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Unraveling Enchantments and Demystification of Narrative: A Magical Feminist Reading of Nafisa Rizvi's Fiction

Zafar Iqbal[1]

Abstract

This paper investigates how Rizvi's magical feminist technique has been incorporated in her novel *The Blue Room (TBR)*. The research indicates that magical feminist texts undermine colonial/patriarchal tenets. This feminist literary study employs magical realist strategies to make the commonplace spectacular, the unbelievable believable, and the inconceivable conceivable. Magical feminism informs feminist discourse as a subgenre of magical realism. I am using Patricia Hart's concept of magical feminism to analyze the primary text. I also invoke Wendy B. Faris' definitions to read magical realist text. This paper further explores how woman is used and traded. *TBR* protagonist Zaib battles patriarchy in several ways. This study may advance magical feminist knowledge.

***Keywords*:** magical Feminism, magical realism, marvelous realism, feminism, patriarchy

This research tends to explores how Nafisa Rizvi incorporates magical feminist elements in her novel *The Blue Room*. Now onwards, instead of using the complete name of my primary text, I use an abbreviation of the novel *TBR* throughout my article. I have adopted and appropriated the title from Wendy B. Faris's book, *Ordinary Enchantments Magical Realism and the Remystification of the Narrative.* I argue that magical feminism is a valuable technique for inscribing women consciousness. The text is magical owing to rhetorical, metaphorical, and narrative strategies. The magical feminist writers' employ supernaturalization, defamiliarization, and other native tactics like incorporating fantastic elements, marvelous realist features that unsettle the reader and challenge patriarchal dominance and repression. The novel is packed with postcolonial elements, but the scope of this paper hardly allows it; therefore, I discuss it suggestively and remain focused on my main concern.

While addressing the magical feminist concerns, the text *TBR* under consideration blurs the barriers between reality and fantasy. The female characters are shown as silent and oppressed objects and positioned as agentive beings with many shifting identities. Additionally, the study uses narrative techniques to unravel enchantments and demystify the magical feminist text. Moreover, magical feminist ideologies relating to postcolonialism converge and recuperate the minor voices.

This study probes a series of questions: How does Rizvi incorporate magical feminist elements in the novel? Second, how has magical feminism been incorporated as an artistic expression? Third, how does magical feminism play a role in tracing the multiple identities of the female characters? Moreover, *TBR* presents a portrait of males and examines how they are to blame for women's sadness and unfulfilled lives. For a better, more peaceful living, Rizvi thinks that both feminists and patriarchy need to re-examine their sociocultural practices.

The significance of the research lies in the fact that no research has been done on *TBR* from a magical feminist perspective. This article highlights Pakistan's grim realities, such as oppressive patriarchy and poverty-related issues. Additionally, this study highlights South Asian Pakistani literature and Pakistani culture. The article illustrates how vulnerable and alone women feel in this patriarchal society. They build their own worlds to release their repressed emotions, and occasionally, they communicate with talking walls to reveal their hopes, aspirations, and secrets. The main character, Zaib, speaks with apparitions that enchant and mystify the reader. This study aims to understand the many facets of Pakistani culture and women's emotional and social position.

Magical feminism is the primary area on which my study focuses. I invoke theoretical insights of Patricia Hart, Wendy B. Faris, and Stephen Slemon to support my assumptions about the selected text. Patricia Hart reaffirms the possibility of seeing magical realist texts as feminist texts. Her theorizing assists me in proving that it may be interpreted as a magical feminist work because my project deals with feminist reading. Theorizing by Wendy B. Faris places me in a good position to test my assertions that my primary feminist texts can be analyzed as magical realist texts. It would be appropriate to introduce and explain why I have selected these theorists and used textual analysis as a research method for this qualitative, interpretaative research.

