

Unveiling the Magical Realism of Pakistan: A Thematic Analysis of *A Firefly in the Dark* and *Midnight Doorways*

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Abstract: *Academic scholarship on Magical Realism has focused majorly on Latin America and, later, on other nations around the world, Pakistani Magic realist literature, however, has not garnered enough scholarly attention. The irreal has long been a part of Pakistani oral and literary tradition, especially in Urdu literature (Kanwal and Mansoor 2021). Recently, Pakistani Anglophone writers have started experimenting with the genre of Speculative fiction by appropriating local folklore and mythological worlds and motifs inspired by the Islamic and South Asian civilizations. To generate an understanding of the use of magical realism in Pakistani literature, this study has analyzed two contemporary Pakistani Magic Realist texts, Malik (2021) and Haider (2018). Through closed reading and thematic coding the data was coded into descriptive categories. The study first evaluated the selected texts by analyzing the narrative strategies through which the magical had been integrated with realism in the narrative. The study also mapped the origin of the sources of magical tropes employed by both writers and the distinct reflection of Pakistani customs and norms embedded with the marvellous. This study contributed towards the localization of the genre of Magic Realism to the geolocation of Pakistan by establishing the distinctness of Pakistani Magic realist works.*

Keywords: *Magical Realism, Pakistani Literature, Cultural Identity, Folklore, Symbolism, Myth and Reality, Narrative Techniques, Character Analysis, Social Commentary, Literary Themes, Imagination vs. Reality, Traditional vs. Modern, Emotional Landscape, Spiritual Elements, Historical Context.*

I. Introduction: The Case of Pakistani Variant of Magic Realism

Pakistani Anglophone literature has recently gained recognition in the international arena with the effort of writers such as Mohammad Hamid, Bapsi Sidhwa, Kamila Shamsie, Nadeem Aslam, and more recently writers including Mohasin Hamid, Shazaf Fatima Haider and Usman Malik have won international fame. The worldwide popularity of Pakistani

writers and their inclusion in the syllabi of writers in Commonwealth, Postcolonial, and world literatures indicates the acceptance of a distinct Pakistani Literary canon (Kanwal and Aslam 381). The genre of Magic realism has been one of the most contested genres due to its oxymoronic nature. Being an amalgamation of both fantasy and literature, this genre has eluded exact definitions and at most critics have only been able to enlist inclusive categories to define the corpora of Magic realist works. Marisa Bortolussi (359) aptly explains that in Magic realist works there is no unifying logic but a common feature of all magic realist works is that they take supernatural, paranormal, and even mystic as a normal occurrence. Thus in Magic realist works the marvelous is anchored in realistic settings.

In Pakistani Urdu fiction, magic realism has long been a rich part of the oral tradition of fiction and various other story telling modes such as Kissa, Dastan and Folk songs etc. Magic is a prominent feature in Pakistani culture, folklore, and religion, and has been a source of inspiration for Pakistani writers and many works of fiction such as *Imran Series* by Ibn-e-Safi, *Dastan-e- Amir Hamza*, and *Umro Ayyar* are popular Urdu fictional series which periodically employ Magical elements. Furthermore, many children's magazines such as *Taleem o Tarbiat* and *Bachon ki Dunia* were a popular attraction during the 60s and 70s time period.

Pakistani Anglophone Magic Realist Fiction is a relatively new field of literature and has been employed by Pakistani fiction writers to subvert traditional narrative structures, and to offer a distinctive viewpoint on the world. Pakistani Anglophone Magic Realist Fiction explores multitude of themes ranging from the personal to the political. Uzma Aslam Khan's novel *Trespassing* (2003), employs magical aspects like talking animals and mystical encounters to investigate the relationship between nature and human consciousness and to deal with issues like trauma, identity, and belonging. Similarly, Musharraf Ali Farooqi's *The Story of a Widow* (2009) is another magic realist work that explores the themes of grief, loss, and the quest for knowledge and understanding. Set in a small Pakistani village, tells the tale of a young widow who comes across a strange book that she hopes would reveal the details of her late husband's life. The story employs magical elements such as ghosts and mythical animals.

Pakistani Magical Realist Fiction frequently captures the complicated political and socio-economic realities of Pakistan as well as its rich cultural history in Pakistani literature. Bina Shah's *A Season for Martyrs* (2014), which is set in Karachi, tells the tale of a young lady who becomes involved in political activism as a result of the murder of a charismatic politician. In order to examine the themes of power, corruption, and resistance, the book combines magical realism aspects with a realistic depiction of the city and its political and social difficulties. By combining magical aspects, authors are able to address significant themes in a novel and inventive manner and provide novel insights into the human experience.

Due to its budding nature, Pakistani Fiction has only received some scholarly attention. The genre of Speculative Fiction and Magic Realism in particular has mostly been associated with Latin America and has not been explored much in Pakistani context, despite the fact that Magic Realist literature has a rich legacy in Pakistani Urdu tradition (Kanwal and Mansoor 247). There is a research niche to study the use of magic realism by Pakistani Anglophone writers, in order to uncover the ways in which these Pakistani writers employ magic realism in Anglo-Pakistani speculative fiction, specifically magic realist fiction. The study offers fascinating insights into the indigenous cultural dimensions and elements used in Pakistani magic realist fiction, additionally the paper sheds light on the significance of the use of this technique by Usman Malik in *Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan* (2021) and Shazaf Fatima Haider in *A Firefly in Dark* (2018).

Research Objectives:

- *To explore the use of magic Realism by Pakistani Anglophone Fiction writers*
- *To study Pakistani Magic Realist Fiction as a distinct genre*

Research Questions:

- What specific stylistic features do Usman T. Malik and Shazaf Fatima Haider employ in Magic Realism that differentiate it from Western Magic Realism?
- How do Pakistani writers Usman T. Malik and Shazaf Fatima Haider incorporate specific elements of Pakistani folklore and traditions into their Anglophone Magic Realist texts?

