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Harry Potter Series: From Realism to Magic Realism

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Abstract:

The huge success of Harry Potter Series registered it as a valuable addition in the corpus of Children's Literature. The Sorcerer's wand is not only worthless, but also a mere stack of laughter in our contemporary real world. There lies in fact a thin line between the harsh ached reality of day to day existence and the magical wand and the world of Sorcerers. As a master story teller, J.K. Rowling narrates the popular stories to children, kidult, and adults alike. Though the positive response for the series is worldwide, the question arises – Is she herself a real wizard? In fact Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl, J.R.R. Tolkein, and George Martin incorporate magic in their work in a wise manner. But Harry Potter Series is an amalgamation of these conventions and it is unique because it creates a complete new world as parallel to our actual world. Instead of taking the readers to the realm of enchantment, reality is superimposed in the arena of magic and fantasy.

Keywords: Racial Prejudice, Corruption, Marginalized Class, Harry Potter, Institutional Racism, Contemporary Society, Trauma.

The word Realism is derived from the French word *realisme*, which reflects the verisimilitude of our contemporary society to emphasize the substantive sub contemporary life and society as it exists. Balzac, the founder of realism depicted the verisimilitude of French society in his magnum opus '*La Comadie Humaine*' or '*The Human Comedy*', which is a series of novels and short stories – over eighty works of folks that upholds French Society. He is the pioneer, who paved this way to focus his work on the lives of ordinary French citizen. Further Emile Zola, Dostoevsky, George Eliot, Charles Dickens carried on the tradition.

In France realism became a force in 1850 s, while the art of painter Gustave Courbet, presents a 'slice of life', which is totally free from any, moral, emotional, or aesthetic sensation. Jules Francois Felix Husson, known as Champfleury, published a collection of essays entitled *Realisme*, which is an anticipation of Emile Zola's idea, regarding the need of scrupulous documentation and freedom from all moral constraints. In England the major

figures, who pioneered the tradition of realism are George Eliot, Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, George Meredith, and Thomas Hardy. Though their fictions unmask the crude reality of our contemporary life explicitly, but Rowling's Harry Potter Series, under the garb of magic realism, contemplates the social reality of our mundane life.

Many critics have raised questions about the excessive use of magic realism in Harry Potter Series, and underestimated it as a mere stack of popular culture, that cannot live long, yet the magic of Harry Potter Series lies in the intimate documentation of contemporary reality. Indeed Shira Wolosky, in *The Riddles of Harry Potter* declares – “Magic in Harry Potter works in two directions. There is a presence of magic in the ordinary world, showing Britain to be a world full of hidden mystery. But there is also the portrayal of magic world in concrete detail, with an exactness that, in a kind of inverse realism, makes its workings seem vividly actual. This is not, however, in order to create an alternative to the real world, but to reflect and interpret the familiar world we inhabit.” (Wolosky *The Riddles of Harry Potter* 3)

Class distinction is a very popular phenomenon that exists from the mediaeval time period and continues till at the age of globalization. Somewhere it appears as caste differentiation though serves the purpose of class distinction. The arrangement of our society according to hierarchy, where some of the people enjoy the privilege of master class, and most of the common mass is treated as underdogs become a general rule. It is also a false consciousness that is repeatedly reflected in different genres of literature and serves as an ‘Ideological State Apparatus’. In the very first book of Harry Potter Series, ‘*Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*’, Draco Malfoy advised Harry Potter – “You’ll soon find out some of the wizarding family are much better than others, Potter. You want to go and make friends with the wrong sort. I can help you there.” (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* 81) While the plot proceeds Draco uttered – ‘You hang around the riff raff like Weasley’s and Hagrid and it’ll rub off on you’. (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* 81) emphasized the ego of being superior because of the class demarcation.

The wizarding world of Harry Potter consists of two groups – The Pure Blood and the Muggle Born. Pure Blood is a term used to denote that sort of witches and wizards, whose parents are both wizards, without any contamination of muggle blood. Albeit there are twenty eight sacred families, maintaining the ancestral origin without intermingling with the common lot of Muggle Born, till some of the names are simply wiped out only for their

interests in muggles, which turns them in a nuisance and a mere stock of laughter before the prestigious, Pure Blood wizarding family. *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix*, is an example that traces the violent racism under the garb of magic realism – “Sirius mimed the blasting tapestry with a wand and laughed sourly. Harry however did not laugh; he was too busy staring at the names to the right of Andromeda’s burn mark. A double line of gold embroidery linked Narcissa Black with Lucius Malfoy, and a single vertical gold line from their names led to the name of Draco.” (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix* 113) The Pure Bloods are specifically associated with Salazar Slytherin, the founder of Slytherin house of noble Hogwarts Institution. *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix* states that Salazar Slytherin, a prejudiced cynic comes to the conclusion to teach only those who are of purest ancestry, which enhanced the racial discrimination, thereby leading to the path of institutional racism – “Said Slytherin, We’ll teach just those whose ancestry is purest”, that enhanced the racial discrimination, thereby leading to the path of institutional racism.” (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix* 205)