Patricia Hart is credited with coining the term "magical feminism." According to Patricia Hart, the work merits being referred to as a magical feminist rather than a magical realism because it is feminocentric. "Magical feminism" is the innovation of Patricia Hart. She seeks a definition devoid of "femino-cultural imperialism". She defines "magical feminism" as "magical realism" used in a work that is feminocentric or specially tuned into the plight of women" (32). Magical feminism is the subgenre of magical realism. If I unravel "magical feminism," it refers to incorporating magical realism strategies in feminist discourse.

[1] Associate Professor, Islamabad Model Postgraduate College of Commerce H- 8/4, Islamabad, Pakistan

Rizvi's *TBR* can be located within the magical feminist literary tradition because of magical realism and feminocentric themes. To make a solid ground, I intend to explain why I employ Patricia Hart's insights as a theoretical lens. Hart argues that she purposefully avoids using the term "feminism" in her definition because it is insufficient and elusive; instead, she uses the term "magical feminism" because the definition of feminism "ignores the vast emotional charge that accompanies the word" (30). The works of Isabel Allende help her to coin the term "magical feminism". She suggests examining if Isabel Allende's writing qualifies as "magically feminist" either because it employs magic to establish a truth about the status of women in some specific circumstances or because it is simply "magical realism" utilized to make points about the condition of women. (32). She also "subtly calls the whole literary tradition into question, asking if at present "magical realism" is [an] appropriate vehicle for her continent at all, or whether magic may at times be the opiate of the oppressed" (32).

Moreover, Hart finds Allende's working definition of "clairvoyance" useful, and I invoke the definition of clairvoyance as a lens to read *TBR*. Allende states, "Clara (protagonist of *The House of the Spirits*) can see the future, read people's minds or auras, and envision distant scenes and objects. She is also at times capable of acute insights and perceptions." The American Heritage Dictionary's definition of clairvoyance, which begins, "First, the ability to perceive things that are outside the natural range of human senses," most closely matches Allende's definition. Second, keen perception or understanding" (38). Hart describes the clairvoyant magic in *THS* as magical feminism (55). In Rizvi's *TBR*, Zaib's interactions with the talking walls and her ability to predict future events by reading people's minds—such as Jalal and his sons—to save her father—are examples of clairvoyance.

I argue that magical feminist literature critiques socially relevant institutions like marriage, families, religion, and patriarchy. I discuss in detail how patriarchy operates and affects the socio-economic, emotional, and psychological bearing of the characters in *TBR*. The protagonists like, Zaib, Ayesha, and Bano are its victims. I contend Third World women experience multiple forms of marginalization because they must deal with various social class, gender, identity, sexual, and representational difficulties. Patriarchy often under-represent or misrepresent women. Most people assume that a woman's main objectives are to take care of her husband in all respects, nurture her children, and look after her "home". In Muslim societies, women are empowered in relations like mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters.

I contend that magical feminist and magical realist theories are intimately symbiotic, mutualistic and intertwining. Both the theories are anti-imperial and cross-cultural. The theories attempt to undermine metanarratives and provide Third World people, particularly women, a sense of agency. When I refer to meta or grand narratives, I mean patriarchal structures and institutions of marriage and family. Feminism makes an effort to free itself from ingrained patriarchal beliefs (Selden, Raman, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker 115); at the same time, magical realism also plays a role in "patriarchal culture's disenchantment with itself" (Faris 4).

I invoke Wendy B. Faris' concepts as a theoretical framework to read *TBR*. The definitions seem thorough and all-inclusive. Faris applies the five essential traits to postmodern literature, but as my core text already has all these elements, the criteria also hold for magical feminist works. These are magical realism's five main features, according to Faris:

1. The text contains an "irreducible element" of magic
2. The descriptions in magical realism detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world
3. The reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events
4. The narrative merges different realms
5. Magical realism disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity. (7)

These definitions provide a thorough conceptual framework for identifying magical features in *TBR*. Since the magical feminist/realist interpretation of *TBR* is the focus of this research article. In order to read the text critically, textual analysis has been used as a research method. Gabriel Griffin's Research Methods for English Studies contains an essay by Catherine Belsey titled "Textual Analysis as a Research Method," which is a helpful read to understand research methods and distinguish between research method and research methodology. As the research is interpretative in nature, Belsey argues that it tries "to attend to all the quotations that make the text, the traces by which it is constituted" (162). Belsey further contends that interpretation is not mere subjectivism; it means "something exists in its difference" (163).

