

# HARUKI MURAKAMI'S *KAFKA ON THE SHORE* – A WORLD OF WAR AND MAGICAL REALISM WITH VEDANTIC VIEW

PATHAK TANUJA\*

ABSTRACT. Haruki Murakami is one of the greatest exponents of magical realism in the contemporary literary world. He weaves stories of common people and presents these stories through the prism of magic realism. Their struggles become manifestations of deeper existential crisis. The solution is often to be found in the labyrinthine of fluid time and space. In *Kafka on the Shore*, Fifteen years old Kafka Tamura runs away from home to avoid the terrible oedipal curse put on him by his father. His story runs parallel to the story of an old man Nakata. Kafka's quest takes him into other realm, realms opened for him by Nakata and his companion Hoshino. Oshima, a transgender receptionist at a private library, acts as *saarathi*- the guide for Kafka. Kafka's journey into the labyrinthine of the forest to find his answers ends with his decision to come back to the world he had left behind. One aspect of Kafka's journey is the age old struggle between free will and fate. In the background of this search for finding meaning in life, there is critique against war and violence. Kafka's anger, void, insecurities along with fragmented narrative and emphasis on memories make this a typical postmodernist novel. This paper begins with a brief synopsis of the novel, an introduction of the major characters. The first section focuses on the theme of war and inherent violence. Second section discusses magic realism in the novel. The last section deals with the concept of reality seen through the Vedantic view.

KEY WORDS: magical realism, post modernism, existentialism, war and violence, free will, Vedanta

## Introduction

Cinematic adaptations of books have made magical realism much more acceptable today. Marvel Comic Universe has made inroads into our hearts and lives to an extent that we mourn the death of human superheroes like Tony stark and there are debates where theories of villain Thanos are discussed. Westeros from GRR Martin's *Game of Thrones* is so real that killing of the dragon queen in the season's finale broke millions of hearts, so much so that there were million online signatories proposing rewriting of the finale. In such times, reading Haruki Murakami's novels with magical realism is definitely much more relatable. *Kafka on the Shore*, like most of Murakami

\* PATHAK TANUJA (PhD 2017, Himachal Pradesh University, India) is Associate Professor in the Department of English at PGGCG, Sector 11, Chandigarh. E-mail: pathak@rediffmail.com.

novels, is a multilayered intense novel, with multiple themes woven together by magical realism. It offers a world where apocalyptic thunder accompanies opening of an entrance to another realm; a realm that keeps WWII soldiers alive just as they were, there are no memories so no pain; capitalistic icons and concepts come to life and line dividing dream and reality is thin. And all this is to facilitate a boy in his quest to find answers to existential questions. At the centre of the novel is the Oedipal curse put on the protagonist by his father, adding to the fact that his mother abandoned him at the age four. A characteristic deep sense of abandonment hangs in the novel, most visible in the characters of Kafka and Nakata. Kafka chooses to run away from his destination, outrun his fate and resolve his identity crisis. He wants to be freed of his fate, his identity but as the novel ends, he has to redefine freedom. He cannot avoid the inevitable. But unlike the Sophoclean hero, Kafka does not blind or harm himself; rather he gains an insight into his life and its problems, and has better capacity to see things more clearly. His story runs parallel to the story of Satoru Nakata, an old man who is a symbol of postmodernism, a man with no meaning in his life. Nakata's fate was decided by violence related to war. Their fates are connected through the entrance to the other realm. Nakata has some prophetic powers which he uses to open the entrance. This further enables Kafka to find his answers. Their lives are surrounded by inexplicable incidents. The distinction between reality and dream becomes thin. This concept of reality has been viewed from Vedantic angle. The narrative is highly fragmented with a lot of emphasis on memory and history that make it postmodernist to the core.

### **Literary Overview of Kafka on the Shore**

Murakami is one of the most famous Japanese writers of twenty first century. His writing is a blend of historic and cultural nuances of Japan. Various critics liked Mathew C. Strecher, Patricia Welch, Susan Fisher, Chiyoko Kawakami, Yoshio Iwamoto, Ursula Grafe, Virginia Yeung, Yakoo Kazuhiro, Amy Ty lai, Mukai Satoshi, and Karatani Kojin among other have profusely written about Murakami. His themes of postmodernist Japanese society, Japanese culture, use of music and animal and magical realism are well exploited by the critics. He very effectively portrays the post war Japanese society. The emptiness and isolation of the modern Japanese youth finds a realistic portrayal in his writings. This vacuum is presented through magical realism. The existential crisis haunting the modern man lends his writing a universal appeal. This paper has included war and inherent violence in frequently discussed theme of magical realism. Vedantic outlook of the reality which Murakami presents as alternate reality is discussed in the last section.

Kafka decides to leave home on his fifteenth birthday. The fact that his mother abandoned him at the age of four and his father cursed him with Oedipal curse since age five, has left Kafka unloved and friendless. His mother took with her his adopted sister also. His relationship with his father is that of resentment, fear and hatred. His childhood is devoid of any memory of his mother- no pictures, no official records. In spite of his tender age Kafka becomes a quintessential postmodernist protagonist; one who is in search of meaning in his life. He is victim of a detached isolated environment at home. The emotional insecurities that he faced because of absence and abandonment at the hands of his parents, reflects the vacuum in the younger generation. His mother's void in his life is a little deeper kind. The only memory of his childhood that he carries is one picture with his sister. As a result he sees his mother in every middle aged woman and his sister in very grown up girl. This emotional trauma leaves many emotional scars on him – he has anger management issues at school and had been suspended from school on two occasions. This self exile was to break free from his destiny. He meticulously plans his get-away. With few essentials – clothes, money, knife and walkman in a backpack, he is just a regular kid out of school and can easily blend in the crowd. He chooses Shikoku because that is the last place anyone would expect him to go. On reaching Shikoku he has a jubilant sense of freedom which proves to be false when he reaches the forest towards the end. He realises that there is no freedom in running away from his problems. What Kafka thought was running way from destiny turns out to be inevitable.

