

A Critical Study of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude

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Abstract

Gabriel Garcia Marquez emerged out as a post-colonial writer in Latin America presenting the colonial history of his home country Colombia. There is a great impact of the narrative technique magic realism in his writings. Of all his great novels, **One Hundred Years of Solitude** is a Magnum opus novel. It mirrors the history of his native Colombia, its dream, successes and failures as an independent republic. The novel catapulted him into an instant fame. **One Hundred Years of Solitude** is full of the technique magic realism. It presents the story of the six generations of Buendia family. The evidence of civil wars between Conservative and Liberals and Banana strike of 1928 has been private. The novel **One Hundred Years of Solitude** is a social document indeed.

Key Words-postcolonial, Magic realism, technique, evidence, catapulted, magnum, civil wars etc.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez is a remarkable figure of magic realism. His novels focus on social issues. Silence, solitude, and darkness play a significant role in Marquez's portrayal of the trauma that haunts post coloniality. Of all his three great novels, **One Hundred Years of Solitude** is a magnum opus novel of Marquez. It appeared in the transitional period of modernist and post-modernist fiction. It has been translated into twenty four languages. It is 'the world's first truly global novel'.¹It presents the story of the six generations of Buendia family. It is an epic of loneliness. It is the most fascinating and most complex novel. As far as narrative technique is concerned Marquez uses flash forward technique in this novel. He depicts very vividly the theme of war, suffering, and death with clarity and political slant. His magical flair is to combine fantastic with reality by introducing to the reader his Colombia, where myths, portents, and legends exist

side by side with technology and modernity.

In this novel the supernatural is presented as mundane and the mundane as supernatural or extraordinary. The novel unfolds a fictional story in a fictional setting. He carefully balances realistic elements of life. The novel explores the story of 100 years in the lives of the Buendia family, who live in the coastal jungles of an unnamed South American country. Here myth performs as a vehicle to transmit history to the reader.

"Throughout One Hundred Years of Solitude, Garcia Marquez exaggerates events to gain Fantasy, However. The exaggeration is almost always numerically specific and gives each occurrence a sense of reality."²

One Hundred Years of Solitude is full of references from the actual history of Latin America and Colombia. It is Marquez's

marvelous novel that brought appreciation to the author. Marquez uses the innovative narrative technique and style in this novel. The book covers the actual historical time period between 1820 and 1927. The novel is simply divided into twenty chapters, which, of course are not formally numbered.

The novel presents the history of the town of Macondo and of its founding family, the Buendias. Consequent upon his killing of Prudencio Aguilar, a neighbor who insulted his honour, Jose Arcadio Buendia and his wife, Ursula, along with a group of friends leave their native town and set out in search of a new home, setting eventually in an isolated region in the swamplands. Macondo lives for some time in a state of primeval innocence and its only contact with the outside world remains through the occasional visits of a band of gypsies.

With the passage of time, Macondo emerges from its isolation and becomes relatively a progressive and prosperous town; through it does not turn out to be a Utopian town of the dream envisaged by its patriarch, Jose Arcadio Buendia. Gradually political intrusion takes place in the form of posting of a magistrate, Don Apolinar, by the central government to administer authority over the district. Subsequently, the town is drawn into civil wars on account of its importance in national politica.

The history of Buendias begins with the sin of incest as Jose Arcadio and Ursula are first cousins and the coming generation too has strong tendency to incest. The Buendia family, throughout the novel, is haunted by the prophecy of punishment in the form of birth of a child with a pig's tail. Jose Arcadio and Ursula leave Riohacha to escape the prophecy, yet it proves to be true when Aureliano

Babilonia and his aunt Amaranta Ursula, the last generations of Buendia, indulge in love affair and give birth to a child with a pig's tail. Later on, Aureliano Babilonia deciphers the manuscript written by Melquiades one hundred years ahead of time and he discovers that it is a prophetic account of the history of Macondo and Buendias and their end will come the moment he deciphers the last sentence.

The story of Macondo reflects the general pattern of Latin America's history. It is founded by settlers fleeing a home-land: "In his youth, Jose Arcadio Buendia and his men, with wives and children, animals and all kinds of domestic implements, had crossed the mountains [. . .] and founded Macondo, so they would not have to go back" (OHYS 51). However, by the end of the novel, the city of mirrors becomes city of illusion. Macondo "thus represents the dream of a brave new world that America seemed to promise and that was cruelly proved illusory by the subsequent history [and] in effect, is a demystifying rewriting of the history of the subcontinent."³ The novel begins with the memory of a 'future past' when the narrator announces: "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice" (OHYS 9). Here, what is future for the reader is past for the narrator as the writer puts the action of the narrative in the future and it creates suspense in the mind of reader. The reader does not know when, where and why Aureliano faces firing squad and defamiliarizes ice when he sees and touches it for the first time. However, the temporal gaps between the initial announcements and actual events decrease when reader actually becomes a witness to the fore-announced execution of Arueliano

by firing squad in the middle of the novel. As such, at times narrative expectations are denied as the protagonist avoids what the reader has been led to believe, that is, inevitable execution of Aureliano.

