

Magic Realism in *Kando Nodi Kando*

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Syed Waliullah (1922-1971) was a powerful writer of Bangladesh who introduced and cultivated modern literary techniques and trends in Bangla literature. Many distinguished critics like Syed Abul Maksud, Abdul Mannan Syed, Devipada Bhattacharya, Syed Akram Hossain etc. have discussed those techniques and trends in several books and articles and also in seminars and symposiums on different occasions. Those techniques and trends mainly include existentialism, stream of consciousness and the elements of the absurd, not the treatment of reality as a technique as such. In his PhD thesis on Waliullah, Zeenat Imtiaz Ali also has not focussed on Waliullah's treatment of reality as a technique. This silence of the critics about the treatment of reality in his novels seems rather strange as in *Kando Nodi Kando* there is conspicuous presence of a newer sort of reality, remarkably resembling the postmodern treatment of reality, universally called Magic Realism. Apart from this, a number of Surrealistic events and episodes are also clearly visible in his second novel *Chander Amabashya*, in the play *Taranga Bhango* and in a few short stories of *Dui Teer O Anyanyo Galpo*. However, we also here cannot elaborately discuss these techniques of the treatment of reality in all the works of Waliullah, owing to the reasonable constraints of scope and space in an article. Therefore, this article aims at exploring merely the novel *Kando Nodi Kando* in order to point out the Magic Realistic traits in it and to show its success as a great Magic Realistic novel in Bangla literature.

Apparently, the first author and critic who drew our attention to the technical treatment of reality in Waliullah's works is Shahidul Zahir, a renowned contemporary writer. In an interview with 'Ajker Kagoj' he said that in *Kando Nodi Kando* Waliullah had practised Magic Realism, a postmodern technique, most successfully practised by the Latin American literary doyens like Marquez and Borges (Zahir). Zahir also expressed his belief that Waliullah had read Marquez before writing it, though he could not establish it through adequate evidence. Zahir's assertion was brief but it, no doubt, opened a new vista of critical approach to Waliullah's novels.

Waliullah was born in 1922, the year in which Magic Realism also first appeared as a trend in painting in Germany. It was Westheim who first drew attention to this trend by circulating a questionnaire concerning the end of expressionism and the appearance of this new trend. The publication of the responses to this questionnaire immediately appealed to the contemporary thinkers and the practitioners of art. The 1925-exhibition of paintings arranged by Gustav Hartlaub finally brought this new trend to a state of recognition when it was first defined by Hartlaub as New Objectivity (Neue Sachlichkeit) and as Magic Realism (Magischer Realismus) by Franz Roh (Guenther 40-41). Waliullah most probably became aware of it in the 1960s when he was getting established as an author and Magic Realism was also settling on firmer grounds as a potent artistic trend of far-reaching significance. This probability stands on two grounds:

(1) Anne-Marie refers to at least two renowned Latin American writers namely Aime Cesaire (Caribbean) and Pablo Neruda (Chilean) in Waliullah's reading-list (Anne-Marie 19, 26). From this we can assume that along with those authors he had also read the renowned writers of Latin America such as Carpentier, Borges and Marquez as, in those days, they were not less discussed than the former two. Even if he might not have read the concerned authors in the

original, it can be assumed with every probability that he had read at least the reviews of their works as such works were regularly reviewed then in the journals of Paris.

(2) As the treatment of reality by Waliullah is visibly similar to the reality portrayed in the works of Carpentier or Marquez, we can validly guess that Waliullah had somehow made an acquaintance with that mode of reality through his reading.

However, this is a mere assumption that Waliullah had an acquaintance with the Magical Realism practised by Carpentier or Marquez. At any rate, it can be pinpointed in several episodes and events in *Kando Nodi Kando* that he has practised a similar sort of reality in this novel. Then only the fact whether he used this technique consciously or unconsciously remains shrouded in mystery.

Now we would like to analyse this strange sort of reality practised in *Kando Nodi Kando* in order to show whether that strangeness characterises the reality as Magic Realism or just as an anarchic abnormality. With this end in view, it is necessary to clarify the term Magic Realism and throw light on its characteristics. In its initial stage, as long as it maintained relevance only with painting, it meant a break away from expressionism in order to paint everything in its original shape and colour. It negated all uses of gorgeous colours and also 'the fantastic, extraterrestrial, remote and exotic objects' (Roh 16). Instead, it advocated the painting of simple objects with all their simplicity but letting the 'mystery' or the 'life' of every object be perceivable through its 'palpitation underneath the surface' (Zamora 15).