In *Harry Potter and Prisoner of Azkaban*, the same prejudice gets reflected in the teasing attitude of Draco Malfoy, a member of Slytherin House towards the half giant Hagrid, who is appointed as a teacher of Magical Creatures by Dumbledore. The rude behaviour and the insulting words by Draco Malfoy surprised the readers – “God, this place is going to the dogs’, said Malfoy loudly. That Oaf teaching classes, my father will have a fit when I tell him.” (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* 87) Later While Malfoy called Hermione a mud blood; it upholds the biased attitude of some wizards to keep the pure bloods in a superior position, while treating the muggles, and half-bloods as underdogs that reflects the verisimilitude of our contemporary society. To maintain the prestige and status according to the hierarchy, even friendship and mixing up with the riff raff, muggle born is abominable, which can make one filthy, which is revealed by the portrait of Sirius Black’s mother in *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix* – “Filth Scum! By product of dirt and violence’s! Half breeds, mutants, freaks, be gone from this place! How dare you to befoul the house of fathers – Yooooou! She howled, her eyes popping at the sight of the man Sirius. Blood traitor, abomination, shame of my own flesh.’ (Rowling *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix* 115)

But the paradoxical fact is that the praxis to maintain the legacy of perfect race aggravates the violence and vile words. ‘Avada Kedarva’ not only emits death, but also poisoned the lovely family bonds as well as the filial relationship, which is portrayed in the

words of Lord Voldemort in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* – “You stand Harry Potter upon the remains of my father, he hissed softly. A muggle and a fool . . . like your dear mother. But they both had their uses, did they not? Your mother died to defend you as a child . . . and I killed my father, and see how useful he has proved himself, in death. . .” (Rowling *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* 560) The extreme prejudice revealed in his fulfilment of the vows, which he utters with a warm satisfaction in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* – “. . . I revenged myself upon him, that fool who gave me his name . . . Tom Riddle. . .” (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* 561)

Pure Blood mania reaches in the zenith when Lord Voldemort created a holocaust to maintain the quality and perfection and his disciples supports him by thinking that muggle born are liable to be killed that is revealed by the words of Sirius Black in *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix* – ‘No, No but believe me they thought Voldemort had the right idea, they were all for the purification of wizarding race, getting rid of Muggle born and Pure bloods in charge.’ (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix* 112). This specific belief and attitude is carried on by the descendants of Slytherin House, who even after the disappearance of their Lord keeps on thinking about the death of a mud blood, when the chamber of Secrets will open after fifty years.

Rowling’s Harry Potter Series is very tricky, which uses the race blind society of Hogwarts to pursue a same issue, through proxy. Harry Potter’s world has striking resemblances between Nazi regimes of World War Second. Pure bloods are better than half-bloods or muggle born, and his attempt to wipe out those impurities to keep the race pure is very similar to Adolf Hitler’s belief that Aryan race were the master race and all other people would follow them to create a perfect society. Like Lord Voldemort, Hitler is a strict dictator who encourages genocide against Jews to maintain the legacy of perfect race.

Recently race becomes such a discriminating factor which constantly threatens so many White people for whom it simply becomes ‘the world that shall not be named.’ But under the veneer of magical world which is consist of wizard, elf, werewolf, centaurs; this world can be safely explored. Many non-white characters are identified in the wizarding world of Harry Potter, Such as Angelina Johnson ‘a tall black white girl with long braided hair’; Dean Thomas is represented as ‘Black boy, even taller than Ron’. Rowling uses the Harry Potter Series to provide a moral frame work that encompasses race discrimination.

On the other hand, Harry Potter Series vividly sketched the oppressed, marginalized group on the garb of House Elves. Each and every pure blood family uses to keep an elf for house hold work. They are treated like a vermin, who in spite of being devoted and dedicated to the masters can be chopped in old age, which they accepts as their destiny. The portraiture of Kreacher, in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, who still tries to follow the order of her dead landlady – ‘Kreacher would never move anything from its proper place in Master’s house’, said the house elf, then muttered very fast, ‘Mistress would never forgive Kreacher if the tapestry was thrown out, seven centuries; it has been in the family, Kreacher must save it, and Kreacher will not let the master and the blood traitors, and the brats destroy it. (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix* 110). They are bound to work constantly according to the wizard without being paid that indicates the subordination and brings the reader immediately in the real world of Subaltern, and remind one of Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak’s questions – *Can the Subaltern Speak?*

Another Side of immense corruption is reflected by Cornelius Fudge, Dolores Umbridge, and Rita Skeeter. Cornelius Fudge utmost attempt to hide the truth of Voldemort’s return, only to maintain his position as the minister of magic, is a sheer attack to the contemporary politicians whose only aim is to keep their position upright, without serving the society. Further the process of jurisdiction, in *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix* reflects the corruption of courts and explores the violent reality. Cornelius Fudge’s utmost attempt to conceal the truth that Harry Potter is compelled to produce a patronus, only to resist the dementors, he met unexpectedly in an area surrounded by muggles, is reflected vividly in *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix* –