2. Literature Review:

Overall, the major concern of critics' engagement with Pakistani Anglophone literature has been identity deconstruction and reconstruction (Nazir, 2018). Pakistani Anglophone fiction is a rich and diverse field that reflects the complexities of Pakistani society, its cultural, religious and political landscape. Critical studies of Pakistani fiction written in English frequently demonstrate how Pakistani Anglophone fiction challenges the binary oppositions that are typically employed to define Pakistani identity in political and cultural discourses along with exploring themes of identity, belonging, migration, diaspora, gender, and sexuality, and to engage with global political and social issues. The binary opposition between Pakistan and the West is typically highlighted and dissected in fiction and its critique. Literary critics frequently laud Pakistani writers for portraying this identity dilemma in their works and for

deconstructing rigid conceptions of it in historical, cultural, and political discourses coming from both within and outside of Pakistan (Cilano 2013; Clements 2015; Morey 2011).

Some interesting studies have explored Pakistani Anglophone Magic Realist works. Kanwal and Mansoor (2021) have set the ground and presented a case for Pakistani Speculative Fiction. However, their work while mapping the rising influx of Pakistani Anglophone Speculative fiction in the recent decade and its appropriation of tropes from Pakistani Urdu literary tradition does not provide details about the characteristics of Pakistani Anglophone Magic Realist Fiction. Batool et al. (2022) in their study of linguistic appropriation of Urdu in Malik's (2021) work have presented a strong case for a distinct Pakistani English idiom. However, their study focuses majorly on linguistic phenomenon of language appropriation and does not pay much detail to the genre of Magic Realism in Particular.

Qazi and Mahmood's (2023) study had objectives similar to the current study and gave significant insight to the researcher with regards to the formulation of methodology and analysis of data. While proving a significant read, the study is limited its scope as it mostly focused on investigating the commodification of Pakistani Anglophone Magic Realist fiction.

Finally, since 2010, Pakistani Magic Realist writing has developed and flourished, with a number of new authors exploring the potential of this sub-genre. The literary pieces discussed in this review show how Pakistani authors employ Magic Realism to produce surreal and dreamlike settings that enable them to address complex social, political, and personal issues while also making a comment on more general global issues like migration, violence, and displacement. The literature reviewed above clearly indicates that the contemporary Pakistani Fiction in general and Magic Realist fiction in specific has outgrown the domain of Postcolonial scholarship and frequently addresses larger issues impacting the Pakistani nation.

3. Methodology

This paper proposes that the Pakistani variant of Magic Realism is a distinct subset of the broader genre due to its unique tropes, aesthetics, and employment of native mythologies. Using Faris' framework for magic realism from the book chapter "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction," which identifies "irreducible elements of magic" embedded in realistic descriptions, this study analyzes how Pakistani writers incorporate these elements differently from their Western counterparts.

Two contemporary works of Pakistani Anglophone fiction, *Midnight Doorways: Fables from Pakistan* (Malik 2021) and *A Firefly in the Dark* (Haider 2018), were selected for analysis. These texts were chosen for their representation of Pakistani Magic Realism and their critical

acclaim.

The data were analyzed through close reading, with initial coding based on descriptive categories such as thematic elements, narrative techniques, and cultural references to label chunks of text where magic occurred. Codes were systematically developed and applied to identify recurring motifs and unique features of unreal or the magical. This process led to the identification of prominent themes, which are discussed in this paper.

Defining the "unreal" is crucial for this analysis. In literary studies, realistic fiction adheres to the laws of physics as we understand them (Evans 152). However, "unreal" elements may include phenomena that are currently impossible but could become feasible with technological advancement or beliefs that are culturally specific yet perceived as magical by outsiders. Anne Hegerfeldt contends that magical realism is not a novel literary or cognitive strategy; rather, it is simply "tracing the various strategies by which individuals and communities try-and always have tried-to make sense of the world" (64)

In Pakistani Magic Realism, legends, myths, and folktales, though seemingly unreal to Western audiences, reflect everyday reality for the native population. This cultural divergence is central to the narrative strategy of Magic Realism.

By analyzing these texts, this paper argues that Magic Realism is not merely a marginalized narrative mode but a critical tool for Pakistani Anglophone writers. It establishes the Pakistani Anglophone literary canon and promotes indigenous ontology, challenging Western-centric perspectives and highlighting the unique contributions of Pakistani literature to the global literary landscape.

4. Analysis: The Marvellous Real in "Midnight Doorways" and "A Firefly in the Dark"

Both writers employ a number of different strategies such as the use of; inexplicable events, pantheon of Deities and Mythological beings inspired by the native culture, characters with superpowers, transmogrification and metamorphosis, to incorporate magic in their narratives despite the difference in genres. These strategies have been discussed below.

4.1 Inexplicable events

According to Faris (2004, 8) one of the basic qualities of the genre of magic realism is the irreducible element of magic. The audience is led to think that "magical things' really do happen' in a story by the skillful juxtaposition of these unrealistic aspects with the accepted laws of nature and everyday life. Both Malik (2021) and Haider (2018) do not make their

