

# TREATMENT OF HISTORY IN SELECT FICTIONS OF GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ

[Synopsis of Ph.D. Thesis]

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## 1. INTRODUCTION:

In the middle of the 20th century the world of European fiction was transformed by the writings of a Latin American novelist named Gabriel Garcia Marquez who was the first Colombian and the fourth Latin American to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, the previous Laureates being the Chilean poetess Gabriela Mistral (1945), the Guatemalan novelist Miguel Angel Asturias (1967) and the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda (1971). The period in which Marquez was born and ultimately began to write was a significant one in the history of Hispanic (Central and South American) literature. During the 1950s, the literature of the continent was characterized by three specific features: super-regionalism, the realist-modernist duality and a striving towards universalisation. (Maurya 53) Marquez emerged as a major exponent of Latin American in the period in the second half of the twentieth century (the 1960s) which is widely known as the 'boom' which gained international attention and led to recognition of Latin American belle letters as a powerful development in modern literature. The novels of Marquez which were quickly translated into various European languages including English caught the imagination of readers all over the world. His earliest published work includes novels and short fiction like the collection of short stories entitled *Leaf Storm* (1955), which was followed by another volume of short stories entitled *No One Writes to the Colonel and other Stories* (1958). Marquez subsequently published a number of novels including *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975), *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985), *The General in his Labyrinth* (1989), *Of Love and Other Demons* (1994), *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981), and *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* (2004).

An attempt has been made in this thesis to explore how Gabriel Garcia Marquez (1927-2014) treated the elements of history in some of his important works of fiction and to show how his representative fictions are effective in reflecting or representing the turbulent political history of Colombia in particular and its effects on the people of the region. In a decade and more after political independence, South America became a byword for political instability. It was a region notorious for civil wars, revolutions, coups, political assassinations and short lived constitutions, and as a place entrenched in extreme conditions of social and economic injustice. As a matter of fact, Latin America was born to an outworn, muddled and problematic socio-political legacy which was further complicated by small but powerful authoritarian coterie which took over power in the newly independent nations. Incessant political intransigence, social anarchy and civic confrontations led to most of the newly emergent nations coming under despotic governance. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a majority of the subcontinent's nations availed of the opportunities of liberal world trade inaugurated upon the command of Great Britain. This resulted in the formation of liberal oligarchies that were able to use the export economy to consolidate their authority and hegemony, and to stabilize their territories. Absolute autocratic and authoritarian regimes prevailed everywhere in the Caribbean as well as the Central American and Andean regions. There emerged in Latin America a whole brood of military dictators like General Pinochet of Chile, Juan and Eva Peron of Argentina, Rojas Pinilla of Colombia, General Moreno of Ecuador, Batista of Cuba, General Antonio D. Santa Ana of Mexico, and Juan Vicente Gomez of Venezuela. (Roy 295)

The second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century witnessed the emergence of corrupted political personalities whose lack of diplomatic knowledge and skills enabled many foreign powers fuel the several relentless and brutal bloody civil wars which destroyed not only Colombia but many of the other wealthy and other prosperous independent nations of Latin America. South America itself suffered over the 'War of a Thousand Days' which continued from 1899 to 1902. In this war which was fought between the liberals and the conservatives, between the bourgeoisie and the landowners, more than 100000 people died. (Grigore 63) Another historical event that is significant in the context of Marquez's fictions is the *Masacre de las bananeras* that took place on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1928 in the town of Cienaga near Santa Marta, Colombia. And apart from this, there is also the history of the government vandalism known today as 'La Violencia' (1948-1958), which resulted in the politically motivated slaughter of two hundred thousand people. Marquez's writings are often concerned with such historical tragedies as civil wars, the regime of a dictator, or an act of atrocity perpetuated by the army against its own people. In fact, these historical elements and events have been reflected in most of his fictions. However, for the purpose of this study, only some of Marquez's novels have been selected. These included the texts *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* (1955), *No One Writes to the Colonel* (1961), *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1989), and *The General in His Labyrinth* (1989). Marquez in these works introduced his readers to the never-ending repetition of tragedy of Latin America and its people.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