Memories are one of the key components of this novel, and libraries are collective memories of mankind. Kafka observes that each book enshrines the smell of past which leaks through when you open the pages. As a child Kafka often found refuge in libraries, a place where no one bothered a lonely child. According to him library was the best hideout for a fifteen years old runaway. Hence, he marks a private library in Takamatsu, which he starts visiting once he reaches Shikoku. This library is owned by Komura family. On his way to Shikoku, he meets Sakura, a girl whom he thought to be his sister. And in Komura library he meets Oshima and Ms. Saeki. Kafka's new destination marks his journey both within and without; the journey that comes full circle when he ultimately makes peace with his fate and decides to brave the world.

Nakata is a sixty years old man; a simpleton living on the government subsidy for mentally challenged. He is the symbol of his era – an empty man with no meaning to his life. This is one parallel between Kafka and Nakata: Kafka is emotionally empty and he too does not find any meaning in his life. Nakata can't read and write. He is unfamiliar with desires and greed. He has never been at crossroads in life; he never had to make any kind of

choice. His only love is talking to cats. This ability distinguishes him from others. This exclusivity gives him the privilege to be instrumental in moving the pieces on the board. He becomes the medium through which plans of the higher powers are executed. Later his main aim becomes to find the entrance stone, open the entrance, bring balance in the world and then close the entrance. This opening and closing of the entrance is again a connection between Nakata and Kafka. Nakata's earlier entrance into the other realm had been unguided, hence, he came out empty. He left his intelligence and his compassion behind and came back to this world with half his shadow.

Kafka, on the other hand, is guided by Oshima, Ms. Saeki and his own alter ego. Thus, Kafka comes out a more balanced person. It is in the course of opening the entrance in the present that Nakata reflects on the fact that he was empty inside. Anyone could put bad things inside and make him do bad things. For the first time he considers that he too should be like normal people; he too should be able to read and write. He wanted to accumulate knowledge. Once Nakata has fulfilled his mission of bringing balance back into the world, he dies. He passes on his legacy to his companion, a lorry driver called Hoshino.

Murakami's stories are rich with characters out of the ordinary walks of life, characters like truck driver Hoshino. These characters give rootedness to his stories. Hoshino is a simple truck driver who agrees to take Nakata because the old man reminds him of his dead grandfather, the only person who showed any faith in Hoshino. Right from the onset Nakata inspires Hoshino to do good. As their journey continues, Hoshino begins to reflect deeply on his life. His first realisation is that he had been a very selfish man. In his relationships with various women, he had never taken their emotions into consideration, whereas they had all been very generous towards him. Armed with this new insight, Hoshino decides to keep other's needs in mind and resolves to accompany Nakata to wherever the old man goes. He decides to support Nakata in his mission. His ordinary, directionless life gets a new aim. He becomes bold and decides to quit his thankless job. With Nakata by his side, Hoshino gets a new perspective into his life. He begins to understand things better, like music; things which had hitherto been out of his preview. He begins to understand and appreciate music. Ultimately Hoshino makes Nakata's mission his own mission. After Nakata's death he is devastated, broken-hearted and alone, but he waits for the opportune moment to close the entrance. His journey with Nakata becomes his coming of age in a way. He inherits Nakata's legacy, as the novel ends he has begun to converse with the cats.

Ms. Saeki is an enigma. She is in-charge of Komura memorial Library. She has an intriguing past and is unable to let go of the memories of that

past. She has an air of aloofness around her, a sense of not belonging to her surroundings. In course of narrating her past Oshima says that he thinks she is waiting on the platform for the train (death) to arrive, and Kafka is that train. This sense of despondence in her life comes from an incident concerning her boyfriend. Her boyfriend is senselessly killed by a mob. In order to cope with this tragedy she leaves the town for twenty years and comes back only when her mother dies. These twenty years according to her are filled with recklessness, anger, frustration and decision to change the reality. On coming back, she asks the Komura family, her boyfriend's family, to give her a place in their private library. This is an attempt by Saeki to keep close to the memories of her boyfriend. She finds a time warp and is able to revisit and relive the happiest time of her life- time when they, she and her boyfriend, were fifteen and their happiness was perfect. This time warp is born out of the entrance gate that she has opened after her boyfriend's death. Towards the end, when Nakata comes to meet her, he urges her that it was time to close the entrance gate. Both Nakata and Ms. Saeki have separately been involved with opening of the entrance and both these characters have faded shadows. As time passes, Kafka believes her to be his mother. Later when Kafka enters the other realm, Ms. Saeki meets him one last time. She tries to provide him with some answers he needed, and to heal him. Moreover, she urges him to go back to the world he had come from. Her experience in the time warp had been unfulfilling, it tilted the natural balance of the universe and she had hurt many people inadvertently. Now that very natural balance had to be restored. Her final accomplishment is to convince Kafka to return to a world where she too would live on in Kafka's memories.

