



## The Elements Of Magic Realism In Uday Prakash's Novella *Paul Gomra Ka Scooter*

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the elements of magic realism in Uday Prakash's novella *Paul Gomra ka Scooter*, where the boundaries between the real and the surreal dissolve into a richly layered narrative. The story traces the life of Paul Gomra, a failed Hindi poet and government clerk, whose decision to buy a scooter becomes a turning point in his otherwise uneventful existence. What follows is a series of fantastical events—visions of tribal warriors taming an iron animal, dreamlike journeys across Delhi, absurd public speeches, and ghostly appearances on GT Road—all merging the ordinary with the extraordinary. The scooter, standing like a mute iron animal, becomes a symbol of technology, aspiration, and eventual ruin. The narrative critiques post-liberalization India, highlighting the absurdity, marginalization, and existential despair of small-town intellectuals. Magic realism is used not to escape reality but to expose its deeper, disfigured truth.

**Keywords:** Magic Realism, dream sequence, hallucination, alienation, despair.

Magic realism, as a narrative mode, blends magical or fantastical elements with realistic settings in such a natural, matter-of-fact way that the extraordinary becomes part of ordinary life. The term was first used in the 1920s to describe a group of surrealist German painters, but it later came to be associated with literature. Writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Isabel Allende, Günter Grass, Italo Calvino, John Fowles, and Salman Rushdie used this style to combine realistic depictions of everyday life with dreamlike events, myths, and folklore. Their stories often shift between the ordinary and the magical without warning, making it difficult to separate fantasy from reality. Brenda Cooper sees magic realism as a way to express the unity of opposites—where the logical and the illogical, the real and the imagined, coexist. Nigerian novelist Ben Okri adds that magic realism reflects a state of mind shaped by hallucinations, shifting perceptions, and uncertain truths.

*These writers weave, in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and details, together with fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as with material derived from myths and fairy tales.* (Abrams and Harpham 258)

In postcolonial literature, magic realism plays a deeper role. As Pramod K. Nayar notes in *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction*, the term—borrowed from visual arts—has been used to describe the works of several postcolonial writers such as Marquez, Rushdie, and Okri. Their novels—like *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, *The Famished Road*, and *Midnight's Children*—present magical events within believable, real-world settings. These stories often mix different time periods, where past and present flow into each other seamlessly, complicating the narrative timeline. Ghosts, spirits, and humans may share the same space, and myths or rumors are treated as facts. Magic realism also allows authors to bring back local traditions, beliefs, and cultural practices that existed before colonial influence. In this sense, magic realism is not just about fantasy; it's a way to challenge dominant

narratives and reclaim cultural identity. It is within this literary framework that Uday Prakash's story *Paul Goma ka Scooter* can be explored for its rich use of magical realist elements.

*Magic realism conflates the realistic with the dream sequence. Thus, the reader is hard put to distinguish between the fantasy element and the described reality... Another prominent feature of the Magic Realist novel is the mixing up of time sequence... Magic realist novels also use a great deal of indigenous beliefs, superstitions, rumors, and myths alongside real events so that the line between historical fact and fictions break down... One way of defying magic realism is to say that events in a magic realist novel do not obey known and established laws of science but may be seen and perceived only as inexplicable and fantastic.* (Nayar 237)

Uday Prakash's story *Paul Gomra ka Scooter* revolves around the life of a middle-aged Hindi poet, Paul Gomra, who lives in Kavi Nagar, a colony in Ghaziabad, and works at the office of a national daily near ITO Flyover on Bahadur Shah Zafar Road. Approaching the age of forty-five, Paul begins gaining weight, developing a protruding belly—his so-called “fraud pouch”—despite a plain diet of roti and potatoes. His name confuses people, and he laughingly claims, “I am a Hun,” when asked about his origins. Though revolutionary in his thoughts and an advocate of social change, Paul remains deeply insecure about his job. Despite working at the same office for many years without promotion or recognition, he lacks the courage to quit. His fear of job loss is so intense that it once gave him a mild heart attack, and on another occasion, he was found inside a 12-foot-deep roadside pit, pleading with the darkness not to fire him. Paul is skilled in traditional tasks like proofreading and layout and has a decent grasp of history, but he struggles with understanding the present. Rapid technological changes and the onset of globalization leave him baffled, highlighting the growing disconnect between him and the world around him.