reader confront with the sources of magic right off the bat. Rather they slowly and gradually condition their reader to accept the presence of magic, of strange presences. For example, in *Ishq* (Malik 2021, 16-42) there are no direct or indirect references to the occult throughout the story. It is only near the end when the family has to abandon Parveen's rotting corpse, in the wake of rising flood, that something strange happens. Hashim and the narrator (Ammi) suddenly start to notice a wraith-like presence with a lame leg following their path. Hashim presumes this figure to be Parveen's soul come back from the Netherworld. Now the reader along with Aliya presume this to be the hallucination of the grief struck boy; however, narrator too feels the presence of something like a tentacle in the moments before Hashim is dragged underwater. Although this episode is labelled off as a suicide by a grief struck delusional boy; however, this event had such a strong impact on narrator that she recalls this strange event even on her deathbed. Being a sample horror story the impact of this strange event is magnified multiple times due to this device of Authorial Reticence, unexplained mystery, because as readers we are left questioning what actually happened. Whether Hashim was dragged underwater by some wraith or whether he slipped and lost consciousness due to the intensity of the flood water remains a mystery for the reader since the author refrains to comment upon it. Faris (1995) in her seminal essay, "Scheherazade's children: Magical realism and postmodern fiction", identified the traits of Magic Realist narrative. One of the hallmarks of magic realist fiction is that such texts contain an "irreducible element of magic" (167) which makes us "question the received ideas about space time and memory" (173). Malik's (2021) use of strange and unexplainable occurrences too makes us question the possibility of the occurrence of such phenomena. The strange phenomenon is directly derived from the Pakistani society, which comprises of different peoples such as Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Parsis etc., as the wandering souls of dead people is an accepted belief in Hinduism.

Haider (2017) in contrast uses a milder approach in her novella "A Firefly in the Dark", to familiarize the reader with the worldview of her characters. She uses bedtime stories told by her character Nani to indoctrinate the alternate belief system of her characters. Thus we are told Nani regularly tells bedtime stories to Sharmeen about Jinns, Janaree, Labartu and other such creatures which are not visible to the naked eye but regularly invade the human world and interact with humans. However, not all characters align with this native belief system Aliya, for instance, believes that Nani's tales are simply outdated superstitious beliefs as on one instance we witness that Aliya tells Sharmeen, "*Nani is old and she babbles. She's beginning to believe her stories are true. It happens to old people sometimes*" (14). These conflicting worldviews pacify the skeptical reader and involve him within the narrative. However, as we move further along in the narrative strange events occur with regular frequency which make the reader doubt the authenticity of his skeptical worldview. One such instance is when Sharmeen is playing Hopscotch and in her carelessness her foot slips however, instead of falling down and hitting her head she experiences weightlessness.

Her head was a fraction away from the pavement when she felt a gentle lift, a force gliding her over the squares and laying her on the cement. She felt as light as a feather swaying in the breeze. . . Slowly, she rose and stood up, brushing the dirt off her jeans. She was about a foot away from the hopscotch squares on the ground. (31)

It is almost as if an invisible force levitates Sharmeen's body and gently lays her on the ground as if to protect her from harm. Another such inexplicable instance happens when Sharmeen tried to reach out to her slipper, that she had kicked under the bed, however to her disbelief she sees the slipper sliding towards her reaching hand. Both these strange incidences make Sharmeen, and the reader in turn, dumbfounded as in both instances there were no beings visible who could have helped Sharmeen.

This quality of irreducible element of magic employed by both Malik (2021) and Haider (2018) clearly preps the reader to perceive reality in an entirely new vein as the events which were narrated do not clearly occur under the dictates of nature as we know it. Along with the irreducible element of magic both writers also employ authorial reticence. Reticence on the part of the author is defined as the "deliberate withholding of information and explanations regarding the unsettling fictional universe" (Chanady 16). The narrator doesn't try to explain the unusual and remains objective and indifferent. He acts as though the supernatural is commonplace, leading the audience to do the same. Magic realism would cease to exist if an explanation for the supernatural were made. It gives the reader the freedom to interpret the book anyway they see fit.

Be it the sudden levitation, or things moving due to invisible force, these events cannot be swept under the rug of hallucination as multiple characters witness the events in both Haider's and Malik's narrative. Thus the employment of authorial reticence while describing these inexplicable events stamps the texts as exemplars of the genre of Magic realism. According to Faris (1995, 168) "the magic in these texts refuses to be assimilated into their realism. Yet it also exists symbiotically in a foreign textual culture- a disturbing element. . . irreducible magic often means disruption of the ordinary logic of cause and effect". This disruption that makes the inexplicable events stand out in both the texts due to which the reader is forced to stop and wonder at the reality being presented to him.

4.2 Pantheon of Deities and Mythological Beings

Much of the magic realist fiction generated by authors originating from post-colonial nations employs deities and other mythological figures native to the marginal cultures. In fact, belief in the occult steered much of the way of living during the pre-modern times. Thus in an attempt to reconnect to their heritage many of post-colonial writers channel the mythological figures from their indigenous culture in their writings. Camayd-Freixas (1996, 585) stipulates

that in order for the real-marvelous to transform into Magical Realism some sort of primitivism is recruited. Thus in Haider's narrative the reader is introduced to a whole hierarchy of mythological beings labelled under the broader category of Jinn in the native south Asian and Gulf regions. The Jinns are inspired by the Islamic mythology and they are believed to be beings made of "smoke less fire" (Haider 2018, 3); the closest counterparts of these in Western mythology are ghosts however they both have different cultural and religious significance. According to Peterson (2007, 94):

In Islamic cosmology, the universe is structurally divided into a seen and an unseen world. In the unseen world, angels, devils, and other beings respond to God according to their moral nature. In the seen world, human beings do the same, being divided (individually) into those who accept God and his messengers and those who do not. Jinn occupy a special, liminal status; they are of the earth, yet unseen on it.

In Haider's (2018) narrative we are introduced to different cadre of Jinns such as *Janaree* (2), female jinn; *Labartu* (7) a fire demon who lives off of newborns; *Amluq* (9) the son of jinn and man; *Naai'dda* (26) water demons; *Lyllurian* (102) a group of jinn who feast on the dead and mesmerize humans and treat them as play things; *Si'ilat* (108) an offspring of two demons (*Udhrut* & *Qutrub*); *Qarin* (109) these are the evil Jinns, forever doomed to burn in hell; *Ifrit* (184), a type of Jinn sometimes associated with a demonic spirit belonging to the underworld; *Amluq* (110) these are Jinns on the first stage towards turning into a *Qarin*, usually these associate with black practitioners and help them in black magic.