When authors started treating Magic Realism in literature, it began to denote a shocking and almost contradictory characteristic. While commenting on the novel by Alfred Kubin called *Die Andere Seite (The Other Side)*, W. E. Suskind wrote that Magic Realism in literature mainly referred to an unearthly reality

(*unheimlichkeit*) (Guenther 59). Whereas in painting it was considered to be a struggle to be true to the object as much as possible, in literature it became a struggle to escape from the objective reality. This was paradoxical and shocking. But still it was not that Magic Realism that we now attribute to literature.

Magic Realism with its present connotation in literature, was first explained and provided with a theoretical base by Alejo Carpentier in the prologue to his novel *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of this World* 1949). In this prologue, Carpentier however terms it as Marvelous Real (Realismo Maravilloso) in place of Magic Realism (Realismo Magico). In his definition Carpentier says that it (Magic Realism)

'begins to be unmistakably marvelous when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favoured by the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme estate (estado limite)' (Carpentier 86).

This definition points to a few essential characteristics of Magic Realism, for example, (1) unexpected alteration of reality, (2) privileged revelation of reality and (3) amplification of the scale and categories of reality. All these characteristics suggest that the reality dealt in Magic Realism crosses the boundary of normal social reality and obviously becomes strange and unbelievable, as this reality is 'amplified', 'unexpectedly altered' and experienced from a 'privileged position'.

Soon after giving this definition, Carpentier affixes a crucial characteristic to it to distinguish it from Surrealism. He warns us that in every case the

phenomenon of Magic Realism must presuppose 'faith', the faith of the people in that phenomenon (Carpentier 86). So, the 'privileged revelation' can not be a revelation beyond or without belief; and the 'amplification' of reality cannot be an amplified state not believed in the community. Carpentier goes on saying that 'if they are invoked in mere disbelief they will become nothing more than a literary ruse which was the case of Surrealism in Europe' (86).

Here another literary riddle gets resolved. Surrealism and Magic Realism tend to be deceptively identical. They both show a state of reality which crosses the boundary of normal objective social reality. The riddle began right from the birth of the term Surrealism as Andre Breton himself could not exactly define it in his *First Manifesto* written in 1929 (Carpentier, Baroque 89). The riddle now got resolved in the hand of Carpentier. Carpentier showed that though both the trends Surrealism and Magic Realism refer to a similar sort of reality, there is a difference between these two and it arises from the community they concern. If the strange reality arises from the belief of the community it becomes Magic Reality. It is then an objective and experienceable reality though inexplicable. But, if that strange reality arises from one's fancy or fantasy, and not from the belief or faith of the community, it becomes super-reality or Surrealism. Surrealism thus involves almost all the strange realities of Europe where all the unreal are treated as merely impossible or fantastic, because only the scientific explanation of a thing or phenomenon constitutes the faith in that particular thing or phenomenon in Europe. Along this line of distinction between Magic Realism and Surrealism drawn by Carpentier of Cuba, we will now proceed to anatomiise and analyse the strangeness of reality that Waliullah has woven into his *Kando Nodi Kando*, with a view to determining whether the strange reality of this novel belongs to Magic Realism or to Surrealism or to none of them or to both of them.

Both major and minor together, there are at least thirteen manifest events and episodes of strange reality in this novel. Among them the longest one is the episode of Sakina Khatun's hearing of a weeping which at, the beginning, the other people do not hear. This weeping is connected to the weeping of the river arising out of its fear of Death, to the weeping of Khodeza for her failure to be a fiance, and also to the weeping of Muhammad Mustafa for his being the probable cause of Khodeza's suicide. This puts the episode of Sakina's hearing of weeping as the epicentre of the story. The central human character Mustafa and the central nonhuman character the river Bakal are bridged together by this episode of weeping. It bridges up all the important characters and episodes, again it sets the other episodes winding around it. With all these functions the episode of Sakina's hearing of weeping is one of the most important ones in the novel. Again this strange story of weeping pervades nineteen out of the thirty-three chapters of the novel.

