

**Thematic Concerns in Contemporary Latin American Literature****Rajesh Kumar***Assistant Professor of English, KLE Society's Law College, Rajaji Nagar, Bangalore, (Karnataka) India***Abstract**

The existence of a ‘boom’ in Latin American Literature has been widely acclaimed in Europe and America in particular and across the world in general. Today, we can study Latin American Literature as a separate entity and an independent body of writing, which is far away from the main stream of American Literature or Canadian Literature. After the post – war period, this New Literature in English came to light, and as many as six Nobel prizes for Literature have gone to Latin American authors writing in Spanish. Latin America is a term coined by the Anglo- Saxon Americans. It is a vast region , which has undoubtedly produced literary gems , ranging from the first Nobel Laureate of Latin America, Gabriela Mistral, followed by the Nobel Laureates like Miguel Angel Asturias, Pablo Neruda, Gabriel Garcia Marques, Octavia paz, Mario Vergas Llosa and few others not so significant but still bears the mark of creative genius on Latin American Literature , they are Jose Martin ,who is considered as ‘Man of Letters’ Jorge Louis Borges ,a giant literary personality , Victoria Ocampo, Romulo Gallegos, Simon Bolivar, the great intellectual and liberator. All these notable writers have played a significant role in blazing the path and setting trends at different times and in different forms of literature. The martyr and the man of letters Jose Marti believed that there cannot be a Latin American Literature without their being a Latin America. It is for us to draw a corollary , that is , when there is a Latin American Literature, there must be some meaning in the word” Latin America”

**Thematic Concerns****Towards a more Universal Literature**

The study of Literature has, unfortunately, for some and, necessarily, for others ceased to be for such objectives, which Longinus outlined as “to delight and to instruct “.The same is true in the case of Latin American Literature as any other World Literatures. It aims at liberal representation of men and women. Their situations and circumstances become evident across the world wherever humanity dwells .In Latin American novelists like Mario Vergas Llosa, Gabriel Garcia Marques, in their novels, we can find an element of universality in theme.

**Regionalism in Latin American Literature**

Latin American writings bear the stamp of regionalism, as writers hail from different regions, their writings are coloured by the element of regionalism, but on the whole it shows the collective spirit of Latin America as a nation as well as a sub continent. We may wonder, why does a literature bear the name of a continent and not that of particular nations that goes into making a continent? There is, indeed, a Latin American Literature much more than a Mexican, Cuban, Argentinean, and other national Literatures.

**Role of Language and Geography in Latin American Literature**

Language has been a binding factor; eighteen countries from the south of Rio Grande to the ice bound south pole, speak the language of Spanish or mostly known as the language of Cervantes. Brazil is the

lone exception –an exception which cannot be taken lightly, because of its vast size and importance, where Portuguese is the Lingua franca .However, Spanish and Portuguese are not only two different manifestations of Romance language descended from Latin and intelligible to each other, but because of their peninsular heritage, that is, of Iberia, share many things in common.

### **The Role of Christianity**

Another eminent factor that brings the Latin American countries together is Christianity. The first Spaniards, the conquistadores in their dual role of political conquest and religious mission bearing ‘the sword as well as the cross’, called the land that Columbus discovered “New Spain “. Although the imprint of Spain and Portugal , the two nations that make the Iberian peninsula , was of far reaching importance, so much so that many this part of the world is known as ‘Iberioamerica”, yet this was ,but a part of the mosaic. The indigenous people such as the Incas, Mayans, Aztecs and others with their myths and legends gave it another dimension, a dimension that has made Latin America older than Anglo Saxon America. To this we also vitally consider the Afro Americans or Black Africa . The result is the mysteriously complex Latin America, the expression of which is very vividly manifested in its literature.