It would be appropriate to discuss passingly postcoloniality. The scope of this paper does not allow me to discuss postcolonial elements in detail. Concerning my core text (*TBR*), Alva's idea of postcoloniality sounds intriguing and persuasive. It concentrates on women colonized, marginalized, and silenced by the patriarchy, which is determined to curtail their autonomy. Alva continues, "Colonialism is not simply something that happens outside a country or a people, not just from the outside world. In Rizv's *TBR*, several women who are patriarchy victims in different ways include Zaib, Sumer, Amna, Lala Rukh, Ayesha, and Bano. They are voiceless individuals. In postcolonial

feminism, a woman from the Third World is portrayed as a passive, mute, marginalized, domesticated victim. They are unable to respect their personal choices in marriage and employment. As my research mostly deals with feminist issues, therefore, it would be fair to refer briefly feminist criticism in the following discussion.

French writer and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir theorized on philosophy, politics, and social issues. One of her well-known quotes, "One is not born a woman, but becomes one" (283), has influenced feminist thought. Simone de Beauvoir's world-renowned book *The Second Sex* (1949) gained significant attention for discussing women's subjugation and societal gender construction. According to Simone de Beauvoir, women are not inferior to males; they should not strive to be like men, and they are perfectly normal individuals who should focus on developing their own sense of self and originality. In a patriarchal society, women are considered contingent beings (dependent creatures influenced by circumstances), but males are thought essential subjects (independent selves with free will). Marriage is a trap in her eyes. Men seek them out to become mothers. She was a socialist feminist in this sense.

According to Cixous, conventional writing is characterized by a phallocentric perspective. Consequently, she proposed an alternative concept of writing known as "ecriture feminine," which pertains to distinctly female or feminine writing. This conception represents a significant stride towards liberation. Luce Irigaray, another prominent French feminist, espoused a similar perspective, emphasizing the subversive act of "writing from the body." Elaine Showalter is recognized for her contribution to literary theory by introducing the word "Gynocritics." This concept entails recognizing and appreciating women's literary works, not merely as products of a patriarchal society but as essential expressions of female experiences and perspectives.

I intend to explore how *TBR* fits into the magical feminist literary tradition. What features make it a magical feminist text? First, the talking walls' magical qualities. Second, Zaib's clairvoyance, her mesmerizing eyes, and her ability to read minds and communicate with spirits. Third, the family's inability to sleep without going through the torments of sleep deprivation and other elements of supernaturalization and defamiliarization make the text a perfect example of magical realism with a Marquezian feel and flavor.

Zaib, a young clairvoyant, has the power to perceive an individual's aura or mind. Her siblings have the hunch that she has excellent mind-reading abilities. The concepts of aura and clairvoyance play a decolonizing role in magical texts. As Zaib approaches Adeel (distant maternal cousin) to say greetings, she reads his filthy intentions. He pulls her towards him before she realizes he is patting her on the firm rear. She feels his lewd hand searing her body, but no one sees it because the room is full of family members conversing and giggling. She resolves to give him a life lesson. In the following terms, Rizvi describes how her mystical piercing look gives her power:

Zaib imagined a scorpion crawling over her face. Then he met her look. Adeel's hand fell away involuntarily and suddenly he felt as if he had been bitten by a poisonous creature and the fiery venom was coursing through his veins and burning the tissue, muscle, and bone in its path. He turned blue, unable to breathe, and clawed at the air as if to escape from the inferno within him. (8)

Upon diverting her gaze from his eyes, he became thoroughly soaked, fatigued, and on the verge of collapsing into the ground. Observing this, his spouse promptly noticed him and hurried to assist, preventing his imminent collapse. I argue that readers tend to be aware of the male gaze, but Rizvi presents a counter-narrative suggesting a woman's stare might be equally intimidating, if not more. The male gaze is considered detrimental, while the woman's gaze is perceived as having a transformative and constructive influence in *TBR*. Rizvi proposes an educational approach aimed towards parents, emphasizing the importance of sensitizing their children to differentiate between positive and negative physical contact and cultivating an awareness of their environment.