The point that deserves our attention here is that this episode of Sakina Khatun, remarkable for both its length and importance, incorporates a scientifically unreal story. This leads us to think that Waliullah had a deliberate design to deal with different levels of reality in his novel and this was a common trend in Latin American fiction in the 50s and 60s. As a mature writer, Waliullah also like Rulfo or Marquez, had the dexterity to make his design successful through necessary supportive techniques and complications. These techniques include many things. First, his chosen incidents of strange and bewildering reality are from both the groups: subjective reality and objective reality. However, both of them are scientifically unreal. The incidents of the two groups are then entwined together resulting in a provocative complication. We have to keep in mind that these two groups represent two trends of reality, Magic Realism and Surrealism. While the strange and unreal objective realities refer to Magic Realism, the unreal subjective realities refer to Surrealism. Thus this technique involves an

entwinement of Magic Realistic and Surrealistic events together. Secondly, from those unreal events Waliullah has chosen a central one to be the pivot or the axis of the novel and the other incidents are woven into the plot to help the pivotal one. Among the other techniques a distinctly noticeable one is the continual shifting of the two narrators of the novel.

For a critical analysis of the application of these techniques of Waliullah, we would like to arrange the strange events woven in *Kando Nodi Kando* into two groups. In one group we will include those unreal events which are subjectively real and thereby Surreal. In the other group we will include those which are objectively real and thereby Magical.

Group 1: Events in *Kando Nodi Kando* which are scientifically unreal but subjectively real, that is, ultimately Surreal:

1. The illusion that the steamer is coming (Waliullah 201)
2. While crossing the canal Subhadra Muhammad Mustafa feels the existence of fierce aquatic animals there and he finds his limbs getting paralysed (Waliullah 244).
3. Habu Mian suddenly hears the steamer whistling and he runs towards the steamer station with his son in his lap (Waliullah 249).
4. Amena Khatun meets a fairy and gossips with her under a tree (Waliullah 254).
5. Mustafa's courage to cross the mysterious Tamarind tree of Kalu Gazi, almost in a trance (Waliullah 244).
6. Mustafa experiences the strange event of seeing Khodeza superimposed on Sakina Khatun when he comes across the latter (Waliullah 331).
7. Mustafa sees the face of Khodeza coming up from water (W 334).
8. Hearing the heartrending cry of the landlord which came from years back from the courtyard of Ka'ba. (W 201).

All these eight incidents of unreal subjective reality are short-lived in the flow of events and real to certain persons as simply a jutting-out of their contemplating and agonising souls. These events do not come up from the collective consciousness or the collective unconscious. Rather they come up as some experiences of subjective concentration or hallucination of some specific persons. This shows the Surrealistic traits of these events. However, as they take place in a society where people are prone to believe anything even blocking their scientific faculty, if necessary, these events do not invoke any violent disbelief, either. Moreover, these events play an important role in the evolution of the plot which upholds some magically real events in the centre. These Surrealistic events thus pave the way for the central magically real events for their smooth appearance in the novel. These also help the central magic realistic events gain due credibility and a symmetric embodiment in the texture of the novel.

Such weaving of Surrealistic events in a magic realistic text is again a practice of several important magic realistic writers of Latin America. Even the Nobel Prize winner *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Marquez has numerous instances of this sort. An example is the Surrealistic events preceding the magic realistic event of Ursula's shrinking into a child not larger 'than the Christ child' and small enough to be eaten by the kitchen rats (Marquez 348). Marquez paves the way for this magic realistic event through some surrealistic events. These surrealistic events include: how Ursula under the weight of age was experiencing what took place more than one hundred years ago (M 347), how Jose Arcadio Buendia experienced permanent Mondays (M 80), how Ursula met with Melquiades in the bedroom of Jose Arcadio Buendia many years after his death (M 143)- and a few others like these.

Now let us look at the other unreal events which are objectively real and thereby characterised as Magic Realism.