### **Theme of Multi Culturalism and Cultural Hybridity**

Latin America is a melting pot of cultures, and thereby cross cultural influences have extensively worked on Latin American writers. In the past there was a debate whether Latin American Literature is a part of the western tradition. If we take the Argentinean, Jorge Luis Borges, we shall

see the western mind at work. But Nicholas Guilin of Cuba, baffling and has played a different role and he makes the African presence come alive in Latin America, a Continent which has a whole set of values from the purely indigenous to the sophisticated western tradition .And in this scale of values we have, on one side, countries like Bolivia and Guatemala also known as Banana Republic, where the Pre –Columbian race and culture dominate, and on the other hand, Argentina and Chile, with the highly transplanted culture. Those anxious to discover their roots do not have to leave Latin America. The European , the Indian and the Negro would find themselves going to people and places in their own continent and discover that the texture is inter-woven and the deeper they go, profound the mystery becomes and the mixture of races.

### **Modernism in Latin American Literature**

The Contemporary scene begins around the year 1940 s .The Spanish civil war in Spain diminished the influence in Spanish in Latin America to a great extent .Latin America depended upon Spanish books and modes and its literature drew sustenance from the models in their own historical contexts . The Latin American Modernist movement towards the end of the last century took Literature away from the Spanish modes and opened windows to let in fresh air from other world literatures ,most particularly French rather than English.

### **Theme of Revolution in Latin American Literature**

The nineteenth and early twentieth century novels in Latin American were essentially centred around the indomitable nature. The accent was rural, men relegated to a

secondary position in relation to nature. Latin America has for a long time suffered in the hands of dictators. And this brutality has been depicted in many novels. Even in the novels of Mexican Revolution, we find the qualities of nature reflected in men and their passions, with all their spontaneity and violence. One terrific novel written on this theme was *The President* by Miguel Angel Asturias, is about the panorama of tyranny, and is terrifying and also fascinating. One emotion that of fear, dominates the entire novel.

The theme of Revolution has been repeated in the novels of later times. And the Mexican Revolution was precisely, the theme of the death of Artemio Cruz, a novel by the foremost novelist of Mexico, Carlos Fuentes. The power and directness of *The Underdogs* have given way to techniques that we had too often in the works of Kafka, Faulkner and Joyce. From 1950 s to 1960 s, Miguel Angel Asturias wrote a trilogy, *The Cyclone*, *The Green Pope* and *The Eyes of the Interred* which the Nobel Citation saw as “a new and burning theme”. He shook of the influence of Surrealism as he found, ‘the surrealism of the American Indian and the Negro is more natural.’

### **Theme of Natural, Un Natural and Super Natural**

There is a remarkable vitality and imagination both in the theme and the narrative technique in Latin American fiction, referring to the Latin American fiction, Garcia Marques said, “The boom is the answer to the ‘whimper’ of the Novena Roman.” *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981) is a short novel in which we are confronted with a picaresque situation of the principal character remaining ignorant of his imminent fate, while everyone else

is aware of the fatal end. *Love at the Time of Cholera* (1985), is the evocation of a great love that is almost impossible in a real and imaginary Colombia visited by cholera and civil war. Like, *The President*, of Miguel Angel Asturias and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Marques has been considered as a great mile stone in the literary history of Latin American Writings. As Asturias, Marques combined natural, un natural and super natural elements.

Jorge Luis Borges is another South American writer from Argentina writing in the Spanish language ,whose fame has spread far and wide in the realm of prose , his contribution been a major factor in the contemporary world literature , though he specialized in the shorter form of the narrative , that is , the short story , the articles and letters. *Ficciones* and *Labyrinths* are some of the titles available in English .Borges surprises us with his ingenuity and transcends time and space.

### **Theme of Writer Politics in Latin America**

Latin America does not seem bereft at any time of the year. Recently, controversies have centred around five literary icons from Peru, Mexico, Argentina, Nicaragua and Chile. The Literatures produced by these countries have been translated into the major languages of the world with surprising rapidity and enthusiasm .But there is a lot of writer politics within a nation and between nations.