It was a turning point in history—East Germany and the USSR had vanished from the world map, and socialism was collapsing across Europe and Asia. At the same time, Paul Gomra was puzzled by the rapid disappearance of Hindi magazines and newspapers in Delhi, unable to link this to the global shifts. The market had taken over everything—villages, towns, homes—all transforming into shops. Even family ties, like those between father and son or husband and wife, were now ruled by market forces. A sparkling new era of saleable women and machine-like earning men had arrived.

*Aurat bikau or mard kamau ka mahan chaka-chak yug aa gya tha.* (PGKS 37)

Among the surreal and unsettling episodes in *Paul Gomra ka Scooter* are the stories of two new age young women—whose sudden rise to fame mirrors the rapidly changing, market-driven world around them. The 17-year-old daughter of a hospital sweeper became a millionaire overnight after appearing in a ten-second advertisement for a shaving blade. In the ad, she posed naked on a giant blade, conveying a sense of bliss through her facial expressions alone. The ad's impact was so powerful that seven out of ten males felt a sexual desire, and a celebrated painter declared in an interview that he had watched it over 150 times and would dedicate the next two years to painting only her.

Another girl, once a primary school teacher from Chhapra, Bihar, left her job and eloped to Delhi. She starred in a bold commercial for *The Black Horse* beer, where she appeared in a dramatic scene on a black Arabian horse. Her body and the product (beer foam) merged so seamlessly on screen that it created a sensation in advertising circles. The ad was widely discussed in media panels and expert forums, and it led to a 27% rise in the brand's sales. Paul Gomra observed all this in disbelief, as society moved from the machine age into an overwhelming electronic era.

*Sitting astride the rough back of a muscular black Arabian horse, she drew out a bottle of beer named The Black Horse from beneath her transparent undergarments and poured it over her breasts. And there, atop the horse, she herself began to dissolve into beer froth. What remained on the rugged horseback was the foam of (A. M.)—slowly transforming into the brand of beer itself.* (PGKS 38, my translation)

In the surreal world surrounding Paul Gomra, children played traditional games like gilly-danda with dinosaurs and fairies, and offered chocolates to mythological figures like Hanuman, Bhishma Pitamah, and Krishna, while enjoying a drink called McDevel soda. Local thugs now wielded weapons powerful

enough to demolish buildings, and violence—bombings, shootings, and destruction—had become a routine part of life. Paul found himself unable to make sense of it all. Godmen and ascetics travelled in air-conditioned cars and struck international arms deals for hefty commissions. A yogi once buried in meditation had now opened luxury hotels. The country's cabinet waded through mud to kiss the dangling feet of a Baba perched on a tree for the last 50 years. A violent dacoit's life story became a blockbuster. A man abusing Gandhi gained instant fame, and it seemed as though the ghost of Nadir Shah haunted state transport Red-Line buses, crushing innocents daily.

*Nadir Shah's bloodthirsty genie had taken possession of the thousands of crimson-hued buses of the State Road Transport, and each day, it ran rampant, grinding women, children, and unsuspecting souls beneath its merciless wheels. (PGKS 39, my translation)*

One evening, utterly exhausted, Paul Gomra boarded a bus from Delhi to Ghaziabad. Despite the discomfort of the hard seat, he fell asleep and missed his stop by three kilometers. Hungry and worn out—he had shared his office lunch as always—he imagined asking his wife for four rotis the moment he got home. But when he rang the bell of his modest flat, a surreal scene awaited him. Instead of his wife Sneh Lata, a glamorous Mehar Jessia lookalike opened the door—hair styled like a fashion shoot, glowing skin, designer lingerie, and the scent of high-end perfume filling the room. His injured son Mantu was dancing energetically to a Madonna song. Was this fatigue or the dizzying invasion of globalization? That night, while watching a soft porn film on Star Movies and being intimate with this unfamiliar, hyper-modern version of his wife, Paul Gomra felt his ego stir—and he resolved to take two major decisions that would change his life.

