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Nurturing Resilience through Magical Realism

Ms. Aadya Vyas,
Research Scholar,
Department of English,
Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

Abstract :

Along with the physical evolution, the emotional and psychological evolution of humankind has been rather astonishing and remarkable. Walking upright was the end-goal, but forming societies, inculcating values and cultivating virtues has been an absolute masterstroke. Since time immemorial, humans have commanded pre-eminence over the entire planet all thanks to their exceptional ability to adopt, adapt and reinvent. Life has never been kind to anyone and our ancestors had a tough time figuring out the very basics that have been served up on a silver platter to the current generation. And yet, we remain unsatisfied. The current lot of humans prancing about the earth seem to have taken a liking for whining ; sulking over silly heartbreaks , constantly cribbing over missed opportunities , unknowingly gaslighting parents and siblings, sneaking off to unsupervised gatherings among other things becoming the norm of the society. A norm that is not only unnecessary but one that is downright detrimental to the societal fabric. Ripping apart the societal fabric may sound all exciting and rebellious but in reality, it is a ticking time-bomb ; a bomb that would strip the planet of all kinds of advancements and progress upon explosion, pushing the entire human race centuries back.

No one would ever like to have centuries of progress and development undone and thus, there is an urgent need to get our act together. We must reiterate the ancient wisdom of adopting key life principles, adapting our mindset to navigate difficult situations and reinventing the way we think - replacing grumbling with gratitude , smart-alecky with sincerity, haughtiness with humility and contempt with consideration. We need to understand and realise the monumental significance of symbiosis, not only within the species but otherwise as well.

Humans have survived the worst of disasters while clinging onto the last ray of hope. Resilience has kept people thriving in the bleakest of situations. Hence, it appears nurturing resilience is the need of the hour. Resilience is generally defined as the ability to bounce back from adversity with flexibility & strength, maintaining wellbeing despite challenges. Going by this definition, it most certainly is the virtue that needs to be immediately inculcated within the 'modern' humans. Inculcating a virtue means to implant or impress an idea on someone's mind, often by persistent repetition. This persistent repetition is known to have a lasting impact when it is seamlessly intertwined with literature. Reading stories that recount the valiant tales of the most ordinary of humans pushing and powering through life with effortless resilience can reawaken hope in the hearts of this overtly-practical generation. Magical Realism is a genre full of such stories which showcase the true power and potential of resilience. Unexplained magic , gruesome reality , sordid struggles and agonising trauma are intricately woven together to construct the narrative of magical realist texts.

Keywords : *Evolution, Virtues, Resilience, Magical Realism.*

“ According to Darwin's Origin of Species, it is not the most intellectual of the species that survives; it is not the strongest that survives; but the species that survives is the one that is able best to adapt and adjust to the changing environment in which it finds itself. ”

— Leon C. Megginson (1963)

Science has been extremely kind in conjuring up plentiful theories supporting the exceptional physical evolution of humans. However, it is very important to laud the emotional and psychological evolution of humans with utmost sincerity, for the same is truly responsible for carving out the uber-sophisticated human life experience as we know it today. Formation of societies and the associated rules , development of cultures, inculcation of values, identification of virtues and vices, creation of groundbreaking inventions, unveiling of great discoveries among the other valuable intricacies of life can be unequivocally attributed as the singlehanded achievements of the rigorously trained human brain. Over the course of several centuries, the human brain has consistently yet tactfully tackled a good amount of torment coupled with arduous challenges, never breaking down in spirit or body. This has only been possible because humans possess the innate ability to adopt, adapt and reinvent their way of life in conformity with the situation around them. The sensibility to harness this power to survive and thrive in the bleakest of circumstances has rewarded us humans with the crown of the rulers of the planet. A crown so dear to us yet so overrated since the current generation of humans seem rather undeserving of it.