Moreover Garcia Marquez's mythical account of Macondo's history depicting its early years as a Golden Age and womb-like innocence of its people is indicative of its isolation and insulation from the other European communities a Macondo was built on the bank of a river with clear water running along polished stones which were white like prehistoric eggs. Marquez recapitulates the same in *Living to Tell the Tale* in a nostalgic tone: "I remembered it as it was: a good place to live where everybody knew everybody else, located on the bank of a river of transparent water that raced over a bed of polished stones as huge and white as prehistoric eggs" (LTT 5). The world was so recent that many things lacked names, and in order to indicate them it was necessary to point" (OHYS 9) and it is a "truly happy village where no one was over thirty years of age and where no one had died" (OHYS 15). And the only contact the town has with the outside world is through band of gypsies who would come to the town every year during the month of March. The chronic deprivation/solitude/isolation of Latin America until the modern era of science and technology is ridiculed and comically portrayed.

Mario Vargas Liosa rightly observes:

"History and Literature- truth and falsehood, reality and fiction – mingle in [the novel] in a way that is often inextricable. The thin demarcation line that separates one from the other frequently fades away, so that both worlds can entwine in a completeness which the

more ambiguous it is, the more seductive it becomes, because the likely and unlikely in it seem to be part of the same substance".⁴Appraanths Jose Arcadio's feverish desire and fascination for science and his devotion to all kinds of experiments cannot be fulfilled through empirical mode of narration. It is through magical mode of narration that Marquez seduces him to use the practical artifacts like magnet and ice given by Melquiades, for the progress and prosperity of the people of Macondo.

Like Latin American people, he fails to realize his dreams of a utopia. Hence, the world that Buendias inhabit is one that fails to come up to its expectations and their history is replete with disillusionments. Ursula is fed up with Jose Arcadio's madness for his acumen for alchemy and flies more on her animals to increase their poor domestic holdings. When Macondo becomes a town, Jose Arcadio is fascinated by an immediate reality that becomes more fantastic than the vast universe of his imagination.

In order to counter the effects of the plague at Macondo Garcia Marquez fantasizes the townspeople identifying objects with labels: "With an inked brush he marked everything with its name: table, chair, clock, door, wall, bed, and pan. He went to the corral and marked the animals and plants: cow, goat, pig, hen, cassava, caladium, banana" (OHYS 46). The inhabitants of Macondo fight the loss of memory through inscriptions: "This is the cow. She must be milked every morning so that she will produce milk, and the milk must be boiled in order to be mixed with coffee to make coffee and milk" (OHYS

46). The loss of memory of the villagers threatens to express all layers of identity and culture.

The author transforms his own lived experience and memory into fictional narratives and thus creates parallel history of Macondo which serves as metaphor for Latin America. In the writing of **One Hundred Years of Solitude**, Marquez wanted to combine myths with harsh reality. Nevertheless, his understanding of reality is not confined to everyday life, or incidents of police atrocities it is much more than that:

“But I realized that reality is also the myths, beliefs, and legends of the people. These are their everyday life and they intervene in their victories and defeats. I realized that realist isn’t just the police who arrive and shoot people, but also the entire mythology, all the legends, everything that comprises people’s lives. And all of that needs to be included.”⁵Garcia Marquez mixes up real and imaginary events and at times it becomes difficult to discern real from the unreal. For instance, a legend mentions about the tragic incident in the life of his grandfather, colonel Nicolas Marquez that took place in the city of Barrancas which Garcia Marquez mentions as a “duel,” an affair of honour” in his memoir *Living to Tell the Tale*. The colonel confronted an old friend and former lieutenant, Medardo Pacheco. The quarrel began with a “base remark” about Mendardo’s mother that was attributed to Garcia Marquez’s grandfather. However, the public explanations for the affront did not assuage Medardo’s rage and Marquez’s grandfather

challenged him to a duel in which Mendardo was killed. Consequently, Colonel Nicolas Marques, Marquez, s grandfather, along with his family leaves the place for Riohacha and finally settles in Aracataca.

Garcia Marquez mingles truth with his imagination and uses real history of Colombia as background to form fictional framework for his novel. For instance, Colombia won independence from Spain in 1810 yet the country is left only with the knowledge of monarchic and military forms of government. The ruling classes are divided into Conservatives and Liberals parties. Liberals consist of middle class group and they attempt to change the political status ruled by the Aristocrats, which are the Conservatives.