Calm and composed Oshima is a guide to Kafka. He is a transgender who is compassionate, resourceful and intelligent. Most of the times he becomes mouthpiece for Murakami. He shows Kafka the respect and understanding the fifteen year old craved. After the shrine incident, Kafka spent the night at Sakura's apartment, but the next day he needed a place to stay and hide. Oshima takes him to his cabin in the woods. This cabin is significant as it is an ideal, idyllic retreat from the chaotic world; it has no electricity, there is no connection with the outside world. Thus, this retreat is an excellent place for introspection for Kafka. He becomes acutely aware of his own self vis-à-vis his natural surroundings. Everything is clean, pure and alive. Nature presents itself as a living force to Kafka and he finds trees and stars intimidating at times. He feels he is being watched by some powerful force, a palpable darkness outside, a darkness which was alive and could engulf him if it wanted. Oshima is haemophilic and had to be home tutored and had spent a lot of time in this very cabin when he was a fifteen year old. So, there were books on all subjects. Kafka chooses one on a German gen-

eral Adolf Eichmann, a man who was caught in the dream of Adolf Hitler. Murakami uses books like *Miners* and *Penal Code* have been used by Murakami to trace Kafka's thoughts and psychology. In the cabin, Kafka thinks of Yeats' concept of responsibility, "It's all a question of imagination; our responsibility begins with the power to imagine. It's just as Yeats said: In dreams begin responsibility. Turn this on its head and you could say that where there's no power to imagine, no responsibility can arise" (Murakami 2005:141). Tridib in *Shadow Lines* says similar thing, "... if we didn't try ourselves, we would never be free of other people's inventions" (Ghosh 31). It is this acute self-awareness that comes in Kafka while staying in the cabin: an ability to see himself in relation to the whole world, to get a better perspective of his existence in this world. This is the first step towards finding his answers. As he is leaving the cabin, he observes, "A minute ago it felt so real, but now it seems imaginary. Just a few steps it takes for everything associated with it to lose all sense of reality" (Murakami 2005: 164). On his second visit to the cabin Oshima warns Kafka about the thin border line between reality and dreams, a thin line separating other realms. He observes that it was easy to cross over and come back, the essential thing was to remember that beyond some point there is no coming back. Kafka lives his life through Oshima's eyes: Oshima hints at things/events that were to happen; he hints at a living darkness which Kafka experienced during his first stay; he hints at Ms. Saeki being different and Kafka meets her fifteen year old self at night, he talks about other realms and WWII soldiers and Kafka meets them. Thus, in a way Oshima is Kafka's guide; he nudges Kafka in the right direction to find his own path.

All these main characters are connected to each other through events and incidents that are magical, in the magical realistic world of Murakami, these events occur most naturally. There is a genuine suspension of disbelief as actions are credible in their own right. At the centre of all this is a fifteen years old runaway trying to win his life back. He believes he is making choices and defeating fate.

### **War and Inherent Violence**

"Mr. Nakata, this world is a terribly violent place. And nobody can escape the violence. Please keep that in mind. You can't be too cautious" (Murakami 2005: 90), says the Siamese cat Mimi. Murakami shows that violence has been internalised by man, and it lies dormant in all of us like some sinister darkness. This sinister darkness can manifest itself in most violent way, at most unsuspected times. This theory has also been used by Murakami in his later works like *IQ84* and *Killing Commendatore*.

Born in post war Japan, Murakami was greatly influenced by his country's the history during war as well as aftermath of war on Japan. Wars are

imposed on simple people, much against their will. These wars make murderers out of simple people. Unwilling young men are drawn into war because of national politics. This theme has been used in *Kafka on The Shore*. Nakata is nine when he comes to Yamanashi Prefecture from Tokyo. Nakata's life is changed completely on 7<sup>th</sup> of November 1944, the day he fell victim to a strange inexplicable phenomenon, known in the novel as Rice Bowl Hill Incident. His teacher, Ms. Okamochi observes that in the woods it was easy to forget war. He is nine years old fourth grade student on a field trip with his teacher and fifteen class fellows. They all see a white light far up in the sky. Because of rationing of food they are all looking for wild edible mushroom. Suddenly all sixteen children fall unconscious on the ground. Their breathing is normal, all their vitals are normal, but they are unconscious with their eyes moving to and fro as if they are looking at something. They gain their consciousness after a few hours, but have no recollection of this incident. Fifteen children gain consciousness after a few hours and the sixteenth child comes to his own after two weeks. And that child is Satoru Nakata. Typically, no explanation is given for this incident. Maybe the two World War II soldiers who later appear in the woods, had opened the entrance and the children fell through it. If this were to be believed, then after sometime they all came back, except Nakata. Nakata stays back in the other realm and when he does finally come back he is altered beyond repair. He has all his memories wiped clear. He can't read and write. He is a shallow image of his former self and even his shadow is paler than the shadow of the normal people. It is as if he has left some part of himself behind. But the plausible reason behind his refusal to come back to this realm has more to do with violence and becomes clear from Ms. Okamochi's account.