Mario Llosa ‘s first novel that shot him into immediate fame ,*Times of the Hero*, when he was given the prestigious international Hemmingway prize for Literature in Paris, but this feat was unrecognized by the Peruvian government. Llosa once reported in a newspaper that

some leftist writers, including Marques, were in fact acting like dictators in Latin America.

Mexico hit the headlines when its prestigious poet and essayist Octavo Paz, who had served his country's Ambassador in India five decades ago, was given the peace prize at the Frankfurt Book Fair in the presence of the president of the Federal Republic of Germany. In a speech delivered on that occasion, which was often acclaimed with cheers, Paz made his disgust for the regimes who create writer politics within a nation.

Pablo Neruda or Neftali Ricardo Reyes, everywhere in the world, except in his own country, Chile, the government was suspicious of giving any homage to the Nobel laureate, and because of this he fled from his country and went into exile and took shelter in different countries.

Mario Vargas Llosa, another great name in Latin American novelists, is Peruvian, in a talk on "the magic world of Gabriel Garcia Marques", given on the campus of the Washington State University, said, "The literary genius of our times is usually hermitic, elitist. There is a suspension in belief as we are carried away by the narrative and we come to reality made intense by magic."

### **The Poetry of Pablo Neruda and the Theme of Love**

About the many splendored personality and the poetry of Pablo Neruda, I would like to give an observation made by Federico Garcia Lorca, a very great poet of Latin America, who came very close to winning a Nobel Prize and barely missed it, the poet opines that "And I tell you that you should open yourselves to hearing an authentic poet, of the kind whose bodily senses were shaped in a world that is not

our own and that few people are able to perceive, what he perceives. A poet closer to death than to philosophy, closer to pain than to intelligence, closer to blood than to ink. Now, I would like to quote the poet's own observation with regard to the occupation of poetry and what it means to him. Pablo Neruda writes, "I have always wanted the hands of people to be seen in poetry," the poet wrote in 1966. Then he added, "I have always preferred poetry of bread, where everyone may eat." This intuitive connection to the masses was a feature of his oeuvre from early on in his career, with his ground breaking Residence on Earth. Not only did it persist throughout his life but the connection actually became more biblical prophet of sorts, the voice of the voiceless. It also made him a favourite target of attacks.

Gabriel Garcia Marques once depicted him as "the greatest poet of the twentieth century- in any language." Conversely, Juan Ramon Jimenez said that Neruda was "a great bad poet". It is clear that Chilean knew how to make waves, so much so that when the Swedish Academy granted him the Nobel prize for literature in 1971, the official announcement itself was bellicose in tone: This year's award has been given "to a contentious author who is not only debated for many years, but for many is also debatable. This debate has been going on for the past forty years, which demonstrates that his contribution is unquestionable."

The strident debate has at times threatened to simplify Neruda's contribution. This public persona is legendary. He is arguably, the ultimate poet, whose words were tools for radical transformation. But there was a private person behind, one watchful of the disturbances of life. He

stated in 1935 in a manifesto called "Towards an Impure Poetry. "It is useful at certain hours of the day and night to look closely at the world of objects at rest .From them flow the contacts of man with the earth, like an object lesson for all troubled lyricists. The used surface of things , the wear that hands have given to things , the air , tragic at times , pathetic at others, of such things –all lend a curious attractiveness to reality that we should not underestimate." The two Neruda's, the outspoken and the private, do not always coincide.

Neruda's odyssey is extraordinary, decades go by and his poetry, a perennial favourite of young and old, always feels as if it were just off the press. Translations of Neruda is something which is very interesting thing in itself we can focus on . Translations of Neruda, in official and pirated editions, abound in dozens of languages, including Uzbek, Latin, and Yiddish. In fact, years ago a Spanish newspaper concluded in a survey that he is "the most frequently translated poet on the globe."

Almost every significant event of the twentieth century palpates in Neruda's poems :the soviet revolution , the Spanish civil war , Nazism and Stalinism , the massacres of the world war II perpetuated in the name of Volatile, Utopias , imperialism and colonialism , the cold war situation , the political and economic insolvency of Latin America , Vietnam and the age of Aquarius , Fidel Castro 's revolution in Cuba, the student up heavels of 1968 and the arrival of socialism in his native land. His work is at once a chronicle of tumultuous times and the intimate diary of a nomad.

