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REPRESENTATION OF COLOMBIAN POLITICAL HISTORY – A STUDY OF THE SELECTED NOVELS OF GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

Dr. Bhatima Barman



Dr. Bhatima Barman
Department of English
M.C.College, Barpeta

Supervisor :
Dr. Baby Pushpa Sinha
Department of English
Assam University, Silchar
Year - 2014

Latin America inherited an anachronistic and disordered socio-political legacy which was further debased and despoiled by the few but powerful oligarchy who controlled the newly independent nations. The struggle for power and rule led to numerous civil wars, coups and revolts that eventually created extreme political, economic and social disorder and instability. Dictatorships and repressive military regimes have been a constant and chronic feature in the Latin American political scenario.

Caught amidst political battles, economic upheavals, social chaos and cultural complexities; the common man has always been the worst sufferer. The sense of uncertainty and fear, the scars of violence, the deprivation of rights, the unfulfilled promises of progress, and the overarching sense of futility of such a life

some themes of concern a need for deliberation and reflection on the Latin American predicament. García Márquez's experiences as a common Colombian national and later on as a journalist and writer would give shape to his political ideas and determine his affiliations. His socialist sympathies are reflected in his activism as well as in his literary productions.

In the thesis, I have made an attempt to study the selected novels of García Márquez vis-à-vis his political standpoint and how his fictions are effective in reflecting or representing the turbulent political history of Colombia and its effects on the people. The novels selected for study are *No One Writes to the Colonel* (*No One*), *In Evil Hour*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*One Hundred*), *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (*The Autumn*), and *The General in His Labyrinth* (*The General*).

The first chapter of the thesis consists of certain important phases and concerns of Latin American political history (with added reference to Colombian political history, in particular) as well as a brief study of Latin American literature which is closely connected to the socio-political and cultural concerns of the continent. This is followed by a biographical study of Márquez's life and career, the vital connection between his political experiences and literary productions, his political activities and involvements which reflect his ethics as well as the dominant concern of his role and contribution as a writer. Aspects of literary presentation will also be discussed within this chapter. For an easy reading, this introductory chapter will have three sub-headings: Latin American/ Colombian political history, Latin American/ Colombian Literature, and Márquez's Life and Works.

As the thesis intends to study Márquez's selected novels vis-à-vis his socio-political concerns; the second chapter will be the study of his two early novels — *No One Writes to the Colonel* and *In Evil Hour*, both of which were written in the backdrop of the intensely violent period of *la violencia*. The chapter is entitled: "Power, Protest and Justice in *No One Writes to the Colonel* and *In Evil Hour*". As the title of the chapter suggests, the themes of power and protest, as well as that of justice are played out here.

In *No One*, a septuagenarian Colonel waits endlessly for a letter which would confirm his war pension. However, his sacrifices as a war veteran goes unrecognized as he never receives the pension till the end of the novel. The stoical figure of the Colonel is pitted against an oppressive and corrupt system. His son is shot dead by the authorities for circulating clandestine papers. He and his

becomes a symbol of resistance against the reactionary government. At a point when the Colonel's poverty brings him at the juncture of selling away the cock he makes the biggest decision to nurture the cock for an upcoming cockfight and thus keeps alive the hopes and resistance of the people of the town as well as his own hope of justice and deliverance.

In Evil Hour shares the social and political milieu with *No One*; where the citizens have to endure a return to a regime of curfews, violence and corruption after a period of relative and short-lived peace. It is the story of an unnamed town where certain lampoons threaten to disturb the prevailing peace. At a deep political level, Márquez shows that the prevailing atmosphere of peace was just a façade. As the lampoons were slowly and steadily unearthing the dark secrets of the respectable families of the town and was gradually destabilizing the so-called peace that was being established for a while; in a more symbolic and stronger way the clandestine papers (which were circulated by people who opposed the regime) would steadily be exposing the atrocities of a ruthless autocratic government which was trying hard to put up a show that peace prevailed. Law was maintained and that justice was being delivered. Márquez's censure of power and oppression is evident as the common people have to fight everyday for survival. The casualness with which a life of curfew and censorship is lived satirises the absurd situation when terror and fear of death becomes normal. These two early novels by Márquez which takes place in small, unnamed towns are befitting narratives of resilience shown by common people against the vicissitudes of absolute power. Although he writes about oppression, grave political injustice and deaths — amidst the bleak reality lies a possibility of hope brought about by the resilience of the common man. It is this very human will and courage of the common man that sustains hope against indescribable loss and suffering.

The third chapter is entitled: "Solitude and Suffering in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*".