His teacher Ms. Setsuko Okamochi, for the first time in her adult life, faces unexpected periods that too while on a field trip with fourth grade students. She manage to avoid embarrassment by using some towels, which she later hides behind some bushes. Nakata finds one bloody towel and brings it to his teacher. Ms. Okamochi is so beside herself out of embarrassment that she slaps Nakata in the presence of all the children. And just then all the children faint. This incident never makes it to the press and public because of government policy during the ongoing war. Ms. Okamochi's behaviour subjects the children to war like violence. It takes twenty eight years for Ms. Okamochi to share her reading of Nakata with one of the psychologist on the panel of investigating committee. War breeds such apathy and insensitivity,

During the war there were so many horrific events, and millions of people lost their lives, so I don't suppose people would be very shocked by what happened in our little town... I'd say most people who recall the incident find it an unpleasant memory they'd prefer not to touch on. (Murakami 2005: 104)

The numbness and indifference of the populace towards human tragedy is summed up by Ms. Okamochi, “Most things are forgotten over time. Even the war itself, the life-and-death struggle people went through, is now like something from the distant past” (Murakami 2005:104), She does not have the heart to confess her part in the tragedy to the inquiry committee; the reason why this violence affected Nakata in the worst possible way. Nakata had a difficult childhood. He was under pressure from home to perform well:

... he was the brightest and had the best grades. He had very pleasant features and always dressed well. He was a gentle boy and never butted in where he didn't belong. Never once in class did he volunteer an answer, but when I called on him, he would always give the correct response, and when I asked his opinion he'd give a logical reply. He caught on right away, no matter what the subject. Every class has a student like that, one who'll study what he needs to without supervision. Who you know will top the university and get an excellent job. A child who is innately capable. (Murakami 2005:109)

She further observes that Nakata had a sense of resignation in him. He completed difficult tasks, but did not express any happiness about it:

He never struggled to succeed, never seemed to experience the pain of trial and error. He never sighed or smiled. It was as if these were the things he had to do, so he did them. He efficiently handled whatever came his way- like a factory worker, screwdriver in hand, working on a conveyor belt, tightening a screw on each part that comes down the line. (Murakami 2005: 109)

According to her, he had lost his natural openness and sense of accomplishment because of the emotional or physical violence at home. She had detected some very subtle flinching in the kid, flinching that comes from nonphysical violence and is kept hidden by the children. Under the light of this knowledge, what Ms. Okamochi did to Nakata was as violent as the war that was raging the world,

If there was any violence taking place in a family like that it was bound to be something more complicated and less direct than what farm kids experience... The kind of violence I displayed then may very well have dealt a fatal blow to whatever feelings had been budding inside him... I can still see the look on his face as I was slapping him. The tremendous fear and resignation he was feeling. (Murakami 2005: 110-111)

This incident changes Nakata forever- his education, his prospects in life, his relationship with his parents and his brothers. His range of emotions is

very limited; he doesn't feel anger and hatred, he doesn't feel discontentment and sadness, "The concept of death was beyond his power of imagination. And pain was something he wasn't aware of until he actually felt it. As an abstract concept pain didn't mean a thing. The upshot was he was unafraid..." (Murakami 2005: 131). He is a product of the war and as a result he is a hollow person. His mind works in a kind of vacuum state:

Nakata let his body relax, switched off his mind, letting things flow through him. this was natural for him, something he'd done ever since he was a child, without a second thought. Before long the border of his consciousness fluttered around, just like butterflies beyond these borders lay a dark abyss. Occasionally his consciousness would fly over the border and hover over that dizzying, black crevasse... That bottomless world of darkness, that weighty silence and chaos, was an old friend, a part of him already. Nakata understood this well. In that world there was no writing, no days of the week, no scary Governor, no opera, no BMWs. No scissors, no tall hats... (Murakami 2005: 90)

Rice Bowl Hill incident is a metaphor for the inherent violence in us that can snap at an unexpected moment of time. Murakami uses another example to show how we can reach this maniacal threshold of violence which is not very different from war. Nakata makes some additional income by finding lost cats. He is on a lookout for a lost tortoiseshell cat called Goma. He gathers information from other cats that a strange looking man was catching cats and harming them. When he comes face to face with this man, he turns out to be whisky brand icon Johnny Walker. Nakata has absolutely no clue as to who this man is or what he represents. He is also unable to comprehend why someone would catch cats. Johnny Walker explains his reasons to Nakata – he is collecting souls of the cats to make a flute. From cats he was going to graduate to humans and make a huge flute and then control the whole mankind. He represents the senseless killings for personal power and dominance. Power struggle spread all over the world, which results in meaningless wars is symbolised in Johnny Walker's accumulation of cat souls. He makes a proposition to Nakata that if Nakata wanted Goma and a few of his known cats to be spared, he would have to kill Johnny walker. Nakata is alien to such emotions as rage and hatred and is incapable of killing someone. But Johnny walker says, "I never ask the impossible. That's a colossal waste of time, don't you agree?" (Murakami 2005: 137) He says:

I know you never killed anyone, and don't want to. But listen to me- there are times in life when those kinds of excuses don't cut it anymore. Situations when nobody cares whether you're suited for the task at hand or not. I need you to understand that. For instance, it happens in war? (Murakami 2005: 153)

Johnny Walker further persuades Nakata by stating that

you've got to look at it this way: that this is war. You're a soldier and you have to make a decision. Either I kill the cats or you kill me. One or the other. You need to make a choice right here and now. This might seem an outrageous choice, but consider this: most choices we make in life are equally outrageous. (Murakami 2005: 153)