Our ancestors underwent a plethora of trials and tribulations to figure out the very basics of life like food, water and shelter. Armed with little to no knowledge, they were keen to establish systems that would facilitate life for the future generations ; devising the crucial technique of farming and cultivation, conceiving the concept of potable water and envisioning the art of erecting all-weather shelters using brick and mortar. Fortunately for us , their penchant for elevating life experiences did not end here. Forest fires and volcanic activity unknowingly aided in the discovery of fire which soon found a bunch of wonderful applications - a source of light at night, an agent for cooking food and scaring away wild animals and a gentle companion to breeze through freezing cold weather. Careful inspection of round objects highlighted their ability to roll, thereby leading to the excogitation of the concept of wheels which form the very basis of an immensely complicated transportation system in use today. Wooden logs floating on water effectively promulgated the idea of rafts which could be used to move objects across water bodies. Fishes inspired the design of boats and ships, the wings of birds stimulated the idea of aeroplanes and helicopters, herd of animals staying together resulted in the establishment of settlements where humans lived together in peace, harmony and cohesion. Thus, regarding nature as the ultimate source of inspiration worked wonders and none of it was premeditated. Every bit of learning which contributed to facilitating human life happened either by chance or by accident ; alluding to the philosophy that nature is our quintessential guru.

As time elapsed, humans made phenomenal progress, essentially simplifying and easing every aspect of life. Cautiously tapping into the inbuilt scientific temper led to the emergence of science and technology. Rudimentarily, science was supposed to quell our misgivings about the natural world through observation, experimentation and evidence-based reasoning. In a similar manner, technology was developed with the purpose of aggrandising human life. What were intended to appease and stimulate the rational and logical portions of the human mind, ended up driving it astray. The scientific and technological advancements that were supposed to make life worth living, ended up wrecking it. This happened since the yearning to nurture nature got replaced by the carnal instinct of progress at the cost of anything - nature or the other co-habitants. Slowly yet steadily, humans started prioritising their wants over their needs - hunting animals for a good roast or just for selling their body parts to make a quick buck, clearing forests to construct luxurious resorts or other settlements, polluting air, water and land as per convenience - all of this was never a part of the plan. The plan was simple : live and let live, honour and nurture the greatest source of inspiration i.e. nature. However , the plan went awfully awry as soon as the insatiable lust for lording over the planet gained predominance over every other thought, emotion or feeling. The lust did ensure phenomenal development but at a great personal cost.

We are now equipped with almost all the knowledge in the world and yet we fail to recognise the importance of things that were literally worshipped by our forefathers. In spite of all the great inventions like vehicles, internet, laptops, smartphones, CCTV cameras etc by our side , we still fall short of deserving the legacy of our progenitors ; for they wholeheartedly believed in giving back while we truly believe in snatching away. This catastrophic shift in the approach towards life has us cruising comfortably towards doomsday, the early signs of which are visible now. It seems humans have cultivated an expansive interest in whining - sulking over silly heartbreaks , constantly cribbing over missed opportunities , unknowingly gaslighting parents and siblings, sneaking off to unsupervised gatherings, the prevalence of physical and emotional infidelity in relationships, abandoning family and society at the slightest inconvenience - establishing these as the new norms of the fragmented society. While setting a new norm is not uncommon, but setting ones that are downright detrimental to the societal fabric is a sure-shot recipe for disaster.

The society has been fractured beyond recognition in the pursuit of blatant liberalisation - a goal never envisioned by our forefathers. Families are breaking up at the drop of a hat with divorce rates being at an all time high. Young adults are walking right into the trap of consumerism - possessing zero tenacity to save for hard times. Innocent children and teenagers are being exposed to inappropriate content and exchanges on the social media platforms. Enormous amount of vulgar and frivolous content is being generated in the blind pursuit of virality and the same is being consumed with unreflective acquiescence. Youngsters are living in a permanent delusion that no job or business can match the earnings of influencers and YouTubers and they must not settle for any less. Consequently, the traditional route of vehemently sticking to a job or business in order to build one's personal and professional life has been perpetually discarded.