Aside from these different varieties of Jinns these are other beings too who practice magic or are capable of channeling magical powers such as *Humzad* (Haider 2018, 84)-humans who are paired with Jinns and are capable of bonding with them on a metaphysical plane; another significant mention is those of *Amils* (58), humans who practice magic and black arts as we see Aziz consulting a Faqir by the name of *Baba Baqsh*. During this episode we come to know that Aziz had also sought this Faqir previously to get charms in order to influence Sharmeen and Aliya. According to the popular definition Fakir is considered to be a holy man, and in South Asian culture a Fakir is used for an ascetic who rejects worldly possessions; however, in the contemporary Pakistani society there is another class of practitioners who are labelled as *Fakirs*. In Pakistani society a Fakir is believed to be a man who has command over the art of divination and is able to commune with spirits not visible to the naked eye. Some of these practitioners are able to command and direct these beings to interfere in the lives of humans, usually for a specific fee. The one thing this episode indicates is that practicing black magic is not only an accepted reality in Pakistan but has also been adopted as a profession by some individuals. Faris (2004, 2) asserts that Magical realism "also represents innovation and the re-emergence of submerged narrative traditions in metropolitan centers".

In Malik's (2021) work too, we see a variety of mythological characters inspired from the South Asian and Islamic cultures. There are descendants of Annunaki (I62) living in war torn Pakistan in the story *The Vaporization Enthalpy of a Peculiar Pakistani Family* (46-165). The Annunaki were gods in the Mesopotamian Pantheon who judged the actions of humans and prescribed justice and fate of the humans (Baugh). In the story the protagonist Tara and her brother are the living descendants of Annunaki and by the end of the story we witness that Sohail is able to channel the Annunaki as he become the physical manifestation of Annunaki.

His skin was gone. His eyes melted, his nose bridge collapsed; the bones underneath were simmering white seas that rolled and twinkled across the constantly melting and rearranging meat of him. His limbs were pseudopodic, his movement that of a softly turning planet drifting across the possibility that is being. . . . His fried vocal cords were not capable of producing words anymore.. Annunaki watched her through eyes like black holes and gently swirled. (I63-I64)

In another of his story, Malik channelizes Adar Anshar, the supposedly Night Emperor who manifests during the story from the prehistorical bath house of Mohenjo-Daro city. As per Malik's own affirmation the story *In The Ruins of Mohenjo-Daro* (2021, 167-228) is Malik's attempt at Lovecraftian horror story. Thus we are told that *it's the day of the Goat* (I93) and according to the local legend *the dead swell here* (I94) on this particular night. At the end of the story the group of students summon Adar Anshar aka *The Terrible Emperor of the Night* and *The Croucher in The Mounds* (212) through a bloody ritual by offering the blood of the protagonist (Noor).

In a similar fashion Malik (2021) presents the reincarnated Serpent Queen from the Hindu mythology in his story *Dead Lovers on Each Blade Hung* (101-144). Mathur (2010, 180) while elaborating on the folklore of Ichhadhari Naag comments that these snakes are pious and gain their power by not biting anyone for 100 years. Generally, found in pair, these snakes are guardian angels of a very precious stone Naagmani. In the story "Midnight Doorways" (Malik 2021, 101-144) the narrator and Hakim Shafi are on a quest to find the missing wife of Hakim Shafi who's been missing for almost a year. Both characters uncover and follow a cold trail to the valley of Uch after learning about a band of Qawwals with whom Maliha (the missing woman) was last seen. Hakim Shafi later discovers that his bride went on a quest to look for Naag Mani "the mythical serpent pearl" (119) at Uch. Supposedly the Naag Mani has mystical abilities such as granting youth and eternal beauty to the possessor of this stone, some folktales also proclaim that such a stone would offer protection from jinn, while others proclaim that the cobra in possession of this stone would find shapeshifting abilities. While the reader along with the characters are dubious about the abilities and existence of

such a stone we are nevertheless made familiar with the fascination which Maliha has with researching such stones despite being a herpetologist. However, the unimaginable does happen at the end of the narrative as we witness a woman with “marble like skin and fangs” (138) rising out of a mount under the Shrine of Bibi Farida at Uch. Not only does she rise, she also mesmerizes Hakim Shafi and then consumes his flesh while keeping Hakim Shafi in trance.

The common feature in both Malik’s and Haider’s narrative is that the presence of the fabulous beings highlights the diminutive status of human beings. Be it Haider’s cadre of Jinns or Malik’s version of mythological beings, the humans are utterly helpless before these forces. Thus from the stature of being the pinnacle of the Creation humans are reduced to a pathetic and diminutive stature, and are helpless before the will of these supernatural beings. In his introduction to the compilation of H. P. Lovecraft’s stories, Moore (2014) notes that in Lovecraft’s narratives, “[f]ar from being the whole point and purpose of creation, human life became a motiveless and accidental outbreak on a vanishingly tiny fleck of matter situated in the furthest corner of a stupefying swarm of stars” (xii).

By channelizing these prehistoric deities both writers actually represent the native belief system of Pakistan where the locals believe in supernatural forces which cannot be perceived with naked eye and which perform on a scale much higher than what humans can influence. This is in stark contrast to the Empiricism which endorse an experimental and scientific approach to reality and questions all other forms of realities.

4.3 Stunted Superheroes

Coogan (2006, 30) defines superhero as, “[a] heroic character with a selfless, pro-social mission; with superpowers—extraordinary abilities, advanced technology, or highly developed physical, mental, or mystical skills”.

Malik (2021) too employs superheroes in his narrative. In the story *Resurrection Points* (55-78), the protagonist belongs to a family of practitioners who possess the ability to animate the dead. However, the hero and his father (who works as a Diener and a part-time Hakim) only practice covertly due to fear of persecution by the society. The father runs a mortuary which also acts as an unofficial clinic where they stimulate sensations in the dumb limbs of their patients. At the very start of the story, we see Daud supervising the protagonist who animates his first dead body.

