



Research Paper

The Impact Of La Violencia In The Life Of The Colonel In Gabriel Garcia Marquez's No One Writes To The Colonel

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ABSTRACT: Latin American literature is remarkable for the presence of several iconic figures like Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Colombian history is an embodiment of isolation, solitariness and violence and they are deeply embedded into the psyche of the novels of Garcia Marquez. The stigma and fear of being a colonized nation was always with them that they regarded the injustices meted out to them as routine courses of events and remained silent even to the denial of their fundamental rights. The colonial and neo colonial powers had conveniently forgotten to listen to the anxieties of those who were on the margins. But figures like the Colonel in *No One writes to the Colonel* offered resistance to such exploitations and maintained dignity even in the face of hardships. Narratives like those of the Colonel were always instrumental in imparting the lessons of empowerment to a nation that has long been subjected to several forms of exploitations.

KEYWORDS: Colonel, Exploitation, Latin America, La Violencia, Resistance

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Latin American continent has been subjected to many forms of violence and suppression right from the beginning of the colonial era. The process of violence adopted different modes during different periods of time. Even after independence, the brutality of violence continued to exhibit its presence during the neocolonial and post colonial periods in the forms of capitalism, urbanization and exploitation under the pretext of progress and development aimed to rebuild Latin America from the aftermaths of colonization.

Exploitation of the weaker sections of the society has been the most common tactic adopted by those in power especially during the military regime in Latin America. The weaker sections of the society were silenced and sidelined so that they couldn't offer any form of protest against the several ways through which they were forced to become submissive. The oppressive measures reached the ordinary masses in several ways- denial of basic right to live and work was the most common one. Through this tactic, they extracted the common man's hope and optimism to thrive in a society which has been their only place of abode. Natives were the worst affected one in this game of power. The pathetic thing in Latin America is that the colonial mind set continued even after independence and this time the powerful among the natives themselves contributed their part in exploiting their own people. They conveniently forgot the roles played by such marginalized people in making their country free from colonialism and helping them to enjoy the benefits of power.

The Colonel in *No One Writes to the Colonel* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez is one such figure who has been denied even the basic right to get his pension to have a decent living. The Colonel has been a part in the process of creating the government in power, but unfortunately his party lost in the civil war. The military regime always tried to suppress people like him with the support of the shrewd natives. Gerald Martin in his biography, Gabriel Garcia Marquez: A Life introduces the story like this:

It is October: a colonel, whose name the reader will never know, and who used to live in Macondo, is a man of seventy-five rotting away in a small, asphyxiating river town lost in the forests of Colombia. The Colonel has been waiting fifty –six years for his pension from the War of a Thousand Days and has no other means of support. It is fifteen years since he received even a letter from the state pension department but still he goes to the post office every day in the hope of information. Thus he spends his life waiting for news that never comes [210].

The pathetic situation of the Latin Americans during La Violencia is the subject of the novel *No One Writes to the Colonel*. Even their right to have a decent funeral is being denied by the military regime and is

seen in the novel when a poor musician's funeral procession was ordered to change direction when it was planned to pass in front of the barracks.

Poverty has been portrayed as the worst form of violence in this novel. "The colonel took the top off the coffee can and saw that there was only one little spoonful left. He removed the pot from the fire, poured half the water onto the earthen floor, and scraped the inside of the can with a knife until the last scrapings of the ground coffee, mixed with bits of rust, fell into the pot"[1]. This situation occurred in the life of the colonel as a result of La Violencia. The irony of this situation was that it didn't grab all the Latin Americans alike. There were certain groups which reaped several benefits out of it. Gabriel Garcia Marquez portrays the representative of such groups through the character Sabas. When the country gets rotten in the hands of poverty, Sabas lives in "a new building, two stories high, with wrought- iron window gratings" [9]. He indulges in corruption and calls himself a true patriot. His real face is revealed through the rooster episode in the novel.

The Colonel's son Agustin, a tailor kept a rooster when he was alive. He was murdered by those in power "for distributing clandestine political propaganda" [Martin: 211]. After his death, the Colonel protected the rooster in the memory of his son. Sabas, who called himself Agustin's godfather, offered nine hundred pesos for the rooster. But when the colonel brings it, he changed the price to four hundred pesos. Sabas knew the situation of the colonel and tried to make gain out of it. Such people also existed during La Violencia. Their ruthlessness went unopposed during that time as poor people didn't have the courage to raise their voice against them. Such characters always presented themselves as great in the golden pages of history and went unquestioned. But the Colonel was such a dignified person that he had decided not to become submissive in front of such repressive tactics. Gerald Martin observes in this regard: 'The Colonel endures innumerable humiliations in order not to have to sell the bird, which for him and his son's friends (named Alfonso, Alvaro and German) becomes a symbol of dignity and resistance, as well as a reminder of Agustin himself. The Colonel's wife, who is more practical, and also ailing and in need of medical treatment, disagrees with him and repeatedly urges him to sell the rooster. At the end of the novel the Colonel is still obdurately resisting" [211] and when she questions him what would they eat, at the end of the novel, "he felt pure, explicit, invincible at the moment" and "he replied: Shit. It had taken the colonel seventy- five years- the seventy- five years of his life, minute by minute- to reach at this moment" [69].

Marquez's works establish a deep rooted sense of reality inherent in the culture of Colombia. The pretensions and double game of the authorities became the subjects of scrutiny in his works. Through powerful narratives their realities were brought before the public and this has given the ordinary people an opportunity to understand the facts hidden from them till then. This has in turn given them the courage to question exploitation when it appeared before them again.

Thus narratives play a pivotal role in empowering an exploited nation and oppressed generation. Once narratives are presented as history people get an opportunity to get into the shoes of the writer and analyse the depicted situations and also to think beyond the writer's ideas as common man. This will enable them to scrutinize every 'official' fact presented before them and will also try to understand them from the perspectives of the exploited and marginalized. Only when people adopt such a stance, many hidden things can be unearthed.

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