*Upon reaching the flat, he rang the doorbell. As the door opened, he nearly stumbled in surprise. It was not his wife, Sneh Lata Saxena, who had answered—but the renowned model, Mehr Jessia. Her hair, curled with rollers and conditioner, gleamed under the lights, dried to perfection and shimmering as it quivered gently in the breeze of the ceiling fan. Once dusky, her complexion now appeared tinged with shades of light green and sky blue. Her body exuded the delicate fragrance of Chantilly, the famed eau de cologne from Montreal. (PGKS 40, my translation)*

That night, Paul Gomra took two revolutionary and catalytic decisions. The first had roots in his identity—his name. Born Ram Gopal, his father, a Hindi teacher fond of many languages, had named him so to balance the spiritual tug-of-war between Ram and Krishna, inspired by a mad principal who opposed even “Jai Ram Ji Ki.” But in the new global era, Ram Gopal sounded archaic—like Lallu Lal or Sdashukh—so he reversed it, becoming “Paul Gomra,” a name better suited to postmodern airs. The second decision was deeper: a resolve to adapt to a world driven by media, technology, and markets. His thoughts swirled with modern tragedies—Mr M. A., a billionaire who rose from rags, married a heroine, then died by suicide; the sweeper's daughter, now a ravaged model; the primary teacher, who met a grotesque end in a hotel barbecue. The grotesque and the fantastic had fused with the real—this was the age he now chose to face.

In a strange, fevered moment of daydreaming, Ram Gopal began seeing his traditional, plump wife morph into dazzling avatars—first as Meher Jessia, then as the scantily clad teacher-turned-model astride the Arabian horse. Amid this surreal metamorphosis, a moment of epiphany struck him. He felt reborn. The time had come to shed the weight of tradition—Ram Gopal was too rooted, too Lallu Lal. He dismantled his name, shuffled its pieces like puzzle tiles, and from this remix emerged Paul Gomra—a name with the zing of Apache Indian, Louis Banks, or TK Benji. Benji, after all, was just a stylised Banerjee, just as Mukherjis had become Mokenjis. And hadn't *Neel Darpan* exposed this slavish clan? Even Nehru, in *Glimpses of World History*, misnamed the banned play a poem. Yet, the same nation mourned K.D. Mokenji, Bharat Ratna and supposed freedom fighter. That night, possessed by new selfhood, Ram Gopal cried, “Paul Gomra! Paul Gomra!” startling his wife, and proclaimed himself a great Hindi poet with a new name - Paul Gomra.

Exactly 55 minutes after his first momentous decision, when the clock struck two, Paul Gomra made the second most transformative decision of his life: to buy a scooter. For 22 years, he had battled the relentless tides of humanity on Delhi's overstuffed public buses, commuting from Ghaziabad's Kavi Nagar to ITO Bridge. He had endured the elbows, the sweat, the cacophony, and the indignity of limbs hanging out from all sides of buses like surreal appendages. As he approached old age, a failed and

anonymous Hindi poet, he felt the strain in his bones and soul. Calculating his time, he realised he had spent three years and two months of his life inside buses. While the world sped ahead in Hondas and Kowalskis, he didn't even know how to ride a bicycle. A scooter, then, wasn't just a vehicle—it was a portal into modernity, an entry pass to a world galloping into a technological age. At 2:10 AM, in his modest one-BHK, Ram Gopal Saxena ceased to exist. Paul Gomra—the poet in transition—resolved to buy a scooter.

The very next day, he withdrew ₹5000 from his provident fund and by 5:30 PM had signed the papers to own a gleaming scooter. But he didn't know how to drive it. So, he scheduled its delivery for the following day. That night, the line between dream and reality blurred. He watched a tribal-themed TV ad where a youth tames an iron beast—a scooter. That imagery soaked into his subconscious. In dreams, he became that tribal boy, bow and arrow in hand, riding the scooter through Delhi's iconic spaces—India Gate, Connaught Place, Mandi House. Speaking an unknown tongue, he stood upright on the moving scooter, dancing like a tribal man. Crowds turned to watch, women and children fled in fear, shops slammed shut, police vans screeched in. As panic spiraled, he leapt off the scooter in terror and woke drenched in sweat. By morning, the dream had materialized: the shiny scooter stood at his doorstep, surrounded by ecstatic children. Yet, the irony remained—he still didn't know how to ride it. The modern world had arrived, but Paul Gomra hadn't yet figured out how to steer it.