When Baba did it, he could smile and make conversation as the dead boy spasmed and danced on his fingertips. Their flesh turned into calligraphy in his hands... And thus we practiced my first danse macabre. Sought out the nerve bundles, made them pop

and sizzle, watched the cadaver spider its way across the table. With each discharge, the pain lessened, but soon my fingers began to go numb. (59)

Although Western Magic realism also depicts necromancers, people who are able to animate dead bodies. However, in the Islamic history there is also proof of this phenomenon when Prophet Ibrahim (AS) butchered and then animated four birds under the direction of Almighty (Islam Basics 2018)

In another story, *The Vaporization Enthalpy of a Peculiar Pakistani Family* (Malik 2021, 146-165), the protagonist and her brother are descendants of the ancient Sumerian gods Annunaki and their blood has the power to burn things. We witness the physical manifestation of this ability when Tara roasts a few mulberries in her cousin Wasif Khan's house, "*She hadn't eaten mulberries before. She picked a basketful, nipped her wrist with her teeth, and let her blood roast a few. She watched them curl and smoke from the heat of her genes*" (154). We are told that this magic is a legacy of her maternal family however not everyone has the same levels of power. For example, we are told in passing that Tara's mother might also have been in possession of this ability but never practiced or told anyone of her abilities.

Similarly, in Haider's (2017) narrative we come across *Humzaads*, people who are able to call upon Jinns from their realm and are able to communicate and bond with them. For example, Jugnu, the Jinn, tells Sharmeen "*God created us in pairs, one human for every Jinn, and divided us by an invisible curtain that humans cannot cross, but jinn can*" (84-85). There are also Amils, practitioners of black art who are able to entrap Jinns and Ifrits and then use them for nefarious deeds. The sources of Magic in the novel are mostly inspired by Islamic belief. In Islamic tradition, an Amil is a practitioner of amal or spiritual work. Amal is the practice of performing specific rituals or recitations in order to gain spiritual benefits or to address a particular need or problem. Amils are often consulted by individuals seeking spiritual guidance, healing, protection, or assistance with specific problems. The Amil may prescribe specific amals or rituals for the individual to perform, which may include recitations of Quranic verses, prayers, or other spiritual practices. An Ifrit, on the other hand, is a type of supernatural creature mentioned in the Quran and various other Islamic texts. The Ifrit is often described as a powerful, demonic being or a Jinn (a type of spiritual creature in Islamic mythology) that is rebellious and disobedient to Allah. However, it is important to note that while the concept of Ifrits, Jinns and other supernatural creatures is present in Islamic tradition, their existence is not a central aspect of Islamic belief, and they are not considered to be a major focus of Islamic theology or practice.

In the novella *A Firefly in the Dark* (Haider 2018), we witness Aziz (the family servant)

consulting one such Amil in the story to get charms to confound Sharmeen and make her trust him. It was also after one such consultation that Aziz butchered a crow and staged its carcass on Sharmeen's play area.

Unlike the western concept of superheroes with a pro-social mission such as Superman, Aquaman, Spiderman etc., the characters in the data are depicted as grey characters possessing human failings. Infact these characters are not presented as heroes but as regular characters living regular lives with some superpowers on the side. It is worth mentioning that both writers have appropriated Urdu while describing their pantheon of Mythological beings which not only nods to the indigenous origin of these mythologies but also highlights the fact that these beliefs are a rich part of Pakistani folklore.

4.4 Transmogrification

In simplest possible terms transmogrification can be defined as caricature or physical transformation employed for grotesque or humorous effect. Malik (2021) however has employed transmogrification for creating a macabre effect. Transmogrification takes place in Malik's narrative as a result of intrusion of supernatural forces in human realm. For example, in the story, *The Vaporization Enthalpy of a Peculiar Pakistani Family* (146-165), the physical transformation occurs when Sohail is successful in channeling Annunaki after a prolonged period of ritual. Thus, we see that after possession by Annunaki Sohail physically evolves:

His skin was gone. His eyes melted, his nose bridge collapsed; the bones underneath were simmering white seas that rolled and twinkled across the constantly melting and rearranging meat of him. His limbs were pseudopodic, his movement that of a softly turning planet drifting across the possibility that is being. . . . His fried vocal cords were not capable of producing words anymore.. Annunaki watched her through eyes like black holes and gently swirled. (163-164)

Similarly, in the story, *In The Ruins of Mohenjo –Daro* (167-228), metamorphosis takes place when the Night Emperor emerges after the ritual has been completed. Tabinda being the one spearheading the whole enterprise is possessed by the pre historic being, Adar Anshar:

Tabinda was at the first step, snorting, pawing at the bricks. She was on all fours. Her face was completely static now, her forehead smooth. Not a fold, not a single crease, as if she were made from polished glass. Drool dangled in corkscrew threads from her chin. (216)

Haider (2017) too employs this technique in her craft as her jinn (Jugnu) is capable of

changing shapes. Infact Jugnu is presented to the reader in a new shape at every encounter. We see him as a Firefly, as a Dung Beetle, as a Gecko and even as a Falcon. In fact, it is after one such shape shifting that Jugnu takes Sharmeen to meet Morpir in order to ask for help in defeating Sargosh (who is slowly devouring the life force of her father). Jugnu takes the shape of a falcon so that he can take Sharmeen on a flight to seek out Morpir. However, unlike a regular falcon, Jugnu magnifies his stature to almost *the size of a baby Donkey* (183) so that he can carry Sharmeen appropriately.