It may however be useful at this point to justify the intent and content of the present research work. There had been a great deal of research accomplished within the general field of Marquez studies in readings of magic realism, postcoloniality and historiographic metafiction in particular. Many theories had been put forward to explain how and why Marquez is one of the most representative Latin American writers. Among the more recent research works, mention may be made of the doctoral thesis entitled "The discourses of love and violence in popular culture and two novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez: *No One Writes to the Colonel* and *Love in the Time of Cholera*" authored by Martha Liliana Castano and submitted to Yale University in 2008. Another study worth mentioning is "Representation of Colombian political history: A Study of the selected novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez" authored by Bhatima Barman and submitted to Assam University, Silchar, in 2010. There is also the research thesis entitled "Post-Colonial Perspective in select novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez" authored by C. Dhanabal and submitted to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, in 2011. Another thesis is "Magical Politicism: History and Identity in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Fiction" which has been authored by Isabel C. Henao and submitted to Seton Hall University in 2017. Among others may be mentioned "Aesthetics and Latino American Artistic expression: A Case Study of Magic Realism in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*" which was authored by Nabila Naimi and submitted to Djilliali Liabes University, Algeria, in 2017; "Gabriel Garcia Marquez and the Aesthetics of Sensuality", authored by Mike Giuffrida and submitted to California State University, USA, in 2011; "Magical Realism and Social protest in the works of Gabriel Garcia Marquez", authored by Mustanir Ahmed and submitted to International Islamic University, Islamabad, in February 2015; "Language and Tone in the novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez", authored by Doris Rolfe and submitted to the University of Kansas, in 1972; "Gabriel Garcia Marquez: A Study of his Fiction", authored by Dennis Deforest West and submitted to the University of Illinois, Urbana, in 1972; "Garcia Marquez, Magic Realism and Language as Material Practice", authored by Fatima Fiona Moolla and submitted to the University of Cape Town, in 1994; "The Problem of loneliness in the novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez", authored by Wilson Rockey and submitted to the University of Calicut, in 1999; "Death, Solitude and Salvation: A Study of the Select Novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez", authored by Gazi Tareq Muzamil and submitted to Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore, in 2016; "Language and Tone in the novel of Gabriel Garcia Marquez", authored by Doris Rolfe and submitted to the University of Kansas, USA, in 1972; "Constellations of allegory: Gabriel García Márquez, Angela Carter and J.M. Coetzee", authored by Yamen Rahmoun Rahwan and submitted to the University of Warwick in 2010; "Based on true stories: Representing the self and the other in Latin American documentary narratives", authored by Liliana Guadalupe Chávez Díaz and submitted to Fitzwilliam College Cambridge in October 2017; "Market Realism: Neoliberalism and Latin American Literary movements after the Boom", authored by Andres Amerikaner and submitted to the Pennsylvania State University in August 2017; and, "Aspects of Power and History in the Dictator Novels by Alejo Carpentier, Augusto Roa Bastos and Gabriel Garcia Marquez", authored by Marcia Hoppe Navarro and submitted to the University of London in January 1985.

Some research papers in the field of Marquez studies which had been published in journals and were examined by me during my research writing, include Archana Singh and Harleem Kaur's paper titled "Silent voices in Marquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*" published in *Research Scholar*, Vol. 4, Issue 1 in 2016; Nupur Mittal's paper titled "Post-Colonial Environments in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's Works" published in *Localities*, Vol.4, Issue 1 in 2014; Mustanir Ahmed and Ayaz Afsar's paper titled "Magical Realism, social protest and anti-colonial sentiments in *One Hundred Years of Solitude: An Instance of Historiographic Metafiction*" published in the *Asian Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 27, Issue 2 in 2014; Mohammad Aghaei's paper titled "Representation of Social Realities of Latin America in Marquez's Literary Discourse" published in *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, Vol. 6, Issue 1 in 2015; Devika Misra's paper titled, "Simon Bolivar and the Latin American Identity Crisis" published in *Research Gate*, in November 2019; Sreejith Ramachandran and Dr. K.R. Rajkumar's paper titled, "A Stylistic Study of the Select Novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez" published in the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Cycle Research*, Vol. xii, Issue xi in 2020; Helen Weldt-Basson's paper, "The purpose of Historical Reference in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *El General En Su Laberinto*" published in *Revista Hispanica Moderna*, Vol. 47, Issue 1 in 1994; Mohammad B. Aghaei and Safar Hayti's paper titled, "Cultural symbols of Latin America in Marquez's literary discourse" published in *Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 7, Issue 1 in 2013; Ebrahim Ali and V. Gaikwad's paper titled, "Political Oppression in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *The General in his Labyrinth*" published in *JETIR*, Vol. 8, Issue 3 in 2021; Mohammad Motamedi, Abdolbaqi Rezaei Talarposhti and Behzad Pourqarib's paper "Spivakian Concepts of Essentialism and Imperialism in Gabriel Garcia's *The Autumn of the Patriarch*" published in *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 20, Issue 2 in 2017; Athulya Thankachy's paper titled, "The Impact Of La Violencia In The Life Of The Colonel In Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *No One Writes To The Colonel*" published in the *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 6, Issue 5 in 2018; Suresh Ranjan Basak's paper titled, "Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *No One Writes to the Colonel: Demythification of El Dorado and the Matrices of Violence and Hunger*" published in the *Metropolitan University Journal* in 2016; Gazi Tareq Muzamil's paper entitled, "Traumatic Imagination in the novel *No One Writes To The Colonel* by Garcia Marquez" published in the *Journal of English and Literature (JEL)*, Vol. 7, Issue 1 in 2017; Lubna Ahsan and Syed Shahabuddin's paper titled, "Tradition and Memory in Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*" published in *Research Journal of Language, Literature and Humanities (RJLLH)*, Vol. 1, Issue 5 in 2014; Silvio Sirias's paper titled, "Bolivar's Corporal Etherealness and His Lost Dream of Unification in Garcia Marquez's *El General En Su Laberinto*" published in *Revista Hispanica Moderna*, Vol. 53, Issue 1 in 2000; Palencia-Roth's paper entitled, "Gabriel Garcia Marquez: Labyrinths of Love and History" published in *World Literature Today*, Vol. 65, Issue 1 in 1991; R. Priyadharsini's paper entitled, "An Analysis of Kafkaesque Essence in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez" published in *Juni Khyat*, Vol. 10, Issue 7 in 2020; Dr. Sheetal Kapoor's paper titled, "*One Hundred Years of Solitude* –The Story of Mankind Revisited" published in *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences(IJELS)*, Vol.6, Issue 2 in 2021; Wolfgang A. Luchting's paper titled, "Gabriel García Márquez: The Boom and the Whimper" published in *Books Abroad*, University of Oklahoma, Vol.44, Issue 1 in 1970; George R. McMurray's paper titled, "Reality and Myth in Garcia Marquez's *Cien anos de Soledad*" published in *Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association*, Vol. 23, Issue 4 in 1969; and K. Gobalakrishnan and Dr. K. N. Sharmila's paper entitled, "The Source of Magic Realism in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*" published in *Black Writings: A Subaltern Perspective*, Vol. 18, Issue 3 in 2018.

