

New Historicism in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

Satya Nath Pegu

Ph.D Research Scholar

Department of English

Nagaland University

Abstract

New Historicism is an approach to literary criticism and literary theory based on the premise that a literary work should be considered a product of the time, place, and historical circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated work of art or text. It gives equal emphasis on the literary and non-literary texts. New Historicism treats text and co-text equally in which the historical document is not treated as context but as co-text. It has its roots in a reaction to the "New Criticism" of formal analysis of works of literature, which was seen by a new generation of professional critics as ignoring the greater social and political consequences of the production of literary texts. It was coined by Harvard English Professor, Stephen Greenblatt, who is regarded as the major founder of New Historicism. The theory arose in the 1980s and gained widespread influence in the 1990s. As New Historicism provides a new approach to understanding fiction, it can provide understanding of history from multiple perspectives. This paper focuses on national history in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya's *Mrityunjay* (1970) through basic approach of New Historicism by analyzing 'the historicity of text' and 'the textuality of history'. The paper will also focus on the comparative analysis of the two writers.

Keywords: New Historicism, text and co-text, national, comparative.

Introduction

New Historicism is an approach to literary criticism and literary theory based on the premise that a literary work should be considered a product of the time, place, and historical circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated work of art or text. It gives equal emphasis on the literary and non-literary texts. New Historicism treats text and co-text equally in which the historical document is not treated as context but as co-text. It has its roots in a reaction to the "New Criticism" of formal analysis of works of literature, which was seen by a new generation of professional critics as ignoring the greater social and political consequences of the production of literary texts. It was coined by Harvard English Professor, Stephen Greenblatt, who is regarded as the major founder of New Historicism. The theory arose in the 1980s and gained widespread influence in the 1990s. New Historicism values how the work is influenced by the time in which the author wrote it and how the work changes people's interpretation of history. As New Historicism provides a new approach to understanding fiction, it can provide understanding of history from multiple perspectives. New historical interpretation will be done through Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya's *Mrityunjay* (1970).

Discussion

New historicists believe that historical texts, such as history books, novels, literary works, documents and folklores, are influenced by the time in which author wrote it. Thus, a literary work should be regarded as a product of the time, place and historical circumstances of its composition. Moreover, in the process of writing, historical events are interpreted by writers with their personal experiences and opinions. So, it is necessary to examine writers' background, the social sphere, and the books and theories that may have influenced them.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, a Columbian novelist who was born on 6 March 1928 in Aracataca, witnessed several socio-political incidents in Columbia as well as Latin America. His novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) is a product of the historical episodes like the Conservative Party and the Liberal party, and the Banana Massacre (1928). Garcia Marquez's personal experiences and other social influences lead to produce the historical anecdotes in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. In order to show how Garcia Marquez links his novel with his experiences, it is necessary to understand Garcia Marquez's life and career. From an early age, growing up in Aracataca, Garcia Marquez was aware of the political history and violence in his country, Columbia. He was raised by his grandparents in a house filled with countless aunts and rumours of ghosts. His childhood was a happy one, in which he enjoyed a close relationship with his grandfather and he was raised in a storytelling environment in that the elders were constantly reliving the past and recounting anecdotes about the history of the family and town. His grandfather, Colonel Nicolas Marquez, had fought on the liberal side against the ruling Conservatives in the Thousand Days' War. The character of Colonel Buendia is closely modeled after General Rafael Uribe Uribe, a legendary figure of Liberal politics and of the Thousand Days' War under whose command the novelist's grandfather fought. As a child, the novelist witnessed the complexity of United Fruit Company. Members of the family used to recall the heady days of the "banana fever" when the United Fruit Company expanded into Aracataca. His grandmother and aunts were credulous and superstitious women who believed in the supernatural and recounted all sorts of magical happenings, as if they were everyday events. He worked as a journalist for *El Espectador* in Bogota and had experienced the direct harassment from the Rojas Pinilla dictatorship. It was from his grandmother that he learned his narrative manner. As influenced by the myths of Faulkner's mythical Yoknapatawpha and Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Garcia Marquez was inspired to write about the mythical town of Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

One Hundred Years of Solitude reflects the history of Columbia since independence. The novel shows the burden of Garcia Marquez who wants to constitute a national identity, through the establishment of the Buendia family in the imaginary town of Macondo. Buendia family is a metaphor for the history of the continent since independence. Like the other countries in Latin America, Columbia gained its postcolonial independence in the early nineteenth century; yet their sense of collective nationhood has still not been properly formed. This can be attributed to the rise of oligarchic control in many Latin American countries after the Spanish domination where there was lack of grass-roots participation. At the beginning of the novel when Macondo is established, the founding people are full of hope and optimism. They leave their original homeland with a view to founding a town by the sea. Jose Arcadio Buendia and Ursula Iguaran are relatives and their marriage in their homeland is scandalized, as people believe that their offspring will be cursed and be born with