Neruda showed up at the height of the Modernist literary movement in Latin America inspired by symbolism, in which Ruben Dario and Jose Marti, among others sought to purify the Spanish language of the stylistic excesses of the nineteenth century. Neruda's was a rebellious stand against, evasive poetry in which swans and princesses as its leitmotifs form with roots in Homer, Pindar and Horace, as the finest way to sing of common things, but he used innovative strategies to create the down-to-earth effect, he sought, as in his odes to the artichoke and to a pair of socks . He declared himself allergic to the "elevated style practiced in ancient times .It was in the mundane that he found his subject matter, and he wanted to keep his poetry at that level. His strategy is easily summarized in three words; simplicity, honesty and conviction.

In the Mexico of the seventies, he was not about reason, but impulse. Neruda at a very early age of twenty wrote, *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, which is a classic in itself and brought him great name and fame and established him as a poet of great merit.

Neruda's translation is a perfect example of transposition from one language to another. In Neruda's case, this difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that the poet's output is clearly uneven. The first book – lengthy rendition of his poetry in English was by Angel Flores, privately printed in 1944 and expanded two years later. It includes portions of *Residence on Earth* and *Spain in the heart*.

The Chilean himself encouraged this multiplicity: he allowed various translators to work over the same poem, at times even concurrently. As is to be expected; the quality isn't uniform. Furthermore, the

field of Neruda's translators is a particularly belligerent, acrimonious one. Since the late sixties, the debate on what constitutes a fine translation has been strident. Michael Wood said in 1974 that "Robert Bly and Anthony Kerrigan make Neruda sound in English as if he might be a good poet in Spanish." There is a serious argument between translators, where Robert Bly blames and attacks Donald D Walsh as a "poor translator" because "he doesn't feel emotional intensity". Walsh responded by describing Bly's attack as "Splashy and slandering," then pointed out various errors made by Bly. The debate brings forth the question; can a translation be truly error free? Alastair Reid, arguably one of the best Neruda's translators, said years ago that translation has a mysterious alchemy. "some poems survive in another language, he argued, 'but others refuse to live in any language but their own, in which case the translator can manage no more than a reproduction, an effigy, of the original.'" To this, I would like to add that the right measure of freedom is the result of sheer intuition, too much is disruptive, too little is confining, in between the two is the deceitful, ungraspable ideal of perfection.

In the Eighties and Nineties, after Neruda was gone, others –Borges for instance – held the spotlight. The Argentine, in an interview, disparaged the Chilean, when he probably met briefly in Buenos Aires, for "selective Activism," choosing to endorse

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4. Quotes used are from an article in the Revisita Del Domingo, Santiago de Chile, 1969.

a good cause only when his own reputation could not be compromised. Borges portrayed Neruda as a fine poet, and then qualified the comment in cumbersome fashion, "I don't admire him as a man". Borges, of course, was allergic to the types of enthusiasms. As Volodia Teitelboim, Neruda's friend and most visible biographer, argued, Neruda in turn believed his Colleagues to be preoccupied with cultural problems, which didn't attract him because, in his opinion, they were not human. The exegetes, the explanations, the etymologists of literature, and the enigmas of knowledge," in the Chilean view, "were all vast and complex speculations, not without emptiness". The quality that has made him a classic is the sheer abundance of his talent.

To conclude, it must be said in the conclusion that the Latin American Literature, whether it is novel, short stories or poetry has spread out in many directions and although it has generally remained committed to the exigencies of a developing society, yet it has witnessed a fusion of many thematic and stylistic strand. Nothing is static in our universe, though the stage is always the same, but the actors and set designs change. The new becomes old, and the old is in the time reconsidered and reinvented. To put it in a nutshell, Latin American Literature is a social protest made purely in literary terms.