



Marquegian Parallels And The Feeling Of The Absurd In

Methil Radhakrishnan's "Kayarinte Attam

Corresponding

ABSTRACT: Magic realism is primarily a Latin American narrative tool used widely by many of the Latin American writers. It is said that the technique has drawn energy from the European surrealism. The concept of the absurd and existential philosophy are part of the early twentieth century European situation. Still, both have got universal relevance and applicability. The purpose of this paper is to prove that both these meet in Methil Radhakrishnan's Malayalam short story, "The End of the Rope", in which he uses the Latin American magic realism to depict the existential dilemma and the feeling of the absurd his characters experience.

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The Marquegian parallels we come across in the short story "The End of the Rope" are those related to magic realism of which the Columbian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez is the greatest exponent. Magic realism has often proved to be a much elusive term as "magic" and "reality"--the two halves of that expression - are polar opposites. In Marquez's novels we frequently confront with situations such as young women ascending to heaven (see the example of Remedios the beauty in *One Hundred Yearsof Solitude*) and a dead man's blood (Jose Arcadio Buendia in *One Hundred Yearsof Solitude*) taking its difficult course through the busy streets, taking turns and climbing steps, to his mother. In *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, we see the despotic general giving orders to his engineers to change the course of rivers and replace certain buildings with certain others. All these absurd orders are strictly obeyed without fail. Here is a specimen passage showing how the quenching of a military coupe is pictured in a larger than life manner. Six plotting generals are dynamitted together while sleeping after an official banquet.

...at the instant that the foundations of the building shook with a compact explosion...by God, and that was that, the mess was over, all that was left was a lingering smell of gunpowder...he saw the orderlies on duty slouching through the swamp of blood in the banquet hall, he saw his mother Bendicion Alvarado seized by a dizzy spell of horror as she discovered that the walls oozed out blood no matter how hard she scrubbed them with lye and ash, lord, that the rugs kept on giving off blood no matter how much she wrung them out, and all the more blood poured in torrents through corridors and offices...

Such dreamlike descriptions reminiscent of the European surrealism take us to a world of the bizarre where the line between the real and the imaginary often gets blurred. Marquez has his own reasons--both political and apolitical--for taking resort to such novel and daring instances of experimentation in narrative strategy. To the Latin American writer, magic realism is the culmination of his search for an apt mode of expression that can contain the whole weight of his unbearable and inexplicable reality.

In Methil Radhakrishnan's short story, "The End of the Rope", however, the purpose of incorporating the element of the bizarre does not seem to be political. It is rather an attempt to capture the indefiniteness of existence which often troubles the individual and leaves him embarrassed before the mysteries life has in store for him.

When the story begins, we see an itinerant magician gathering a crowd around him in a village. He is an expert in rope magic and calls himself "Pulavan". He will throw a rope into the sky and it will hang in the air from nowhere. One could climb up the rope and climb down. When a substantial crowd is gathered Pulavan swings the rope so many times and sends it shooting up. The rope rises up and stands vertical in the air some fifteen feet high. An enthusiastic boy from the crowd comes forward and climbs up the rope. As he reaches the top end, to the great surprise of the crowd, he vanishes! The crowd expects that the boy will come down after some time just like the body cut into pieces by the magician is joined together at the end of the magic. But, the boy does not return. A few minutes later, a cock descends into the middle of the crowd along the rope. Pulavan explains that the boy has been transformed into the cock and lets it fly away. The crowd is pleased and Pulavan's hat fills with money.

But the story hits us with horror and a strange kind of excitement when we realize that the boy's disappearance was not magic, but real fact. The narrator who wanders back to the city square after supper finds the rope still standing erect in the air with Pulavan lying on the ground beneath it. He tells the narrator that the disappearance of the boy was an accident. He had never expected it. The descent of the cock was also an accident which, to a great extent, helped him save his face. The vanishing of the boy remains an inexplicable dilemma to Pulavan. He tries to explain it thus:

Magic is an art of appearance and disappearance. Things that you see this moment disappear the next moment. After some time they reappear. But sometimes, things that disappear in magic never return. Deceiving the magician, they are gone for ever. My master was an expert in juggling. He juggled with knives, sticks, balls and plates. He knew very well where he should expect a particular ball at a particular fraction of a second. He needs only to extend his hand in that direction, and the ball will be safe in his hand. One day, when he extended his hand in a particular direction, the ball was not there. He didn't know where it went. The same thing has happened with the boy also. But, where did the boy and the ball go? I think there is a world where such objects which are lost during magic go. An unseen and unknown world. I fear the boy is now in that world; he hasn't yet returned!

The narrator suggests a different possibility. Perhaps, the whole incident may be part of a larger scheme, of which Pulavan or the crowd was totally unaware. Nobody knew who the boy was or where he came from. He simply walked out of the crowd, as if he had been waiting for this moment for so long, climbed up the rope and vanished into thin air. Pulavan and his rope were only a cause for that moment written in the boy's fate to materialize.

Here, the author is actually addressing certain metaphysical questions. Pulavan was totally unaware of the fact that he was becoming part of a metaphysical scheme to which the boy and his ascension belonged. That is the cause for his dilemma, which renders his situation really absurd. To miss the ball where you normally expect it is a classic example of the feeling of the absurd. You realize that your schemes are being overrun or run down by some other schemes, the dimensions of which you are incapable to comprehend. Pulavan's inability to tie the loose ends together imparts to him the shades of an existential character, who is totally unaware of the currents that carry him off to unforeseen realms of experience. The rope, the boy, his vanishing, the cock--all make him thoroughly confused, and he finds himself at a loss.

This feeling of the absurd is heightened further when the narrator himself, who decides to climb up the rope in order to find out the boy's secret, vanishes at the top end of the rope. In Pulavan's eyes, he has vanished. But the narrator finds himself on a different plane of existence, somewhere like a new world discovered accidentally, a world not palpable to the world below. He feels like Alice in wonderland.

If you can imagine that there is a plane made of glass separating the sky from the earth, I am now walking on that plane. I can see everything below me--the ground, the rope and Pulavan staring up from beneath the rope. But I seriously doubt if he can see me. (24)

It is obvious that he couldn't. The narrator sees so many objects floating around him in the dusty air. Flying hats, plates, knives cups and balls. He feels assured of Pulavan's conjecture that there is a world where objects that vanish during magic go. He picks up a ball from among them, runs back to the rope and throws it down to Pulavan. But Pulavan could not pick it up. His body hung in a noose on his neck at the other end of the rope, his feet not touching ground.

The story takes us to a strange world where fiction and reality inextricably get mixed up. The rope, the vanishings, the cock and the unseen world existing on top of the seen world are responsible for the creation of a realm of the bazarre. Pulavan, the crowd and the narrator belong to the real world. The subtle way in which these two worlds are mixed up is highly reminiscent of Marquegian magic realism, where, as we have seen in the early part of the paper, the real and the fictional get mixed up. Just like Marquez, Methil Radhakrishnan also has used this technique as a narrative strategy or a tool to create an appropriate form to present the content which borders on absurdity. The absurdity of life and its accidents leave Pulavan totally disoriented. It is the unanswerable dilemmas of his situation that ultimately lead him to suicide. The unseen plane described in the story can be compared to the unconscious mind, or even the collective unconscious, which can be called the realm of things lost on man's progress to civilisation. A person's inability to understand the strange ways of his unconscious mind or the primaeva links he has with the mind of the universe can create a feeling of the absurd. Therefore we may conclude that Methil Radhakrishnan has successfully adapted Marquegian magic realism to present his theme of the absurdity of human existence.

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