Marquez presents subaltern viewpoint when the narrator gives a detailed account of “how they had founded the village, of how they had distributed the land, opened the roads, and introduced the improvements that necessity required without having bothered the government and without anyone having bothered them. We are so peaceful that none of us had died even of a natural death” (OHYS 53). The townspeople liking to paint their houses ‘white like a dove’ points to their peace loving nature and disliking for political interference in their day to day existence, especially because the self-serving ruling establishments, whether Conservatives or Liberals, have invariably exploited the common masses. As such, Marquez juxtaposes his personal history with the officially documented version and offers an alternative viewpoint to expose government’s unnecessary interference via imposing its rules and regulations in the day to day affairs of the people.

Macando like Latin America is afflicted by the civil wars between Liberals and conservatives and thus the author juxtaposes the fictional history with the actual history of political instability of the nineteenth century Colombia and other Latin American countries that hindered the order and progress of the continent.

The political power struggle in Colombia is re-enacted in the novel. Sensing their defeat, the government contacts the rebel leaders in the interior and arranges for “an armistice in exchange for three cabinet posts for the Liberals, a minority representation in the congress and a general amnesty for rebels who laid down their arms” (OHYS 122). “Colonel Aureliano Buendia, through is not in favour of the truce, yet he stops “harassing the government of his country and had joined with the victorious federalism of other republics of the Caribbean” with an idea of “unification of the federalist forces of Central America in order to wipe out conservative regimes from Alaska to Patagonia” (OHYS 124).

Marquez employs magic realism to portray the event and the superhuman quality of Aureliano Centeno, one of the seventeen illegitimate sons of Colonel Aureliano Buendia. He is responsible for bringing the train to Macondo. He has an “amazing power for manual destruction” and “broke so many plates, even without touching them.”

Marquez spells out the concerns of the Colombians on attaining the freedom from the colonial rule which proves to be a mixed bag of happiness and nostalgia because the civil wars engulf the country soon after its obtaining independence. And now they have been commercially colonized by the American United Fruit Company. Garcia Marquez also introduces

modern Western imperialism of the twentieth century in the novel. The historical facts serve as narrative raw material for Garcia Marquez which forms basis for his banana chapters in the book. How banana plantation is introduced in Macondo is caricatured with precision through elaborate but complex description.

Marquez represents historical fact/s fictionally as the narrator informs that the town being under martial law. The soldiers put aside their rifles and cut load the bananas and thus break the strike. The workers are asked to assemble in Macondo and they are surrounded by the touting machine guns. Though Garcia Marquez obviously subverts the historical events, yet the reader finds that he has retained the ‘real name’ of the General Carlos Cortes, Vargas who signs and pronounces the massacre orders of the banana workers. It is worthwhile to quote Gane H. Bell-Villada here who observes:

“With the talks at an impasse, the thirty-two thousand workers went out on strike on 7 October. The response of the Conservative government in distant Bogota was a military occupation of the Banana Zone. The soldiers themselves were eventually put to work cutting and shipping banana bunches as strikebreakers... and on 5 December the Government a stage of siege. That night a few hundred workers and their families assembled in the central plaza at Cienaga, a town located some thirty miles north of America. At 1 A.M., General Carlos Cortes Vargas sent an army detachment to make a show of strength at the plaza. The state of siege announcement was read out loud to the strikers..... And finally a

massive barrage of gun fire broke out.”⁶

Marquez hyperbolically recreates the events of banana workers massacre in the Colombian town of Cienga in 1928. In this novel the author explores the actual history from the fog of silence and myths.

Marquez writes that many years after the incident, Jose Arcadio Segundo teaches little Aureliano and “inculcated him [little Aureliano] with such a personal interpretation of what the banana company had meant to Macondo that many years later, when Aureliano became part of the world, one would have thought that he was telling a hallucinated version, because it was radically opposed to the false one that historians had created and consecrated in the schoolbooks” (OHYS 283).

Conclusion:

The narrator satirizes functioning of the historians who manipulate history that suits the present regime. The authorities hush up the massacre of the striking banana workers and claim that Macondo is peaceful and people are living in social harmony. The narrator reports that most people are convinced by the “official version that nothing had happened.” Jose Arcadio Sengundo sees the massacre but no one will listen to him, and no one else in the town can remember the episode. Hence, it is through Jose Arcadio Segundo that Garcia Marquez tends to give his own version of history; chronicles his own personal, alternate history to counter the concocted/fabricated official version. However, the reader’s main interest here is sustained not by the contents of the actual history itself but its fictionalization through innovative technique.

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