According to Faris (2004), the reader finds it challenging to gather proof to resolve disputes regarding the veracity of events and people in such fictions. Nonetheless, the author uses exaggerated details to anchor the extraordinary to reality. Chanady (1985, 42) remarks “no rational focalizer invalidates the authenticity of the phenomena as perceived by the indigenous protagonists”. This further lends credibility to the occurrence of supposedly impossible phenomenon in the data. Both writers have employed the technique of transmogrification for different purposes. At Malik’s (2021) hands transmogrification clearly lends a horrific effect to the narrative; whereas Haider’s (2017) craft clearly projects a humorous effect leading to the feeling of wonder. Furthermore, the reader is constantly made aware that the transmogrified object [the character in question] had been plagued by some intense emotion which is later caricatured by the author. For example, in case of Sohail, his intense desire to seek revenge and hatred against the aggressors led to the culmination that his body transformed into a repulsive shape.

4.5 Metamorphosis of Space

Aside from the physical evolution of the characters, the setting or the space in the narrative also transforms or experiences sudden shift, as if the reader and the characters have entered a rift in space disjointed from the world as we know it. This metamorphosis take place on both physical and temporal levels.

We see this metamorphosis in Malik’s story *The Fortune of Sparrows* (2021, 80-99) when the narrator, while playing hide and seek with her sisters, enters a familiar room only to find she has never seen the various furniture in the room ever before. After being scared fleeing the room she never sees the room again, in fact no one else is able to find this strange place either because the space had altered back to its original look. It’s almost as if the narrator had entered a rift in space and entered a separate dimension for some time. Another similar event happens later in the story when the narrator follows the pet cat into another unused room only to find out she’s once again come to a place she’s never seen. This Narnia like experience is clearly a foreboding because during both incidences the narrator experience heat, charred feathers and smoke. The motif of fire is repeatedly highlighted during both episodes.

In Haider's (2017) narrative this spatial metamorphosis takes place when Jungu, after transforming into a huge falcon, takes Sharmeen to visit Morpir. There are some references in Islamic tradition to miraculous transportation or travel, which could be seen as similar to teleportation or spatial metamorphosis. Although teleportation or spatial metamorphosis is generally believed to be a Western construct the accounts of this phenomenon can be found in Islamic history. One example is the Al-Isra' wal-Mi'raj, which is the miraculous night journey that the Prophet Muhammad took from Mecca to Jerusalem and then ascended to the heavens to meet with God (Muslim Hands 2019). According to Islamic tradition, this journey took place in a single night, and the Prophet Muhammad was transported from one place to another by divine power. Another example is the story of Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon), who was given the ability to travel great distances quickly by Allah. It is said that he could command the winds and travel on a throne that was carried by the winds. Sharmeen's experience echoes the Islamic tradition as Jugnu, in the form of a falcon, takes Sharmeen over vast distance to meet Morpir.

In another instance this spatial metamorphosis takes place through a metaphysical experience whereby Sharmeen's consciousness is taken back in time and she's able to witness history firsthand starting with how the ancestral home came to be and how her family got designated as the Watchers. Haider (2018) explains that Watchers were *humzads* (84) and were capable of calling upon jinns, furthermore, these humans were designated the task of ensuring the safety of all life forms. Even though the metamorphosis takes place on the temporal plane it is very much real as Jugnu warns Sharmeen to be careful about her wishes as "[p]eople have lost themselves in stories like these" (155). Clearly there's danger that her consciousness might not find its way back into her body. Thus, the protagonist experiences an out of body experience where her conscious is taken back in time to witness history taking place.

We are also informant about the vision Amir had about Sharmeen before falling into coma. Proves to be prophetic in nature as the metaphoric vision becomes Sharmeen's reality. The 'glow-worm' manifests into Jugnu who plays with Sharmeen as a firefly, and the 'cloud of black smoke' hints towards Aziz's attempts to use black magic. Later on, in the narrative Sargosh also manifests as black smoke during the climax of the collective struggle to evict Sargosh from Amir's body.

5. Discussion

Section 4.I presented the analysis of the results of study and reported the findings of the current study. Through closed reading it was established that the selected works fall under the genre of Magic Realism due to the presence of following characteristics: irreducible element of magic, detailed description of phenomenal world, depicting the near merging of

two realms (human realm and magical realm), raising unsettling doubts in minds of readers and making them question their received ideas of space, time and identity (Faris 1995). Both writers successfully attain this effect by simultaneously using Authorial Reticence (by not commenting on the supernatural phenomenon) and Plentitude (by describing in detail the disorienting phenomenon). According to Al-Jibroy (2013, 9), “the layering of these details contributes to a specific, baroque atmosphere. The space in between those layers is filled with the extraordinary and strange occurrences”.

Irrespective of the contrast in genre between the two works—Horror fiction and Children's novella—both authors employed relatively similar strategies to include the fantastic into their stories. Notwithstanding the differences in space afforded by the two genres, it was found that both authors used a variety of various techniques to combine the real with the imaginary or non-empirical phenomenon in their narratives. Both Malik (2021) and Haider (2017) used a similar approach to gradually prepare the reader to accept the existence of magic as a natural phenomenon. The findings indicate that both texts exhibited a faith-based ontological tendency (Warnes 2009) in its narratives. It was discovered that both authors subtly trained their audience to adopt the alternative ontology, which accepts the existence of supernatural entities. Aside from having a majority of Muslims, Pakistan is home to members of many different religions who adhere to their own theologies, including Christians, Hindus, Parsis, Baha'is, Sikhs, Buddhists, Kalash, Kihals, and Jains (“Pakistan - United States Department of State” 2021). These many religions are represented by the various mythology that both authors use as sources of magic in their stories.