Faris contends that the decolonizing styles of magical feminist/realist writings allow the emergence and inclusion of new voices (the marginalized and silenced) into the mainstream. According to Stephen Slemon, magic realism is crucial to postcolonial [feminist] writing. In this regard, Stephen Slemon gives a magical realist work understood as postcolonial discourse.

Zaib has a magical stare that allows her to know the exact intention of a man's desire. When Zaib's intuitive sight first lands on Jalal's hands, she has the eerie feel that they belong to a murderer. Jalal notices her stern gaze, and his hands tremble violently. She tells her father, "This man has the smell of a grave digger. He reeks of dead bodies rotting in damp earth" (65).

There is another occasion when Zaib demonstrates her magical prowess. Rizvi exhorts women to take charge of their own lives. When she saves her father from Sultan Murad, a mean and ruthless feudal lord, is a fine example of magical feminism. The entire episode is narrated in a matter-of-fact narrative style. Rizvi wants to demonstrate that power is not based on gender. No matter your gender, if you are strong, you are. At every turning point, Zaib shows up as the family's savior. Zaib uses her enchanted skills (telepathy) at another crucial moment to save her father. Shah Sultan takes Zaib's father hostage. Since Shahi Manzil's entire family is in the grip of depression, they are working extremely hard to find him, but their efforts are all in vain.

When her father is injured, the bruises are transferred to her body, which is the magical element of the entire scenario. Rizvi mentions Zaib, who points to "her forearm where a purple mark like a fresh bruise began to appear and darken, 'and here,' she pointed her ankles where they could see welts were rising on her delicate white skin . . ." (95). Rizvi emphasizes that spirituality is powerful where science and all other resources of pragmatism fail at times. Here, Rizvi seeks to demonstrate the validity and superiority of mythico-magical knowledge above rational and scientific information.

These things portray the marvelous/magical aspect of postcolonial societies. The people do believe them more than real. I contend that the magical text has a built-in propensity to unsettle the reader whether events occur cerebrally or telepathically. The text's tension is a deliberate choice made by the author. Because he suspends disbelief, the reader maintains the false impression that events are occurring in reality. Whether it is a dream, a fiction, a story, or reality, Rizvi's narrative magic keeps the reader's doubts unresolved and unsettled. According to Leal, magical realism is an attitude towards reality . . . that does not create imaginary worlds in which we can hide from everyday reality (121).

The irreducible element, as defined by David Young and Keith Hollaman, is anything we are unable to explain in terms of the universal principles as they have been expressed in Western empirical language, that is, in terms of "logic, familiar knowledge, or received belief" (7). Pakistani culture includes a belief in ghosts and spirits. The Talking Walls episode is a fine illustration of an irreducible element. Though acknowledged, the incident is not explained. The walls possess omniscience. The reader is under a magical enchantment due to the talking wall event. Chanady argues that "In magical realist texts, the reader can never forget the presence of the supernatural, although the story is narrated in the most realist manner" (66). The reader feels as though he is conversing with ghosts or walls. The induction of the supernatural element sets the tone of the novel. A state of suspended disbelief affects the reader. The implied reader in magical realism texts is trained to accept the narrator's point of view or supernatural reality without challenging the text's presentation of an eerie worldview. It becomes essential for him to embrace it as both fantastical and magically real. Chanady discusses fantastic comprehensively in the following words:

In the fantastic, the dominant world view of the text is very similar to our own, and the laws of verisimilitude coincide largely with ours. Against the background of this logical world, the narrator introduces a level of reality that rational man cannot accept. This is the world of superstition and myth, which contradicts the world of reason to which we are accustomed. The occurrence of the supernatural is often seen as a breach of the normal order of things. (8-9)