The current lot of humans possess none of the admirable qualities of their antecedents. Courage, strength, perseverance, dedication, discipline and resilience were the most important and differentiating traits of humans and yet the very same traits seem to have suddenly eluded the entire humanity. The courage to make difficult but important decisions, the strength to stick to one's decisions through the end of life, the perseverance to push through challenging times, the wholehearted dedication to symbiotic style of living, the discipline to keep oneself focused and motivated, and the resilience to face the worst of situations and emerge unscathed and unbothered are some of the basics of life we need to urgently re-learn. Each of these attributes need to be cultivated expeditiously and exhaustively within humans to restore the mirth and gaiety of actual human life.

It is however pertinent to mention here that the one cardinal virtue that needs a very prompt and immediate re-inculcation is resilience. Resilience, when regarded as a human virtue, is defined as the propensity to come to terms with adversity by wielding an amalgam of inner strengths like sanguinity, perseverance, and stoicism in concomitance with external factors like strong support networks. It is the ability to bounce back from gruesome experiences without drowning in the deluge of negative emotions, oft leading to the mutation of conflicts into opportunities for growth. It was sheer resilience that enabled our ancestors to achieve all that they could with the extremely limited resources at their disposal. It is this very resilience that will help us break away from the shackles of self-inflicted gloom and misery that we live in, despite the vast amount of resources available at our disposal.

Nurturing resilience is a long, lengthy and dynamic process that begins with infusing earth-shattering self-belief in oneself. It involves facing problems rather than fleeing from them. It includes wilfully engaging oneself in difficult and sometimes uncomfortable conversations to maintain and strengthen familial bonds. It comprises of handling tragedy, trauma and negativity rather delicately and never ever backing down. It necessitates swift, corrective and reformative action in the face of adversity. Thus, the entire humankind is in dire need of fostering resilience down to its soul in order to enjoy life along with utilising the various endowments that nature has to offer. We must continue to nourish resilience without fail if we are ever to truly enjoy the marvellous inventions and discoveries that humans have laboriously put together over the course of an eternity.

Post identifying resilience as the vital characteristic to be entrenched into our very spirit, we wish to determine an effective, harmless and plausible manner to achieve the same. Also, we wish to drastically reduce the humongous screen time humans have unwittingly allotted to multiple gadgets - smartphones, tablets, laptops and televisions. A possible elixir could be found in the crisp pages of books that belong to a genre of literature which recount the valiant tales of the most ordinary of humans pushing and powering through life with effortless resilience. Stories that highlight the rewards of resilience with a hint of magic are the need of the hour. Switching off from the world of notifications to traverse a world where the mundane seamlessly blends into the extraordinary might just be our best shot. Tailing characters who remain equally unfazed in case of a magical event and a normal one deftly teaches us the art of staying unbothered and unperturbed in the face of

any event - fortunate or unfortunate, joyful or sad, testing or rewarding. A literature which allows inexplicable fantasy to slip in through the crevices of sordid reality makes us passionately pine for moments of magic within our own despicable reality. The kind of literature which is adorned with all these attributes is magical realism.

Magical Realism is a narrative strategy where fantasy slips into everyday life yet the focus is never on the fantastical elements of the story, but on what those elements mean for the characters. Fantasy often acts as an extended metaphor, externalising some sort of internal conflict or moral quandary in the protagonist's life. The genre is full of stories which showcase the true power and potential of resilience as characters live and grow through the most devastating of experiences without wallowing into the depths of depression. Unexplained magic, gruesome reality, sordid struggles and agonising trauma are intricately woven together to construct the narrative of texts like Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Isabelle Allende's *The House of Spirits*, Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, Salman Rushdie's *The Midnight's Children* and the other remarkable magical realistic texts. The stories formally categorised under this genre are replete with themes of everlasting love, cyclical nature of time and memory, fiery political critique and disdain, celebration of body and senses and a meaningful quest for identity. They graciously provide an alternative perspective of historical events lightly fused with mysticism and folklore. Unlike traditional fantasy genres that transport readers to alternate realms, magical realism invites them to explore the magical within the mundane. The genre blurs the lines between reality and fantasy, challenging readers to gain flexibility with respect to their perceptions of the world. Thus, magical realism possesses the requisite prowess to skilfully nurture resilience within the most practical and desolate of hearts ever known to exist.

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