Group 2: Events scientifically unreal but believed as objectively real and therefore Magical:

1. The rising of sand-level, which disrupts the steamer-route and resultantly the people of Kumurdanga lose the steamer station, suddenly turns simply into a nonentity in the belief of a section of the common people (Waliullah 237). This could be compared to the massacre of the banana company which killed three thousand people in a minute but simply passed into a state of nonentity in the belief of the folk of Macondo (Marquez 314).
2. The episode of Kalu Gazi and his Tamarind tree and the point from which the area of his reign starts (Waliullah 242).
3. The episode of God's resemblance with the throbbing heart of a man or an animal (Waliullah 245).
4. The long episode of Sakina's hearing the weeping of the river Bakal that begins at 15th chapter and pervades all the remaining chapters, albeit sometimes diffusely.
5. The explanation why the river weeps (W 318).

A thorough search may reveal more instances of such magically real phenomena. But these five are noticeable even in a cursory reading. Manifestly, these are events and episodes of Magic Realism having the distinct quality of acquiring the characteristic of objective reality. And it was the Cuban writer and critic Carpentier first to point out this distinguishing characteristic of Magic Realism, mentioned earlier. Now it is necessary to show how these events have gained the public faith to be objectively real.

The most important one of these five is the episode of Sakina's hearing of the weeping. At the beginning of the episode, the weeping appeared to be too

strange for anybody to believe. Enraged by such a silly unbelievable thing, Salim Mian insultingly asks- "What do you hear, where does it come from?" (Waliullah 290). However the people take the issue seriously. The headmistress of the school that Sakina serves shows her interest in what she hears (W 282). A number of women come to Sakina's house to know about the nature of the weeping (W 297-300). This seriousness reflects that the event is shaking the total community and is trying to infiltrate into the subconscious of their mind. And gradually they begin to experience the strange reality themselves. After Sakina, Mihir Mandal first begins to hear the weeping coming from the bank of the river. Then one person after another goes on encountering the same experience. Rukunuddin encounters it, the grocer Fanu Mian, Zaytun Bibi- the wife of Habu Mian and, in this way, almost all the people of the community go on encountering the same awesome experience of hearing the weeping (W 307). Through this experience this weeping-episode gets firmly rooted in the belief of the people of Kumurdanga and it becomes an objective reality to them. This characterises the event as a magic realistic phenomenon. But what makes it important for the novel is its pivotal role to wind up the other important real and unreal episodes around it. Again its importance is marked by its central position among the unreal events. Of these two points of importance, the first point, that the weeping episode winds up major realistic events of the novel around it, has fairly been elaborated earlier. We have shown there how the misery of the community Kumurdanga arising out of the apprehended death of the river Bakal and the private misery of Mustafa arising out of the failure of his marriage are wound up together round the long weeping-episode. The other point of importance of this weeping episode of Sakina Khatun is that it serves as the centre of the unreal events. This has also received a partial elaboration where we have shown how the unreal events of the surrealistic sort have come up to support the magic realistic events and episodes. Now what remains to be shown

is how the other magic realistic events support this major one and contribute to establishing the novel as a magic realistic work.

Of the five conspicuous events of Magic Realism, the first one is the struggle of a section of the people to dismiss the fact of the rising of sand-level as a mere nonentity. This almost self-deceptive and deliberate dismissal originates from their conscious desire to find a solution to the problem of losing the steamer station for the river's death. This attempt fails but it prepares the collective consciousness of the people to accept any solution, even if it comes from the phantasmal or the unreal subconscious. This craving for solution justifies the outrageous and scandalising solution initiated by Rahmat Sheikh (W 339). Like many other people of Kumurdanga, Rahmat Sheikh also accepts the interpretation of Sakina that the weeping she hears is the weeping of the river (W 318). They begin to apprehend that the river's weeping is a premonition of several misfortunes waiting for the people of Kumurdanga. One of these has already visited them in the shape of the withdrawal of the steamer station. Now to avoid the other ones hurrying towards Kumurdanga, something should be done in order to pacify the monster who is strangling the river to Death. An instance of this something then appears to be Rahmat Sheikh's act of sacrificing the calf in the river (W 339). This type of sacrifice of precious things then follows one another as a solution to the apprehended dangers. This solution is certainly prompted by the subconscious belief in the bad omen of the river's weeping. This is a sequence of the conscious solution to the problem of losing the steamer station which (solution) they had tried to find out by dismissing the fact of rising of the level of sands as a nonentity. Thus the magically real event of pushing a real thing into a state of nonentity opens the path for the narrative to reach the more important and central Magic Realistic event, namely, the weeping of the river. This role of the first magic realistic event serves the

twin purposes of reinforcing the pivotal magic realistic event and contributing to making the novel magic realistic.