Solitude is a theme which constantly surfaces in Márquez's fictions, in the context of Latin American political scenario as well as its constant preoccupation with its marginalized position vis-à-vis its European colonizer. 'Solitude' has more of a political connotation than mere psychological conceit. The one hundred years of the history of Macondo can be said to be a compressed history of Latin America — albeit, politically satirical and demystified. The entire narrative of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* recreates the history of the American subcontinent subtly — sometimes seriously and at other times parodically. The founding of the remote, isolated village of Macondo; the course of its development

final ruined state (after the Banana massacre) – comprises the hundred years of Macondo. Macondo was founded by the patriarch José Arcadio Buendía with the ‘dream’ of building an illuminated city made of glass; which only turns out to be a mirage by the end of the novel. The last member of the Buendía family realized that the entire life and history of Macondo and of the Buendía’s as well as their annihilation was predetermined. Conceived as a utopia, Macondo turns more into a forlorn, dystopic place. It goes through the phases of settlement, political unrest, industrialization, and economic downturns etc; which are resonant of the various phases of colonial and post-colonial Latin America.

The fourth chapter is: “Power vs. Death and Decay in *The Autumn of the Patriarch* and *The General in His Labyrinth*”.

The figure of the caudillo/dictator/gaicho (as they are differently called in Latin America) has had an everlasting presence in most Latin American nations. Dictatorship regimes have most often been marked by extreme repression, forceful suppression of political opponents, press censorships and gross violations of human rights; as well as an inclination for retaining absolute powers for immeasurably long periods of time. In the novel *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, the Patriarch’s despotism, cruelty, abusive and repulsive sexuality and an almost anti-human stance arises out of power. The entire narrative is Márquez’s diatribe against tyranny and gross manipulation of power. Death and decay pervades throughout the novel. This dictator rules interminably for centuries echoing the endless dictatorships of Latin America. As the ‘autumn’ of the title suggests, it depicts the gradual decadence of a solitary, barbaric dictator – who, despite everything clings on to power. With shifting narrative viewpoints, the book carries us through a vortex of endless barbarism and corruption. There is no fixed narrator in the novel, hence making way for multiple perspectives which facilitate the usually submerged voices of the oppressive state to emerge.

While the Patriarch is a composite figure of several actual dictators of Latin America, *The General in His Labyrinth* is based on the most important historical figure of Latin America – Simón Bolívar. Bolívar enjoys a cult-like status in Latin America. Unlike most biographies and other specialized volumes extolling the greatness of this South American hero, Márquez concentrates on the least documented part of Bolívar’s life – that is, his final stepdown as the President of the newly liberated republics and his final days of life as a sick and powerless man. Bolívar (till today in Latin America) is an idolized figure whose military and political career remains incomparable till date. He is also known as

the Liberator as he carried forward the enormous and daunting task of the Latin American nations from Spanish imperial rule. However, in *His Labyrinth*, Márquez strips Bolívar of all the powers that he has as the President and a Liberator. His depiction of Bolívar is not just a hero but also as a mortal, ailing man is almost iconoclastic. The theme of power, and powerlessness are revisited here. Márquez’s depiction of Bolívar’s waning power and glory serves as a demystified portrayal of Latin America’s iconic, powerful, historical figure.

The fifth chapter is the concluding chapter which sums up the previous chapters.

Márquez is considered to be among the most representative Latin American – someone who has read the pulse of the continent and America’s enormous socio-political complications, cultural richness and diversities finds place in Márquez’s fictions.

To begin with, the most persistent feature in his works is his direct and indirect critique of power (the use and abuse of power, especially by a critique of the undemocratic, repressive political systems where the man is the worst sufferer. He is relentlessly satirical of the corrupt nature as well as of those who perpetuate conditions of dependency and so

Celebrated Chinese novelist Mo Yan spoke in his Nobel Lecture that he finds writing novels dealing with social realities to be a challenge because I’m afraid of being openly critical of the darker aspects of society because heated emotions and anger allow politics to suppress literature and transform a novel into reportage of a social event. As a member of the Nobel committee, a novelist is entitled to his own stance and viewpoint, but when he is awarded the Nobel Prize, he must take a humanistic stance, and write accordingly. Only then can literature be greater than politics. (“Nobel Lecture – Storytellers”)

Márquez’s works are deeply entrenched in the socio-political realities of the Latin American continent. Despite the vital link between his ideas and his literary creations, he has never compromised with the fine nuance of his literary creations prove his deep commitment towards art and society through his art and activism that he envisions a better future for Latin

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