Thus, Johnny Walker's senseless killing of the cats becomes a metaphor for lack of choice exercised by the soldiers during war. He exposes Nakata to extreme violence: of cats being opened up while being conscious, their hearts being ripped out and eaten by Johnny walker. All the while the cats could feel the pain but their tongues had been paralysed so that their cries could not be heard. To put more pressure on Nakata, Johnny Walker does not paralyse the tongue of one of the cats familiar to Nakata. Nakata is simply unable to understand this madness. But it becomes clear to him that if he did not participate in this madness, Goma and a very intelligent Siamese cat Mimi would die a gruesome death. Just as Johnny Walker is about to rip open Mimi's stomach, Nakata is beside himself. He walks up to the table on which Mimi was placed, and without hesitation stabs Johnny Walker in the stomach and kills him. Just as Ms. Okamochi snapped, similarly Nakata feels something snapped in his mind. After killing Johnny Walker he collapses and sinks into the darkness. Johnny Walker's argument wins the case. He gives a demonstration of what war does to common people. Two soldiers who are lost in Oshima's woods since World War II express the same sentiment about war to Kafka, "... Over there it was kill or be killed. That wasn't for us. I'm a farmer, originally, and my buddy here just graduated from college. Neither one of us wants to kill anybody. And being killed's even worse. Kind of obvious, I'd say" (Murakami 2005: 433). These soldiers say war makes murderers out of simple men and they refuse to be murderers. This is the reason they walk over to the other realm and hide there. For, the fear of being caught and being sent back on the battlefield is very strong in them. This same analogy of war is used by Kafka's alter ego, the boy named crow. When Kafka is walking towards the deep woods, the boy named crow tries to advise him that the real war was within Kafka. His anger and frustration would always keep waging an endless war within him, "Listen – there's no war that will end all wars", Crow tells me. "War grows within war. Lapping up the bloodshed by violence, feeding on wounded flesh. War is a perfect, self-contained being. You need to know that" (Murakami 2005: 416). This war, according to crow, could only end if Kafka allowed some ray of love to touch his heart and let it thaw.

War is a large scale systematic manifestation of this inherent violence that prevails in society. Another version of this can be seen in unhindered,

uncontrolled, senseless mob violence frequently found in civil society. This is probably a reference to *Todai Riots* in Tokyo during late 60s. One victim of such bizarre violence is Ms. Saeki's boyfriend. Saeki and that boy were soul mates. The boy had to go to Tokyo for his further studies. In this separation Ms. Saeki wrote a song- *Kafka on the Shore*. The song became very popular and it broke all sales records. Ms. Saeki had to come to Tokyo for the vinyl recording. The two of them were together again. Their world of happiness came crumbling down with his senseless death. He was killed by a student mob that mistook him for their enemy and beat him to death. This bizarre incident shattered Ms. Saeki. She forcefully opened the Entrance and that affected the life of many people who came in contact with her. Random acts of violence force people to make choices that go against their very own constitution and that create imbalance in the nature. The simple cause and effect must be allowed to continue. When this sequence is altered, the balance is shattered. At some point that Entrance needs to be closed at all costs, only then can the balance of the universe be restored. Nakata talks to Hoshino how his emptiness was used by Johnny walker to shed blood. He is apprehensive that other people might also use him,

being empty is like an un-lived-in house. An unlocked, un-lived-in house. Anybody can come in, any time they want. That's what scares me the most. I can make things rain from the sky, but most of the time I don't have any idea what I am going to make rain next. If it were 10,000 knives or a huge bomb or poison gas – I don't know what I'd do... I could say I'm sorry to everybody, but that wouldn't be enough. (Murakami 2005: 331)

The hollow men who indulge in riots and violence are no better than Nakata. They lack all kinds of sensibilities. Nakata is an example of possibilities that a simple man like him can be subjected to. Oshima expresses similar thoughts to Kafka while he was talking about Ms. Saeki's past. He says it was, "people who fill up that lack of imagination with heartless bits of straw, not even aware of what they're doing. Callous people who throw a lot of empty words are you, trying to force you to do what you don't want to" (Murakami 2005: 195). It was narrow minded, hollow men who lack imagination who killed Ms. Saeki's boyfriend. Johnny Walker sums it up in the woods when he talks to the boy named Crow, Kafka's alter ego,

I'm not the one who decides whether that flute turns out to be good or evil, neither are you. It all depends on when and where I am. In that sense I'm a man entirely without prejudices, like history or the weather- unbiased. And since I am, I can transform into a kind of system. (Murakami 2005: 467)

This is Murakami's critique of the war and inherent violence that we manifest on people around us.

### Magical Realism

Encyclopaedia Britannica defines magical realism as, "Chiefly Latin American narrative strategy that is characterized by the matter of fact inclusion of fantastic or mythical elements into seemingly realistic fiction." Blogs (see <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2014/06/21/magical-realism/>) define it as

A literary mode rather than a distinguished genre, magical realism is characterised by two conflicting perspectives, one based on a so called rational view of reality and the other as prosaic reality. Magical realism differs from pure fantasy primarily because it is set in a normal, modern world with authentic descriptions of humans and society. It aims to seize the paradox of the union of opposites; for instance, it challenges binary oppositions life and death and the pre-colonial past with post-industrial present.