Although both writers employ the globally established characteristics of the genre of Magic realism in their narratives, their plot lines, their magical tropes and motifs are derived from the indigenous Pakistani culture. Be it the literary tropes such as Jinns, Humzaads, Annunaki or Naag Mani, all magical elements were derived from the local culture. Similarly, both writers used motifs which had significant reference to the Pakistani Mores and Norms. For example, prophetic visions are a well renowned strategy employed in Magic realist works, however Malik (2021) appropriated this strategy by depicting a typical Pakistani wedding scene repeatedly in his story *The Fortune of Sparrows* (80-99), however aside from the usual liveliness of a typical wedding, the narrator constantly delineates the imagery of fire, smoke and burnt feathers. In fact, in both prophecies the bride is detailed in a shocking manner and the blessings of the wedding guests seem to be a warning that the child narrator is not able to comprehend. At the end of the story we are made aware that a beloved sister, Sangeeta, dies within months of her marriage. Although we are not informed of the exact cause of Sangeeta's death; however, the motif of gas stove is repeated by the author till the end of the story. Sadly, Pakistan has seen multiple cases of exploding gas stove leading to multiple deaths (Ali 2023; Hollingsworth and Raja 2019; News Desk 2022) thus despite the use of authorial reticence

the motifs employed by both Haider (2017) and Malik (“Midnight Doorways”) are anchored in Pakistani society and culture. In an interview with *Desibooks* (2021) Malik himself drew the connection between his narrative and the Pakistani literature. He stated that:

My story, ‘The Fortune of Sparrows’, was written while I was immersed in Masud’s stories. And, in some ways, it’s a response to his narrative structures. Masud loves creating physical and psychic mazes in his stories through which his characters lead his readers to stranger worlds. He, like many surrealist or uncanny artists, also likes juxtaposing death and dream sequences in hopes of triggering sensory pathways that may elude the logic of daily living. ‘The Fortune of Sparrows’, I think, does that too in some ways and subverts a story about a subcontinental trope (female orphans and their manifest destiny) we’ve all become desensitized to into something different. At least, that’s what I hope it does.

Metamorphosis is another well reputed strategy employed in magic realist narratives to create a sense of duplicity of existence which makes the reader question his received notion of reality. The description of the metamorphosis itself is so matter-of-fact and detailed that the reader unreservedly accepts the incredible (Chanady 1985, 49). As discussed earlier both writers employ this technique of Metamorphosis on both physical and spatial levels. Along with the use of this strategy the authors not only employ authorial reticence, their characters too do not question the validity of this strange occurrence where characters and settings evolve and change in front of their eyes. However, every such instance, be it metamorphosis or transmogrification, is detailed by the writers in an objective and matter of fact manner which somewhat forces the reader to accept that metamorphosis has actually taken place.

Aside from appropriating the established strategies employed in Western Magic Realist works, Haider and Malik have also used indigenous mythologies and native belief system as a launching pad for the source of the magical in their narratives. These belief systems ranged from the ancient Mesopotamian belief system to the contemporary Hindu and Muslim belief systems as the mythological creatures such as Jinns, Qarin, Ifrit, Annunaki, Naag Mani, Shapeshifting Serpent Queen (popularly termed Ichadari naagin) were inspired by these mythologies (see Section 4.2). The use of these figures served multiple purposes; firstly, it established the distinctness of Pakistani Magic Realist Fiction. Pakistan, despite being a Muslim majority country, is home to people of diverse religions such as Christians, Hindus, Parsis, Baha’is; Sikhs; Buddhists; Kalash; Kihals; and Jains (“Pakistan - United States Department of State” 2021) who follow their own theologies. Thus through the use of these mythologies the writers also paid homage to the multilayered history of Pakistani society whose lineage predates even colonization as these mythologies are more than thousand years old. Lastly, the use of these belief systems had Marxist purposes too as there is a niche and

demand of unique mythologies in the international arena. Malik himself stated at a conference that, “the world is no more interested in Vampires and various varieties of Faes. They are interested in Jinns and Pichalpairis” (Malik et al. 2022). Clearly, the contemporary Pakistani Anglophone writers are not simply writing back to the Empire rather they are carving out their own space among the established literary canons set by West and cementing the position of Pakistani Literary canon on the International stage. Mahfuzh (2017, 13) posits that literary works dominated by Western Realist perspective have become equal in Magical Realism with the presence of magical elements represented by Eastern Culture. Thus in this space provided by the genre of Magic Realist fiction, Pakistani writers are creating their own niche and audience while simultaneously stamping the genuinity and uniqueness of Pakistani literary canon which makes it stand apart from the other literatures of the world.

The findings showed that the data exhibited many of the secondary characteristics of Magic realist works outlined by Faris (1995); be it the use of characters with mystical or supernatural powers or of reviving figures from the ancient belief systems, both Malik and Haider have dexterously used their craft to engender a specific Pakistani variant of Magic Realist fiction.

The findings discussed in this chapter align with Luffin (2018). While presenting the case of Sudanese Magic Realist Literature Luffin points out the unique elements of Sudanese Magic realist fiction which essentially differentiate it from the Eurocentric practice of magic realism. For in Sudanese magic realist literature, despite its portrayal of cultural hybridity, the appropriation of language, the revision of history, the denunciation of violence and the use of humor is not solely focused on its colonial past, rather Sudanese magical realist literature depicts the tendency towards more nationalistic thematic concerns.

The findings also indicated that Pakistani Authors, and the Pakistani masses in general, have a distinct ontology which contrasts with the Western established ontology, this cultural and ideological difference is one of the major sources of magic in the text. However, the writers do not rely only on this difference in ontology rather many instances of magic reflect the distinctions established by Warnes (2009), Echevarría (1974), Delbaere (1992), and Spindler (1993).

The current study vied to contribute towards the evolution of Pakistani Literary canon and the findings discussed in this chapter attested to the fact that Pakistani Anglophone Magic Realist literature, hitherto mostly unknown to the world readership, is a rich resource and subset of the broader genre of Magic Realism. Pakistani fiction is a diverse and vibrant literary tradition that reflects the country's rich cultural heritage, complex history, and unique social and political context. Pakistan has a rich and diverse cultural heritage that includes influences from Persia, India, Central Asia, and the Middle East. As indicated in the passages above,

Pakistani Magic Realist fiction reflects this diverse cultural background and explores the intersections and tensions between different cultural influences.