From the above listing of research works (which is admittedly not exhaustive but only indicative), it may be noted that some significant issues like the treatment of the history of brutal and inhumane exploitation and persecution which Latin America in general, and Colombia in particular endured, are topics that have been relatively less researched on. Following upon this, the object of my research has been to show how Marquez interweaves a portrayal of the sufferings as well as of the sense of solitude and isolation of the people of the region with a depiction of factual historical events.

### 3. AIMS & OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH WORK:

This research work has tried to explore how Marquez drew upon the substance of history in some of his most brilliant works of fiction to depict the bloody and grim history of Latin America. For the purpose of organization, the thesis has been divided into four core chapters together with an introductory and a concluding chapter. The four central chapters

in this thesis include “Treatment of history in Marquez’s early fiction: *No One Writes to the Colonel* and *A Very old Man with Enormous Wings*”; “History and Politics in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*”; “Socio-Political history in *The Autumn of the Patriarch*”; and “Simon Bolivar and the Political History of South America in *The General in His Labyrinth*”. Marquez in these select texts introduces his readers to the unending repetition of tragedy of Latin America and its people.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY:

This thesis has employed a methodology involving close readings of the primary texts combined with a study of the socio-political, economic and historical background of the Latin American continent. Some concepts and theories taken from and relating to historiographic metafiction, magic-realism, historical novel and postcoloniality *et al* have also been applied. Library resources as well as internet or web sources of information have been extensively used.

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY:

In the very opening chapter (the Introduction) of my thesis I have considered important insights into historiography, looking in particular at Hayden White’s work *Metahistory*, Edward Hallett Carr’s book *What is History?* and Georg Lukacs’s famous critical overview in his monumental work *The Historical Novel*, all of which take note of history as being not a truly factual discourse but rather being a construct. Taking into consideration such understandings of history, this chapter therefore takes special notice of how a novelist like Marquez looked upon and drew upon some of the elements of the socio-political history of the Latin American continent to craft his fictions which have been studied in the present research work. Besides, a literature review has been featured in the opening chapter of my thesis.

Chapter 2 of this thesis which is entitled “Treatment of History in Marquez’s Early Fiction: *No One Writes to the Colonel* and *A Very old Man with Enormous Wings*” has taken into consideration Marquez’s depiction of the lives of common Colombian people who were compelled to live under an oppressive government and at a time when law was entirely abused and justice was reduced to a farce. This tragic history is also delineated minutely in Marquez’s fiction *No One Writes to the Colonel* which was published in 1961 just after *La Violencia* (1948-1958), a bloody civil war between the Liberals and the Conservatives.