The fragmented narrative oscillates between Kafka, Nakata, his past; Ms. Saeki, her past and Oshima's monologues. All these are connected by the elements of magical realism. Concepts, ideas, metaphors, capitalist icons are often personified in Murakami's fiction. Dreams and reality are separated by a thin line, a line that is sometimes erased. Embedded in this magical realism is the core existential question of Kafka, his very sense of identity, his very existence. The chaos of thoughts and the confusion that he has, "... What is it inside me that makes up *me*? Is this what's supposed to stand up to the void?" (Murakami 2005: 417) Mathew C Strecher's observation of Murakami's magical realism is thus very apt:

In short, Murakami's use of magical realism, while closely linked with the quest for identity, is not the least bit involved with the assertion of an identity. Put another way, magical realism in Murakami is used as a tool to seek a highly individualized personal sense of identity in each person, rather than a rejection of the thinking of one time colonial powers of the assertion of a national (cultural) identity based on indigenous beliefs and ideologies. (Strecher 1999: 269)

Transgressing realms is possible, but the point of no return has to be kept in mind. In *Kafka on the Shore* Murakami has used all these elements. Nakata is just a shallow replica of the boy that he was. His consciousness has learnt to cross borders. Nakata's encounter with Johnny Walker has been mentioned earlier. The cat catcher explains his own identity to Nakata, "... anyone who enjoys whiskey would recognise me right away, but never mind. My name is Johnny Walker. *Johnny Walker*... I have nothing to do with the British distilling company. I've just borrowed his appearance and name. A

person's got to have an appearance and name, don't you think?" (Murakami 2005: 135) It is seen how against his basic constitution, Nakata murders Johnny Walker. But when Nakata regains his consciousness, there is no blood on his hands or his clothes. He is not even near the body of the man whom he had murdered. After a few days, instead of Johnny Walker's corpse, the police discovers the corpse of Kafka's father Mr. Koichi Tamura, the famous sculptor.

At the time of the murder, Kafka was in Takamatsu for eight days. At the exact time of the murder, Kafka loses consciousness for a few hours and when he comes to senses, he finds himself behind a Shinto shrine; hair matted with grass and a butterfly pattern of blood on his T-Shirt. Kafka could make no head or tail of how he got there or whose blood it was. He learns about his father's murder after his first visit to Oshima's cabin, a good four to five days after the death. His father had cursed him with patricide, so does this mean the prophecy would not work? Has Kafka been running away from home for no reason? Or does he somehow make Nakata do his job for him? Or does Nakata do him a favour by liberating him from his father, a just way of bringing balance to the world? Kafka sums up his father as, "... But the dregs left over from creating these [sculptures] he spread everywhere, like a poison you can't escape. My father polluted everything he touched, damaged everyone around him... Anyway, I get a feeling he was connected to something very unusual" (Murakami 2005: 218). To which Oshima replies, "Something beyond good and evil. The source of power, you might call it" (Murakami 2005: 218). Later towards the end of the novel, when Kafka has crossed the line and walked into the other realm, there is a metaphorical meeting between Kafka's alter ego, the boy named crow, and Johnny Walker. Johnny Walker laughs and claims he is indestructible. The crow pecks at him and Johnny Walker keeps laughing, he laughs while his eyes are pecked, even after the tongue had been pecked, his remains laughed silently. The evil that Johnny Walker represented, the insatiable greed for control, fame, power that he symbolised, cannot be killed by Kafka or Nakata. But, Kafka is freed of him when he returns from the forest. Interestingly, it is only after Koichi Tamura's death that Kafka begins to interact with Ms. Saeki.

Another key component of this novel is Entrance and its entrance stone. When Nakata and Hoshino reach Shikoku, Nakata tells him they had to find the entrance stone. After going through many books and pictures in libraries, Hoshino still has no clue what they are looking for. Nakata goes to sleep and Hoshino comes out looking for some girl. He meets Colonel Sanders, the KFC guy. Colonel Sanders acts as a pimp for Hoshino and finds a girl for him. Just like Johnny Walker explains his existence to Nakata, similarly Colonel Sanders also explains his identity to Hoshino that he is

just an idea. He doesn't have a name or shape and could take any shape so this time he chose "familiar shape, that of a famous capitalist icon". He calls himself "neither god nor Buddha just an insensate being whose heart thus differs from that of man". And job of this insensate being was to supervise across the realms that there was order – "checking the correlation between different worlds, making sure things are in the right order. So results follow causes and meanings don't get mixed up" (Murakami 2005: 306). Thus, we can say that as an idea or a concept, Johnny Walker is countered by Colonel Sanders. By helping them find the entrance stone, Colonel Sanders has set the wheel moving towards correcting the tilted balance.

Colonel Sanders helps Hoshino retrieve the entrance stone from the Shinto Shrine. It is the same shrine where Kafka woke up all covered in blood. When the stone is picked up, it is an ordinary stone, but when the time comes to open the entrance, it requires every ounce of Hoshino's strength to flip the stone. Opening of the entrance is accompanied by a massive thunderstorm. Just as killing of the Leader is accompanied by a massive thunderstorm in *IQ84*. Nakata tells Hoshino that the stone is everywhere but it gains significance only in Shikoku. With Kafka, opening of the entrance is the exact time when he deduces that Ms. Saeki was his mother. The entrance had been opened earlier too. Before her death, Ms. Saeki admits to Nakata how she had been forced to open the Entrance,

