, Vijayan presents the history of Khasak as an antithesis of the conventional Western practice of writing history as a linear narrative. He challenges the modernist notions of history by invoking the indigenous mode of depiction in terms of legends and myths.

O.V.Vijayan’s *Legends of Khasak* is as complex and as challenging as *The Kingdom of this World* by Alejo Carpentier. Both are based on fictionalization of real historical events. However, both texts portray places where memory, myth and history coexist, therefore producing stories that are as much marvelous as real. This strategy has shown the limits of the realist depiction and has enabled the subaltern voice to be heard.

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13 See Mohan, Anupama. *The Country and the Village: Representations of the Rural in Twentieth-Century South Asian Literatures*, A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Graduate Department of English and the Collaborative Program in South Asian Studies University of Toronto, (2010)

14 In fact the author had also argued that modern science is incapable of explaining all the mysteries of life and existence. The logic and mathematics constituted by Western science have meaning only in this solar system. This system of knowledge and rationality will be invalid in a different cosmic system where the speed of the particles is greater than light. The Afterwords written later by the author explains how he was disillusioned by socialism after the incidents in Hungary in 1954 and his faith in Marxism was shaken. That’s why though he set out to write a revolutionary novel but half way through his work he completely changed the plot of his story and what finally came out was *The Legends of Khasak*. Kerala is one of the most progressive and advanced states of India where Communist party has been winning elections and forming a state government.
Conclusions

In examining the impact of Latin American magical realist writings on Indian literature, I have found the emergence of a third perspective on the connections between literatures of the Global South that is rooted in their similar world views. These writings and the cultural practices critically evaluate shifting meaning of modernity by privileging the use of myths, legends, folktales, and rituals as their narrative device, thus not only crafting an original and mature literature, but also making available the archives of knowledge of the subaltern subject. Senapati’s novel is a vivid example of this technique and repository, while Uday Prakash shares with García Márquez the representational techniques as well as political discourse. Therefore, Uday Prakash’s stories are hard-hitting critiques of the post-independence Indian State where nothing changes for the poor, and exploitation of the mass in India continues. Vijayan and Carpentier have based their novels on historical events that are fictionalized. Myth and history, legends and reality survive together and enable the subaltern voice to articulate their side of the stories.

Therefore, the epistemic dimension of literature challenges the dominant line of criticism that literary texts are “incapable of serving as epistemically reliable conduits of ideas and values” (Mohanty 5). Literatures from the Global South represent a self-determining project that is creating ever new modes to narrate their stories. Therefore, reading them across cultures, nations, and even historical periods can reveal deeper meaning and develop transversal conversations. As Enrique Dussel shows, the centrality of European modernity is just two centuries old. This fact allows what has not been subsumed by modernity to stand chance of emerging strongly. And from this omitted potentiality and alternative exteriority emerges a project of transmodernity, a “beyond” that transcends Western modernity and will have a creative function of great significance in the twenty-first century (221). This “beyond” (“trans-”) indicates the take-off point from modernity’s exteriority (…) that is, from what modernity excluded, denied, ignored as “insignificant”, “senseless,” “barbarous,” as a “nonculture,” an unknown opaque alterity,…” (234) are in the end not so.
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