The second event of Magic Realism is the episode of the Tamarind tree of Kalu Gazi. This tamarind tree has already become a legend in most people's belief and in that way it has already become a magic realistic object before it enters the plot of the novel. So when it is treated in the novel it is already an established magic realistic event in the real life phenomena. As it stands in the village of Mustafa, not in Kumurdanga, it comes as a representative magic realistic event from his village; presumably Waliullah is here providing to create a balance against the numerous magical events of Kumurdanga. In Kumurdanga Mustafa gets integrated into the central magic realistic event of the river's weeping, with his personal weeping as a contrition for the maltreatment of and betrayal with Khodeza. This integration is further strengthened by the fact that Mustafa also had a heritage of magic since his childhood, and the episode of the Tamarind tree is a part of that heritage. Thus the legend of the Tamarind tree enters deeply into the major magic realistic episode of the river's weeping and strengthens the novel as a magic realistic one.

The third episode of Magic Realism is itself a very vital event being related to Mustafa's personal belief and myth-heritage. He once heard from an illiterate village woman that God is like a throbbing heart of a man or an animal. He makes it such a vivid part of his belief that he experiences its live presence several times in his life. For example, at the time of his first attempt to commit suicide, he finds the leather suitcase turning into a throbbing heart. The event is apparently Surrealistic as it is a subjective experience of Mustafa alone. However, what makes it Magical is the passing of the belief of the house-maid into Mustafa and its infiltration into his soul. The importance of this magical episode is its considerable contribution to the characterisation of the central

character Mustafa. When Mustafa is seen calmly proceeding towards his attempted suicide, his inner shivering is simultaneously seen projected on that throbbing suitcase. So, we see, the author has chosen this Magic Realistic event for the depiction of such a crucially important moment in the life of the central character Mustafa. It shows that this event directly contributes to the characterisation of Mustafa and thereby proves its importance for the novel as a whole.

And the last feature in *Kando Nodi Kando* of Magic Realism is the explanation of the major Magical event of the river's weeping itself. The explanation is that the Bakal weeps because it is dying (W 318). The people of Kumurdanga had to accept this explanation and had to believe in it leaving no room for doubt, though the explanation actually made them bristle with fear. Such scientifically unreal explanations of the Magical events are available in many Magic Realistic novels. In *Pedro Paramo* by Juan Rulfo or in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* there are many such interpretations of magical events. In *Pedro Paramo*, for example, Juan Preciado was convinced by Eduviges Dyada's explanation that Dolores's voice was so weak because she had died seven years ago (Rulfo 8). Similarly in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* the Magical event of the birth of a son with a 'cartilaginous tail' is explained as a result of the ominous marriage between his parents, because there was an earlier prediction that any marriage between the two families, these parents belonged to, had the risk of leading to the birth of iguanas (Marquez 20).

As has been noted earlier, the novel *Kando Nodi Kando* contains as many as thirteen manifest events and episodes of strange unreality. Among them the Surrealistic group entwined with the Magic Realistic group strengthens the Magic Realistic framework of the novel. And the Magic Realistic group itself by its thematic and technical significance establishes the novel as a Magic

Realistic one. This magic realistic feature of the novel is again reinforced by the technique of frequent shifting of narrators in it. The two narrators of the novel- the first person narrator 'I' and the character-narrator Tabarak Bhuyian- in a recurrent pattern of shifting, finish the narration of the whole novel. This makes obvious the novel's resemblance with the great Magic Realistic novel *Pedro Paramo* by Juan Rulfo, in which this narrator-shifting technique is so sharply etched and is so puzzling that almost every important character, now or then, seems to be a narrator of the story. All these things testify to the fact that *Kando Nodi Kando* is a great Magic Realistic work in Bangla literature. And all these lead to the conclusion that Waliullah has cultivated these numerous traits of Magic Realism from a sound basis of knowledge about the theory of Magic Realism.

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