‘He excoriated a piece of Parchment from the file before him, took a deep breath, and read. The charges against the accused are as follows: That he did knowingly, deliberately, and in full awareness of illegality of his actions, having received a previous written warning from the Minister of Magic on a similar charge, produce a Patronus Charm in a Muggle inhabited area, in the presence of a Muggle, on August the Second at twenty three minutes past nine, which constitutes an offence under paragraph C of the decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery, 1875, and also under the section thirteen of the International Confederation of a Wizard’s Statue of Secrecy. You are Harry James Potter, of number four, Privet drive, Little Whinging Surrey? Fudge said, glaring at Harry over the top of his parchment. ‘Yes’, said Harry. ‘You received an official warning from the Ministry for using illegal magic three years ago, did you not?’ ‘Yes, but - ‘And yet you conjured a Patronus on

the night of the second of August? Said Fudge ‘yes’, said Harry ‘but’ - ‘Knowing that you are not permitted to use magic outside school while you are under the age of seventeen?’ ‘Yes’, but - ‘Fully aware that you were in a close proximity to a muggle at the time?’ ‘Yes’, said Harry angrily, ‘but I only used it because we were – (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix* 140),

The remarkable feature is that the cause behind the action of Harry Potter is intentionally ignored by Fudge, which is the commonest trick of our contemporary, corrupted lawyers that vividly reflects the picture of realism in the society. While representing the system of jurisdiction and administration Rowling avoids all the fantastical, imaginary, and mythical details. On the other hand the descriptive and evocative details, inclusion of incident from social strata, and representing it in the manner of real life, can include Rowling as the proponent of realism.

The pecuniary motif of the journalist, and publishing fake news only to make the dailies popular is a very common event in our contemporary world, which is ridiculed by the characteristic Portrait of Rita Skeeter in *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix* – ‘Rita gave Hermione a long, hard look. Then, leaning forward across the table toward her, she said in a business like tone, ‘All right, Fudge is leaning on the *Prophet*, but it comes to the same thing. They won’t print a story that shows Harry in a good light. Nobody wants to read it. It’s against the public mood. This last Azkaban breakout has got people worried enough. People just don’t want to believe you-know-Who’s – back. ‘So the *Daily Prophet* exists to tell people what they want to hear, does it? Said Hermione scathingly.

Rita sat up straight again, her eyebrows raised, and drained her glass of fire whisky. ‘The *Prophet* exists to sell itself, you silly girl,’ she said coldly (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix* 567)

The business policy, sheer marketing strategy, portrays the socio economic culture of western world that neatly indicates the statement of Fredric Jameson – “the realistic mode . . . is one of the most complex and vital realization of Western Culture, to which it is . . . well-nigh unique.” (Habib, *A History of Literary Criticism* 474) Though art is fictitious and not amenable to scientific laws, yet it produce a spontaneous, vital flow that is not necessarily life-like, but like-life. In fact, literature is an outlet of the raw material or experience of life.

Now-a-days, the increasing range of boys, who are dissatisfied with the way they look, uncertain about their futures, is a cause of anxiety. Despair and depression constitute mental wounds that lead one towards trauma. Barbara Stauch argues that, in long term studies in which teenagers voluntarily involved their brains, which are scanned on a regular basis, and as a result the mood swings are often regarded as aberrant behaviour. Apart from psychological changes, different chemical reactions are responsible for neurotic affects that stimulates the teenagers to the path of self-harming. Recently suffering from trauma, becomes a common picture of our contemporary life. According to Kimberley Reynolds in *Radical Children's Literature* - "In united Kingdom, one in four people will suffer from a form of mental illness, in the course of their lifetime." (Reynolds, *Radical Children's Literature* 90)

Since emotions are often captured better in abstract forms, Rowling applied this technique in Harry Potter Series, which serves as a medicine of despair and trauma, thereby reinforcing the necessity of magic realism in our contemporary life. The feeling of hopelessness described by the characters in the novels, while confronting a dementor, and also the powerlessness of the victim to overcome the attack by dementors are similar with the young people, who suffer from severe mental difficulties and traumatic disasters. Colman Noctor, in his article '*Putting Harry Potter on Couch*', states –

'The impressive aspect of Harry Potter Stories is that although the dangerous creatures are fantastical and magical, the strength and depth of character needed to overcome them are very real and pertinent to overcome much adolescent challenge. Rowling (2004) creates Harry as a character, who must dig depths of his psyche to find an inner strength to overcome his inner and outer demons. He must exercise will, determination, and bravery to defend himself against both the magical world of wizards and the internal torments of teenage boy who feel alone and different his peers.' (Noctor, *Putting Harry Potter on the Couch* 585-586). Under the veneer of dementors, Rowling presents a vignette of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder syndrome.

Harry Potter Series as a pedagogue of our society paves the path to overcome all the obstacles. Under the camouflage of magic is intimately intermingled with reality that fosters a same degree of fantasia for all the instalments. Several problems occurred in Harry Potter Series that can be hardly resolved by the magical world. As all of us suffer from the trials and tribulations of everyday life, not only a child, but also an adult can be asked to pay an imaginary visit to Hogwarts. Because, it offers a happy interlude to the to the tormented

psyche and bruised souls of human beings, children or adults who are burning alike under the throes of post human, globalised world.

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