Tolstoy's talking walls illustrate defamiliarization: "The narrator of 'Kholstomer', for example is a horse, and it is the horse's point of view (rather than a person's) that makes the story seem unfamiliar" (Shklovsky 16). Since walls talk to Zaib and include her in their "wall-talk club" based on their mental chemistry or mutual compatibility and reciprocation of knowledge, each examines the other, making both a storehouse of knowledge and information (16). Talking walls are unquestionably a fantastical feature in fiction. The walls possess omniscience. The reader experiences time and space disorientation. Zaib hides in the Shahi Manzil's cool crevices in the summer when she needs a break from the oppressive heat. She feels held in a transcendental setting as if sitting in space. Zaib notes:

Zaib began hearing voices around her—imperceptible whisperings at first and then louder though yet incoherent. Then garbled words became comprehensible phrases then sentences . . . When she heard her name, Zaib's already pounding heart thumped deafeningly. Don't be scared. We're friends spoke a soft, baritone voice. (12-13)

I contend that in Pakistani culture, it is widely accepted that "walls have ears, so speak softly" and "in times of crisis, one should consult with walls" are maxims. Rizvi terms the talking walls as a "walk-talk-club" (15). She feels held in a transcendental setting as if sitting in space. According to Faris, "these irreducible elements are well assimilated into the realistic textual environment, rarely causing any comment by narrators or characters, who model such as acceptance for their readers" (8). These sages of ages might have triggered Rizvi to evolve the concept of talking walls. In our society, the reader can easily relate to talking walls. She feels at ease and begins speaking with the walls during the conversation. She has essentially joined the "wall-talk-club" (15). One may say that portraying the entire incident is a good illustration of irreducible components.

The talking wall phenomenon is described so straightforwardly that the very supernatural phenomenon appears to be an everyday occurrence. The example is a fine illustration of how magical realism "naturalizes" the supernatural. Communicating with talking walls represents a spiritual epiphany. Her joy is shared by the walls, who are attracted to her since they find her listener engaging and attentive. She likes their conversational exchanges as well. It creates the impression to the reader as if real discussion is happening. Chanady contends that "the more the reader can identify with the fictitious world, the more strongly he will react to the supernatural events in the text, which are not merely dismissed as symbolic or imaginary by the reader of the fantastic [magical realist text] because they are presented in a convincing manner" (74).

The phenomenal world is present for the reader to experience in *TBR*. Rizvi notes, "The family shared an extraordinary trait that had been passed down to them through the generations . . . They did not sleep, without suffering the tortures of sleep deprivation. (6). "We don't feel tired, Zaib continues to her spouse, Murtaza. Our bodies take a little break

during the day as we focus on petty tasks or do housework. I have said enough. After that, we are revived" (Rizvi 164). The reader feels he is watching a suspense thriller or reading science fiction. The event strikes me as fantastic. I assume that Rizvi might have taken the idea of open eyes from The Holy Quran, Surah Kahaf, (Cave of seven sleepers who slept for 309 years) Allah says "You would have thought them awake though they were asleep" (The Nobel Quran 18/7).

Zaib's fantastic ability causes others to tremble due to her piercing gaze. Although Zaib is real, she has enchanted powers and is well aware of her magical qualities. Her mother (Jahanara) sometimes stares at her to prevent humiliation in front of visitors, which can awaken revenge by her penetrating glance. As already mentioned, she can read people's auras and minds because she has an "uncanny, piercing gaze" and other special abilities. Even reptiles and animals could communicate with her. Here are a few instances revealing how she has used her magical abilities. *TBR* creates a zone where the real and the fantastical coexist. The male employees were very alarmed by the discovery of a black snake in the corner of grandmother's chamber, and the maid, Zaib, who was passing by with one of her siblings, Jahangir, decided to take charge of the issue. According to Rizvi, Zaib returned the glare and locked her gaze even more viciously. The miserable creature turned around and slithered away after conceding defeat (11). The reader tries to determine which transformation she underwent as part of the event that caused the cobra to retreat. According to a matter-of-fact narrative, she pushed the snake to depart the area with her spiritual, magical stare. However, communication through gaze is mystical, telepathic, and spiritual, even though the cobra's departure is real. The actual world and the spiritual world coexist. While reading magical realist texts reader always remains unsettled.