We lived in a perfect circle, where everything inside was complete. Of course that couldn't go on forever. We grew up, and times changed. Parts of the circle fell apart, the outside world came rushing into our private paradise and things inside tried to get out. All quite natural, I suppose, yet at the time I couldn't accept it. And that's why I opened up the entrance stone – to prevent our perfect world from collapsing..." (Murakami 2005: 422)

This time warp that she had opened, presented her with an alternate reality where there was no pain, it was "one long summer"; she was eternally fifteen and her happiness was intact. She admits to Kafka, "In a sense, I guess. I wasn't alone, but I was terribly lonely. Because I knew that I would never be happier than I was then. That much I knew for sure. That's why I wanted to go – just as I was – to someplace where there was no time" (Murakami 2005: 268). She was living two different lives in this time warp; by day she was older Ms. Saeki and at night around 2.47 a.m. she was fifteen years old Ms. Saeki. Her time warp is witnessed by Kafka also. Kafka is sleeping in the Komura library, in the same room where Ms. Saeki's boyfriend used to sleep. This room has a painting- 'Kafka on the Shore', the same painting based on which Ms. Saeki wrote the song Kafka on the Shore. This painting was painted when they were both fifteen. It was a symbol of their perfect happiness. At 2.47 a.m. there comes a girl in that room, a fifteen year old

girl. She sits by the table and gazes at the painting for half an hour and then goes away. Kafka is mesmerized by her beauty and her steadfast emotion for the boy. He experiences this phenomenon every night. Soon he falls in love with the fifteen year old Ms. Saeki.

Gradually, for Kafka the difference between dream and reality starts blurring. He isn't sure if he was in love with the middle aged Ms. Saeki that he saw in the library during day time or the fifteen years old Ms. Saeki who came into that room every night to gaze at the symbol of her love. As his interaction with the older Ms. Saeki increases, so does his love for her. One night, fifteen years old Ms. Saeki makes love to Kafka, in a dream state. Next time he accompanies older Ms. Saeki to the shore where the painting was made. Ms. Saeki is unable to differentiate between Kafka and her boyfriend. She makes love to him in that room. There is an overlapping of personalities at this point. For Ms. Saeki, Kafka is her own boyfriend whom she idolized at fifteen years of age. For Kafka, he is fulfilling his father's prophecy, who wanted his son to take over and love his wife for him. To further add to the multiplicity of identities, Kafka also thinks he is both her boyfriend as well as her son. The dream state and wakeful state has lost its distinction. But Kafka keeps the indicators that tell him that the older Ms. Saeki did make love to him in a wakeful state. It is at this point, the next day, Kafka again goes to Oshima's cabin.

Oshima's cabin is the place of introspection and clearing of thoughts. Strecher has appropriately said that, "To speak of seeing or touching the core identity of the individual, of course is to suggest a metaphysical process by which that inner mind can be accessed, and this forms one of the most recognizable trademarks in Murakami's literature" (Strecher 1999: 267). This second visit of Kafka to the cabin is much more decisive in nature. Oshima mentions the presence of other realm that can help him reach the answers. He also explains to him about the labyrinth using double metaphor, "Things outside you are projections of what's inside you, and what's inside you is a projection of what's outside. So when you step into the labyrinth outside you, at the same time you're stepping into the labyrinth inside..." (Murakami 2005: 379). Kafka remains agitated in the cabin. In his mind he has fulfilled two parts of the prophecy and in his dreams he fulfils the third part- he violates his sister like figure, Sakura. Woods symbolise the labyrinth of his mind and he ventures to enter it in order to find his answers. He wants to know how could his mother abandon him so? Without love there is no meaning to his life. And without meaning to his life he has no desire to remain in this dreadful world. With the help of the two WWII soldiers who guard the entrance to the other realm, Kafka goes ahead. His alter ego advises him to thaw his angry frozen heart by letting in love and

forgiveness. The boy named Crow tries to plead his absent mother's case with Kafka.

On reaching the other realm, Kafka finds this alternate reality peaceful, quiet and inhabited. Significantly, living quarters are similar to Oshima's cabin and reminded him of his childhood. This alternate reality is chosen by Kafka, just like Saeki had chosen hers to be of fifteen years old. Kafka meets the fifteen years old Saeki who explain how this realm works. Time is not a factor in this realm hence, no memories could be made. Library took care of memories. The young girl tells him she would come to him whenever he needed her. The next day Kafka meets older Ms. Saeki. There is no direct reference to Saeki being Kafka's mother but there are references she makes about mistakes she had committed. She has given up something she should never have given up. She also clarifies that holding on to past was a big mistake she made. She has reached out to Kafka in her last hours because in the real world she is dying at that very hour. She urges Kafka in this alternate world to return to the world he came from. For Kafka the defining moment comes when Ms. Saeki asks him for forgiveness. Strecher's observation can be applied here, "Murakami's protagonists unconsciously create metonymical links with the contents of their inner minds in order to draw them out, engage them in discourse, and then send them back to where they came from" (Strecher 1999: 271). She wants his forgiveness without anger and fear. This is crucial for Kafka as he has to let go of all his anger if he is to proceed in life. His issues are resolved when he gives her forgiveness. Both Kafka and Saeki are liberated from their own shackles. By symbolically drinking a drop of Ms. Saeki's blood, Kafka gives her a place in his heart. She wants to be remembered by Kafka alone, rest of her memories she has asked Nakata to burn. She wants Kafka to inherit the painting, *Kafka on the Shore*, and remember her. And Kafka has finally allowed love to touch his frozen heart and it has begun to thaw. Kafka has found meaning in his life. He can face the world as the "toughest fifteen year old".