Marquez was profoundly concerned with history being either forgotten or erased, and especially with the forgetting of such events as had occurred in Latin America. The obliteration of history is a repeated motif in Marquez, and evidence of this can be seen in such of his fictions such as *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* in which there are clear allusions to Latin America’s history of transition from colonial engagement to disengagement. The chapter (in relation to *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* in particular) focuses on detailing of socio-political and religious issues interwoven with glimpses into the daily life of ordinary people in Antioquenos which is situated in the north-western corner of Colombia. Marquez shows the triviality and spiritual vacuity exhibited by the Catholic Church through the character of Father Gonzaga who rejects the miracle of the angel on the grounds that “close up he was much too human”. (Rockey & Gerlach 124)

The chapter 3 of the thesis titled “History and Politics in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*”, shows how the massive political violence and civil unrest characteristic of Colombian national history are paralleled in the life of Colonel Aureliano Buendia who fought against the Conservatives who had facilitated the entry of foreign imperialist interests in the national affairs of Colombia. The European characters are depicted in the novel by Marquez to show that the native culture of Colombia has been defiled and that the erstwhile innocent Arcadia had been lost with the arrival of the Europeans. The arrival of the magistrate Don Apolinar Moscote in the town of Macondo is regarded as an intrusion of centrist governmental power. The chapter further takes into consideration a number of key historical happenings like the many civil wars between the Liberals and the Conservatives that are depicted in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. It has been argued that the events described in the novel are often fictional representations of certain historical events that took place in Colombia during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most notorious of these was the so-called ‘War of a Thousand Days’ that continued from 1899 to 1902. But another historical event that is significant in the context of the novel is the *Masacre de las bananeras* or the ‘Banana Massacre’ of 1928.

The chapter 4 of this thesis which has been entitled “Socio-Political History in *The Autumn of the Patriarch*”, contextualizes the text of the novel in the light of the rise of the *caudillos* during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Latin America (the Andean region, the Caribbean and the Central America in particular). As the history of revolutions, counter revolutions, and civil wars in South America and the Caribbean gave rise to the emergence of self-styled generals, the discussion carried out in this chapter draws attention to the military dictators who had been a common feature of postcolonial Latin America. To name a few, there had been Rafael Leonidas Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, General Pinotte of Chile, Fulgencio Batista of Cuba, Somoza Garcia of Nicaragua, General Garcia Moreno of Ecuador, General Francisco Morazan in Central America and many more. The chapter further examines Latin America’s long history of socio-political complications, racial diversity and authoritarian regimes, all of which have a direct connection with Marquez’s figuration in *The Autumn of the Patriarch* which is a novel centered on the life and time of a General who is a stereotypical Caribbean dictator. The novel delineates fights over absolute power and shows the ruthless exploitation carried out by the corrupt politicians as well as indicating the repression that the Latin American people had to endure for long. It is precisely from this point of view that *The Autumn of the Patriarch* is a serious postcolonial critique on *de facto* colonialism and neo-colonialism, dictatorships and hegemony.

The chapter 5 of the thesis, entitled, “Simon Bolivar and the Political History of South America in *The General in His Labyrinth*”, makes an attempt to investigate the situation and personality of Simon Bolivar who was known as ‘The Liberator’. Bolivar was (and still is) the most discussed historical personage of Latin America, being a charismatic leader who over the years from 1811 to 1824 had guided the revolutionary armies of South America in a troublesome series of campaigns that finally overthrew the Spaniards from their long-established colonies in South America. The chapter examines Marquez’s representations of Bolivar’s victories over the Spaniards and his winning of independence for Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru and Panama. This chapter also takes note of the novelist’s depiction of another historical personage, Bolivar’s former close associate but eventual enemy General Francisco de Paula Santander who was directly involved in an assassination attempt against Simon Bolivar.

In the concluding chapter (Chapter 6) of my thesis I have referred to the so-called “bourgeois–democratic revolution in Mexico” of 1910 and the Cuban Revolution of the 1940s as events constituting a watershed in Latin American socio-political history. The eventual triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 opened up a new horizon in the history of the Latin American people and led to new hopes and aspirations. These two revolutions had a tremendous impact on the writers and intellectuals of Latin America, the Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez included.

## 5. CONCLUSION:

Latin America’s history of religio-political complexities, ethnic diversities and cultural environment all find a place in Marquez’s fictions. Being a writer deeply entrenched in the socio-political milieu of the Latin American continent, Marquez intended to delineate the intimate history of Latin America through the lens of a representation of the experiences of a colonized people. Marquez was no political and social innovator, but there can be no doubt that in his fictions he drew upon historical facts and ultimately challenged the forces and operations of Western colonial hegemony. As Marquez declared unequivocally:

...it is not yet too late to engage in the creation of the opposite utopia. A new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth. (Marquez, *Solitude* 5)

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