Unsettling doubts make the reader distracted, contradictory, and disorganized as he struggles to make sense of specific occurrences in the story's context. There are many instances in Rizvi's writing where the implied reader feels unnerved and unsettled. In magical realism, the reader is assumed to be having fun without doubting the phenomenon's reality or separating himself from the reality of the made-up universe. Gonzalez Echevarria states, "magical realism gives us a world view that does not depend on natural or physical laws, and not based on objective reality" (19). In magical realist texts, protagonists experience non-linearity.

Zaib has a few out-of-body experiences, which is a fantastic illustration of how time, space, and identity are disrupted. The reader experiences events as if they occur in hyper or virtual reality. The magico-realist text's narrator flips the suggested reader's perspective by treating the extraordinary as commonplace and the supernatural as every day. The antinomy is resolved to prevent the reader from noticing a logical conflict. According to what is said, Zaib is skilled at having an out-of-body experience. The entire family is concerned about the kidnapping of Qasim Ali Shah, Zaib's father, by Sultan Murad, a feudal. They are experiencing trauma. As noted by Rizvi, "It seemed all life had stopped and the family was living in a time capsule" (96). The phrase "time capsule" unsettles the reader about whether she is flying in a spacecraft or a time machine, regardless of whether he is watching a science fiction or thriller movie. The reader thinks he is reading a science fiction, where events are deemed improbable but fit inside the text's logical framework. The bounds of cyclical time are distorted and disrupted by the image. Whether it is a spiritual or physical journey, it further unnerves the reader. Rizvi exhibits authorial reluctance. The reader is not given information about the 'trip' in detail.

Marvelous realism is a kind of magical realism that is based on native culture. Marvelous realism is a distinctive feature of Latin American identity that serves as a means of resistance against the dominant European influence. Marvelous realism is native mythico-magic, as we find in *TBR*. In her literature, Rizvi has illustrated the marvelous realism practiced in Pakistan. The context of Zaib's impending marriage, which concerns everyone, especially the young club, intrigues these cases. According to Rizvi, "The gardener came to Qurut-ul-ain (Zaib's mother-in-law) anxiously claiming that the shrubs and trees were doggedly refusing to get on the tasks of spring and no new sprouts had been seen, although there were significant signs of growth in every other house or haveli in the vicinity" (141). Bowers states that "magic realism is related to art forms reaching for a new clarity of reality, and marvelous realism refers to a concept representing the mixture of representing differing world views and approaches to what constitutes reality (16). She offers her viewpoint and advises him to exercise patience because things will improve following Zaib's wedding. Since plants are also living things, they are affected to some extent if people are unhappy and feeling bad. It appears as though superstition and religion are ingrained in the globe.

Moreover, the passing of the family patriarch, Qasim Ali Shah, impacts every aspect of life, including how family members and neighbors perceive their environment. The sky and nature both weep with the grieving. The simple act of dying alters the entire situation brought about by the wonderful indigenous realist culture. Rizvi documents it details:

Now the strange phenomena reached the ears of the family. It rained for three days in the town from the day of Qasim's death as soon as soyam [third day of death] was over. It had not rained at this time of the year in the history of Dera Murshid. A burning tree was found in the middle of the forest: one solitary tree consumed by flames burning to ashes

but affecting the surrounding area. People talked of the events without surprise or consternation. After all, it was Qasim who had left the world and nature mourned his loss too. (252)

It seems as if Rizvi is under the magical spell of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Five years of rain fell in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Another connection is that when Jose Arcadio Buendia, the family patriarch, dies, yellow flowers rain. A few times later, while the carpenter measured the coffin, they observed a slight rain of tiny yellow flowers through the window (Marquiz 72). After 51 years, 9 months, and 4 days, Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza met in Marquiz's *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Every event has a subjective feeling.