On the other front, the real world, Nakata finds Ms. Saeki and urges her that the entrance must be closed. As she agrees, she also gives him a last task of burning all her memories that she had written down. Two of the empty shells, Nakata and Saeki, who had ventured into the entrance and altered their reality, die simultaneously. Nakata's wisdom and intuition is passed on to Hoshino, who closes the entrance and kills the metaphorical sinister creature, darkness that comes out of dead Nakata's mouth; a creature that would have played havoc if it had gone through the entrance. Along with the intuition, Hoshino also gains the ability to converse with the cats. It is a cat that assists Hoshino in killing the creature and closing the entrance. The balance that Colonel Sanders wanted to supervise is finally restored.

Another component of magical realism that is common in many of Murakami's novels is the potent use of dreams; dreams impregnated with sexual fantasies. Ms. Oakimochi has a vivid sexual fantasy involving her husband the night before the Rice Bowl Hill incident happens. The dream is so vivid that she can physically feel it when she is climbing the hill next day with her pupils. Later she blames her dream for her periods and all that follows afterwards. Second instance is when fifteen years old Miss Saeki sleeps with Kafka in the dream state. Thirdly, when he is in Oshima's cabin the second time and in his agitation over his feelings for Ms. Saeki, he dreams of violating Sakura. Throughout the novel, both Sakura and Kafka consider each other like brother and sister. Hence, this is a very disturbing dream for Kafka. Later during telephonic conversation with her, she tells him she had dreamt of him approximately at the same time when he dreamt of her. But thankfully their dreams are different. Her dream is of deep concern for his safety. Similar dream sequences have been used by Murakami in his later novels *Killing Commandatore* and *IQ84*.

Kafka receives the painting 'Kafka on the shore' from Ms. Saeki. Her message about wind and looking at the painting are enough for his to look forward to life. The painting will keep her memory alive. When he decides to come back to this real world, he also decides to go back to Tokyo and finish his high school. His life is in his control. There is meaning in his life as he has Ms. Saeki's painting to look at. A new bright world beckons him. The balance in the universe has been restored.

### **Vedantic view of reality**

Ms. Saeki tells Kafka that when she was twenty she wanted to leave Takamatsu, to meet interesting people, but then she learned the way of the birds- birds on a branch wobble their head to keep focus on the scene. For her that wobbling gesture came from opening the entrance. But she admits to Kafka that she was tired of this duality, her awareness of one vision being untrue. Advaitwad talks about *Brahman* and *Atman*, not as a duality but as components of one. The alternate reality on the other realm is an excellent explanation of Advaitwad. Fifteen years old Ms. Saeki who comes to meet Kafka across the realm, tries to explain to his how everything was fluid there, 'you become part all that you see', she says. 'You see water you are one with water' she tries to explain. As time ceased to be a factor, one absorbed the things one saw. Advaitwad says, Brahman is the ultimate reality, but atman is a whole component of Brahman. S Radhakrishnan quotes II Aitareya Aranyaka, 6 Adhyaya, 1 Khanda,

3) That by which we see (form), that by which we utter speech, that by which we distinguish sweet and not sweet, and that by what comes from the heart and the mind, by perception, command, understanding, knowledge, wisdom, seeing,

holding, thinking, considering, readiness, remembering, conceiving, willing, breathing, loving, desiring? 4) No, all these are various names only of knowledge (the true self), 5) and that self (consisting of knowledge) is Brahman, it is Indra, it is Prajapati. (Radhakrishnan 1914: 436)

He further explains that this “is not a corporeal presence seated on high in the heavens, but an eternal spirit manifesting itself in all things. It is not apart from the world – it is the world” (Radhakrishnan 1914: 437). The cosmic and the individual are not two entities. The individual becomes one with the cosmic. The finite self is one with the Absolute. The reciprocal metaphor can also be understood through Vedanta.

The whole world is regarded as nothing more or less than a manifestation of Brahman, and is therefore, just as real as Brahman is. The significance of the different theories of creation discussed in the Upanishads is this, that Brahman and the world are very closely related. The two are one, though sometimes we regard one as the effect, and the other as the cause. (Radhakrishnan 1914: 437)

This very concept of a place beyond this reality, this world, where one is part of everything that you see, is very close to Advaitwad. It is that state of consciousness where the difference between *atman* and *Brahman* is eliminated. Once you have attained the knowledge of what *Brahman* is then there is the equanimity of peace and timelessness. This is the ultimate knowledge. For Murakami although, the border between the two realms is real; the alternate reality is a state of illusion, one has to come back to this world of pain and senses and memory. This is Murakami’s world of magical realism. Murakami presents this equanimity as a choice, but in his philosophy that choice will shake the balance of the universe because cause and effect of all beings are connected. Hence, one cannot alter the reality for others.

### Conclusions

It is with this solution that *Kafka on the Shore* ends. Free will is not fully replaced with fatalism. Kafka made a free choice of running away, but ended up in Takamatsu where Ms. Saeki was. But he choose to come back and be whole again. The bright new world will pose problems for him, but he has Komura library and Oshima to come back to. He is healed and has found meaning in his life; ultimately the balance in the universe was restored and he has love and memories of Ms. Saeki in his heart and purpose for his life. Johnny Walker is indestructible, but then Colonel Sanders too is in the world. The balance will always be restored.

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