Paul Gomra begged his office colleagues to teach him how to drive, but they all made vague excuses and moved on, while the scooter stood in silence—gathering dust, rusting at its joints, like a forgotten iron beast. Children played on it as if it were part of the playground. Meanwhile, the country's Finance Minister signed international deals like someone flipping coins in the dark. In his sleep, Paul Gomra was haunted by nightmares—journalists and influential people plotting his murder, whispering in dark corners. One day, he met Prof. Iqbal Jafri, an old friend, dramatist, and serial-maker, who agreed to teach him driving. A bottle of scotch was the tuition fee. On the promised Sunday, the scooter was cleaned and dragged out into the open. But it wouldn't start. They kicked it till they nearly collapsed. Finally, an auto driver laughed and turned on the ignition. The engine roared. But Jafri then admitted he didn't know how to drive either.

The scooter stayed put, lifeless again. Paul Gomra returned to scribbling poems as the world spiralled—governments collapsed, prime ministers came and went like shadows. Two dozen Hindi poets had committed suicide drinking pesticides. Ghalib's *haveli* had turned into a coal depot. Even rapes were passable news compared to Sushmita Sen becoming Miss Universe.

Eventually, Paul Gomra shared his scooter troubles with Rajiv Menon, a fellow commuter from Ghaziabad. Rajiv agreed to ditch the bus and ride the scooter instead. But things didn't go as planned—Rajiv worked late and Gomra had to wait hours every evening, sometimes until 11 p.m. His dream of saving time collapsed completely. He spent these idle hours loitering, talking to acquaintances, or visiting reluctant colleagues. His presence soon became unwelcome, and his mental balance started to waver. He began writing incomprehensible, surreal poetry—bits of which fluttered like confetti around the ITO Bridge. One night, he was invited to an official party honoring a high-ranking officer. Rajiv refused to accompany him, mocking the idea of a “poor Hindi poet” attending such an elite gathering. But Paul Gomra went anyway—and for the first time in 25 years, didn't reach office the next day.

That night, amidst ministers, moguls, dancers, actresses, critics, and journalists, a drunken Paul Gomra gave a wild speech, claiming the scooter was like Gandhi's spinning wheel, a weapon against global corporations. He ranted about gathering tribals to surround Delhi, forming a new INA, and cutting off milk, vegetables, water, and electricity supplies to the capital. He shouted that Delhi was dismantling India, that while dinosaurs perished, ants still lived, and that the ruins of the Indus Valley were dead, but nearby villages survived. Eyewitnesses say he and Rajiv Menon were escorted out by police. Later that night, Menon drove the scooter with Paul Gomra riding pillion, singing lines from Allama Iqbal—when tragedy struck. A cavalcade returning from the party rammed into them and moved on. Menon died on the spot. Gomra was hospitalized, unconscious, only the next morning.

Now, the Ghaziabad flat is gone—taken over by a property firm. His family has vanished, and even Delhi's writers have begun forgetting the name of Paul Gomra. But for the past one and a half months, strange tales circulate. Around midnight on GT Road, a bizarre man appears, halting traffic, shouting

slogans of Dandi March, and singing INA songs. He throws stones and screams, “*Quit India! Quit India!*” The mangled scooter still lies in a local police station, and in its dickey, untouched, rests a diary—filled with the mad, visionary verses of the vanished poet, Paul Gomra.

This final twist—where the line between dream and reality collapses—cements Uday Prakash’s story in the realm of magic realism. The blending of political allegory, tragic comedy, and fantastical resurrection not only critiques modernity and consumerism but also immortalizes a failed poet who, through madness and myth, becomes an enduring symbol of resistance. Here, it is interesting to note that Uday Prakash modeled the character of Paul Gomra—at least the naming style—after a fellow Hindi writer and poet, who, in a YouTube interview on the channel Sangat, acknowledged doing something similar himself: reversing a part of his original name to create a new one, just like Paul Gomra.

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