Postcolonial people hold unwavering trust in spiritual aspect of magic and consider it a "healing activity." It is an addition to empirical research. In this way, the phrase "magical real" does not seem contradictory to postcolonial people. Both concepts serve as a supplement to and a complement to one another for postcolonial people. Even Europeans have to admit it and classify magic as a "healing activity," but the Azande people took magic very seriously. The action is carried out with tremendous faith, even when someone is about to pass away. It is as real to them as magic. The "healing activity" contains a profound symbolic importance that renders it real. Leach finds himself in a conundrum to distinguish whether it is magical or non-magical; the act of "healing activity" carries a great symbolic significance that makes it real (504). Such treatment is acceptable and valued over science in the postcolonial world. The public places greater faith in this form of healing than in modern medicine. The issue is a matter of faith to the populace. Asad treated the destitute girl without using a stethoscope or other medical equipment, giving the impression that he was more of a spiritual healer than a medical professional. He is portrayed in this episode of treatment as more of a messiah than a doctor. He equally places greater value on mythico-magical realism (mantra chanting) and spirituality than science. Rizvi's writing creates dichotomies to help the reader determine what is real and what is a mystery:

He now knew he was nothing but a mere chalice through which the forces had chosen to work and help those who had no one. He did not matter in the scheme of things . . . But thousands who thronged at his door from that day on, he was a savior and nothing less; a demi-god who healed the sick and gave solace to the poor. (Rizvi 31)

According to Warnes, "faith based magical realism often assumes a vatic function, calling upon the reader to suspend rational-empirical judgments about the way things are in favor of an expanded order of reality. Frequently, though not always, it does this in order to recuperate a non-Western cultural world view" (12). In this part of the world (Pakistan and India) people prefer to visit Moulvi (spiritual healer) rather than a doctor for a patient's checkup because they believe in this religious-cultural faith system. I argue that their belief system is one of the dominating factors. Now, I would like to shift my discussion to patriarchy if patriarchy is not the central but an essential component of feminist postcolonial debate. I intend to discuss the concept of patriarchy by contextualizing my primary text to clarify the idea because of its significance in patriarchal discourse.

Walby defines patriarchy, "as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (20). The example of Khuda Baksh would help understand patriarchal thinking, Khuda Baksh fields were destroyed by Fida Hussain on the pretense that he would not offer his daughter's hand in marriage, Rizvi condemns their patriarchal mentality. When the issue is brought before the jirga, it decided after hearing from all the witnesses and pertinent parties that "Neelo should be given to Fida Hussain as his wife, but in return, Khuda Baksh would be compensated twice over for the loss of his crops and be exempted from having to give dowry to his daughter" (80). I contend that patriarchy views women as a resource to be traded.

A woman's preferences are ignored by patriarchs, who believe that she should be silent regarding marriage. In contrast, religion recognizes a woman's freedom to make her own decisions, which has previously been restrained by her father, or institutions like jirga, which stands for patriarchal or matriarchal ideologies. In this instance, a woman is used as a tool or commodity to clean up a man's messes. The woman's or her family's status is established by her father or spouse's social class or status. Women are reduced to insignificance and treated like commodities since they do not contribute in terms of material or economic resources. According to feminist critics like Rizvi, marriage's institution must be examined. Marriage appears to be a coercive institution. Most of the relationships in the novel between couples are unpleasant or compromised. The complicated family system in Pakistani culture adds to its already compromised complexity.