6. Findings:

The analysis indicates that Pakistani Anglophone Magic Realist works form a distinct subset of Magic Realism, characterized by several unique literary tropes:

6.1 Intertextuality:

Pakistani Magic Realist literature draws heavily on literary and cultural references from Pakistani history, mythology, and folklore, adding depth and complexity to the narrative. This creates a sense of continuity with the past and reflects a cross-cultural synthesis ingrained in the region's narrative tradition (Kanwal and Mansoor, 2021). Section 4.2 discusses several mythologies employed by Malik (2021) and Haider (2018) in their texts including Persian, Mesopotamian, Hindu and Arabic mythologies, echoing Eemani's (2022) findings on Iranian Magic Realism.

6.2 Metamorphosis:

Metamorphosis is a significant strategy in these narratives, often representing physical transformation. Faris (1995) notes that metamorphoses are common in Magic Realism, and Alshehri (2022) expands this to include physical, emotional, or spiritual changes. In this study, physical metamorphosis of characters and spaces was prominently featured, illustrating dramatic shifts in identity and perception. The metamorphosis ranged from shapeshifting to majestic beasts to transmogrification into horrific shapes and characters. Even the physical space was treated as transient by Haider (2018) and Malik (2021) as characters were able to enter into alternate realms and through imperceptible rifts in physical spaces; at times characters were able to revisit history in person and spectate historical events firsthand.

6.3 Surrealistic Elements:

Surrealism in Pakistani Magic Realist literature challenges conventional thinking, creating a sense of disorientation and mystery. Al-Jibroy (2013) describes this as contributing to a baroque atmosphere filled with extraordinary occurrences. Section 4.1 dissects this phenomenon, showing how layering surreal details enhances the narrative's complexity. Both Haider (2018) and Malik (2021) reticence and Plentitude to chalk out surrealistic details surrounding the magical phenomenon while refraining to question or comment on the magical experience entirely. be it the apparition of the Serpent queen, description of Sohail's altered physical form or the complete body possession by Sargosh all these instances are marked with unrelenting detail using surrealistic descriptions.

6.4 Dreams and Visions:

Dreams and visions are powerful devices used to explore characters' inner lives and blur the boundaries between the natural and supernatural. This trope is employed by Malik (2021) and Haider (2018) to convey symbolic messages, reflect characters' thoughts, and foreshadow events. In many seminal magic realist works for example, in "Chronicle of a Death Foretold" and "Midnight's Children," dreams serve as metaphors for societal issues and personal transformations, a technique also prevalent in Pakistani literature.

6.5 Stereotypical Characters:

The use of stereotypical characters, such as Hakim, Mullah, Fakir, and Maulana by Malik (2021) and Haider (2018), anchors the magic realist narratives to Pakistani society. These titles, as discussed by Batool et al. (2021), are presented in a manner that reflects cultural specificity and societal norms, providing a rich cultural context to the stories.

These findings underscore the unique contributions of Pakistani Anglophone Magic Realist literature, showcasing its distinct narrative techniques and cultural depth.

7. Conclusion

Pakistani literary canon is in the process of being established (Kanwal & Aslam 2018, 2018a). The genre of Pakistani Anglophone Magic Realism has only recently started receiving attention, of both writers and readers. One aspect of the research niche established in the literature review chapter was that there is a noticeable dearth of scholarly work on Pakistani Anglophone Magic realist fiction. The current research aimed to address this gap by focusing on two contemporary Pakistani Anglophone Magic Realist works. This chapter set out to uncover the strategies through which the Irreal or supernatural had been embedded in the selected data. Through the process of closed reading and coding it was identified that both Malik and Haider have employed a wide array of techniques for integrating the magical elements in their narratives such as using inexplicable events, mythical beings inspired by indigenous mythologies and belief systems, using characters with superpowers, and metamorphosis. Aside from these the writers also employed authorial reticence and plentitude in tandem while describing the magical occurrence and the phenomenal world, thereby convincing their reader to accept the event as it is presented. Despite the difference of space for engaging with the Irreal provided by their respective genres, short story and novella, both Haider (2017) and Malik (2021) slowly and gradually familiarized the reader to the presence of magical and an alternative version of reality. This paper focused on analyzing the strategies of engagement with the irreal and mapping out the sources of the magical elements. As discussed above the findings suggest that both texts depicted a faith based ontological

tendency (Warnes 2009) in their narratives as the pantheon of mythological beings employed by both writers originated from the indigenous belief systems prevalent amongst the Pakistani masses. According to Bowers (2004, 98) the use of magical realism is also notable because writers use this mode not only to retell folktales from their own cultural background but also in order to advance a deeper comprehension of the historical context in which the texts were written. Pakistan, despite being a Muslim majority country, is home to people of diverse religions such as Christians, Hindus, Parsis, Baha'is; Sikhs; Buddhists; Kalash; Kihals; and Jains ("Pakistan - United States Department of State" 2021) who follow their own theologies. The various mythologies employed by both writers as sources of magic in their narrative represent these different religions. Aside from employing mythological figures inspired by the indigenous culture of Pakistan both writers also employ a number of strategies to present the "*irreducible element of Magic*" (Faris 1995, 167) in their narratives such as detailed description of realistic yet inexplicable events, transmutation of human characters, metamorphosis of physical space. They also employ characters who possess super powers or are able to channel magic. Though some of the strategies (such as metamorphosis) were appropriated from the Western Magic Realism overall the content, the motifs and the sources of Magic within the narratives were inspired by the Pakistani culture and society. Thus it would not be incorrect to state that Pakistani Magic Realist fiction is a distinct subset of the genre of Magic Realist Literature with its own pantheon of mythologies and sources of magic. Further study of this subset would diversify the genre of Magic realism and enrich its corpus of works.

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