Zaib gets a premonition that something terrible would occur that might significantly change her life. Without seeking her consent, her father informed her that she would be married in four months, and he wished for her to accept the news joyfully without revealing any details about the potential groom. She does not say anything but is internally shocked, apathetic, and indifferent. She feels confused and unsure of how to communicate her thoughts. She has a negative view of how events play out and realizes that marriage is a hostage for having a mistress in the home, which has been legalized. She expresses her inner feelings in the words below:

Zaib's heart sank. She did not incline to leave the comfort and security of her home and go to another house and put up with different rules and in-laws who could be nasty, not to mention a husband she had never met or may not turn out to be the devil himself. It would be bondage she could never hope to escape. (115)

In patriarchal cultures, a father's control over reproduction gives him the authority to name his daughter (the product) and regard his children and wife (or spouses) as his chattels. As we see with Zaib, this is how exploitation begins. Women are swapped because they are commoditized, consumed, circulated, and exploited to support socio-cultural existence. Men in patriarchal settings praise, acknowledge, and reward their efforts. According to Firestone, "reproduction is the basis of women's subordination by men" (qtd. in Walby 66). When purchased, their fathers and brothers—not their mothers—receive the cash. Women are placed under the father or husband's social status, which leads to inequity and discrimination. Therefore, as a transaction, they are handed from one man to another or from one group of men to another and objectified like commodities (Irigaray 171). How cruel of patriarchy that such a family heirloom (Zaib) is not included in this most important choice of her life. Men make commerce of women with men not with women because it involves wealth. Irigaray states that, "The economy——in both the narrow and broad sense ——that is in place in our societies thus requires that women lend themselves to alienation in consumption, and to exchanges in which they do not participate, and that men be exempted from being used and circulated like commodities" (Walby 172).

The terrible lives of their dependents, especially women, have been made possible by patriarchy. Women are taken advantage of because of their sexual vulnerability, economic dependence, and social uncertainty. bell hooks in her essay in "Understanding Patriarchy" enlists the rules of patriarchy, "blind obedience——the foundation upon which patriarchy stands; the repression of all emotions except fear; the destruction of individual willpower and the repression of thinking whenever it departs from the authority figure's way of thinking" (2). Baber Ameer's wife, Ayesha, is subjected to patriarchal abuse by her husband. Ayesha is a disturbed soul, according to Zaib, who observes her over lunch. Most of the time, she fixes her gaze on nothingness and seems disinterested in existence. As Zaib notes, "in her a drooping flower that had once been pink and bright" had lost its vitality. It is intriguing how Rizvi introduces Mumtaz, Ayesha's only kid. Zaib refers to her as "the bright cheer of a sunflower tossing its head in the breeze, completely out of place in the putrefying surroundings" (160). She has read the auras of two men (Akbar and Baber), and the atrocity they have committed in their lives is seen in their eyes. The patriarchy of "the house thinks that the foundation of the house stood solidly on the belief men must keep their wives on a short leash with the help of fear and subjugation" (Rizvi 181). I argue that this approach transforms the house into a living hell. Patriarchal oppression won't let people grow and glow to their full potential physically, intellectually, emotionally, and psychologically.

The argument made in the novel is that patriarchy limits and undercuts women's agency. Numerous stories convinced Zaib, patriarchy is a monster that sucks and robs one's peace and happiness. It seldom encourages women to become feminists but breeds fear and subjugation. Men and women should complement one another; neither should be misogynistic. Men and women should not be seen as rivals; instead, they should be able to coexist in peace and harmony and make the world a better place to live.

To conclude, I attempt how successfully Rizvi incorporates magical feminist elements in *TBR*. I also contextualize Pakistani brand of marvelous realism in this article. Rizvi appears to be well conversant in magical feminism and marvelous realist strategies used by masters of the genre, like Toni Morrison, Isabel Allende, Laura Esquivel, Gabriel García Marquez, and Ben Okari. It offers a social critique to oppressive and exploitative institutions, including patriarchy, marriage, and feudalism. The analysis also reveals that women from lower social classes are considered commodities to be used and abused. Through a magical feminist lens, the research critically examines the text. Rizvi seems to be arguing that institutions like marriage, patriarchy, and religious institutions must be drastically revolutionized so that they may contribute to playing a positive, constructive, and healthy role in society.

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