a pig's tail. So, Jose Arcadio thinks that it is time he and his wife left the town and founded a new one where people can live without their past. The modern inventions brought into Macondo by the gypsies fill them with awe and surprise which reflects their ignorance and backwardness as well as exposes their vulnerability. The advent of the Spaniards disturbs the peaceful life of the Chibchas. In the same way, the arrival of Melquiades and Don Apolinar Moscote brings catastrophe to Macondo. By creating a Macondo on the model of the Chibcha clan, Garcia Marquez yearns to return of pre-Hispanic life to Columbia. Thus, the Buendia family and their hometown Macondo, become a stage whereby Garcia Marquez directs the history of the colonization of his nation.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez uses not only the remote past but also, the contemporary history. To him history is a tool by which he wanted to educate his own community to realize their strength and weakness. This kind of treatment of contemporary history for correction is not very common among writers who dealt with history. He used history as his source material to correct the misrepresentation of the European against Latin America. So, Garcia Marquez thought of new historiography is not based on the history of colonizers, but to highlight Latin American reality that is different from European sensibility. This is significantly represented in the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party, and the Banana Massacre of 1928. Through these historical episodes, Garcia Marquez placed his characters in historical context. The ideological conflict between the two political parties, the Conservatives and the Liberals are found in the leadership between Bolivar and Santander that dominates Columbian Politics. Bolivar's supporters formed the nucleus of the Conservative party, supported the Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand Santander's followers, forerunners of the Liberals, wanted a decentralized government state rather than church control over education and other civil matters. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Garcia Marquez is deeply represented the hypocrisy of the leaders of the two parties who fight for their pride and power without any ideological base. He reconstructs the gap in Columbian politics by portraying the ideological vacuum between the Conservatives and the Liberals. The arrival of Don Apolinar Moscote divides the boundaries between the two parties. Since the boundaries between them are vague, Colonel Aureliano Buendia feels to ask Don Apolinar to tell him the difference between the two parties. When Colonel Aureliano Buendia trying to revolt against the oppressive regime, he asks his nephew, Arcadio to impose order upon Macondo. But, Arcadio becomes a harsh and cruel ruler, and at one point, he plots to kill Don Apolinar, whose daughter, Remedios Mascote is Arcadio's aunt. Colonel Aureliano Buendia himself starts to feel the blurred boundaries between the Conservatives and the Liberals when he is captured and sent to Macondo to be executed. It leads to Colonel Aureliano to belief that people fight for their ideologies are absurd in which the two parties are fighting only for the cause of pride and it brings futility to the Columbian people. The meaninglessness of ideology is found in Colonel Aureliano Buendia's question to Colonel Gerineldo Marquez :

“Tell me something, old friend: why are you fighting?”

“What other reason could there be?” Colonel Gerineldo Marquez answered. “For the great Liberal Party”.

“You’re lucky because you know why,” he answered. “As far as I’m concerned, I’ve come to realize only just now that I’m fighting because of pride...” (Marquez Gabriel Garcia, 139).

The irrelevance of ideology appears on several levels. Moscote identifies the Conservative Party with the church, but it is Conservatives who brutalize a priest and the church. Though, the Liberals, in the person of Arcadio, are ant-clerical, at one point of time, they rebuild the church destroyed by Conservative bombardment. All these factors signify that the Conservative and the Liberals are fighting only for the sake of pride without any clear ideology. Garcia Marquez shows the futility of the civil wars through the Colonel’s life. It highlights the fact that neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals manage to gain a firm foothold in Columbian politics, and it seems as if time did not yield any progress but supported the belief that Columbia was locked up in its own stagnant political whirlpool, sinking yet deeper into bouts of violence and bloodshed. Colonel Aureliano Buendia and his mother are not the only characters in the novel who are able to perceive that there is stagnation. Jose Arcadio Buendia, Ursula’s husband, also experiences the same feeling. Garcia Marquez reflects the dark side of the Columbian politics and the civil wars, and makes his people to understand the truth of history and the impediments to achieve national identity.

The Banana Factory Strike, an event which happened in Columbia in 1928, is recounted in the novel. Although the death toll Marquez gives is exaggerated, the event that occurred is, in fact, real and significant to his theme. In the novel, “the protests of the workers this time were based on the lack of sanitary facilities in their living quarters, the non-existence of medical services, and terrible working conditions” (Marquez Gabriel Garcia, 323). Jose Arcadio and other union leaders were responsible for voicing their concerns against the factory. However, as a response, some leaders were jailed in an attempt to silence them. Mr. Brown ends up freeing himself of responsibility and leaves Macondo. His identity becomes crucial for the ease with which history can be eradicated and responsibility revoked. Regarding Mr. Brown, the narrator explains that “he appeared before the judges with his hair dyed black and speaking flawless Spanish. The lawyers showed that the man was not Mr. Jack Brown, the superintendent of the banana company, born in Prattville, Alabama, but a harmless vendor of medicinal plants born in Macondo and baptized there with the name of Dragoberto Fonseca” (Marquez Gabriel Garcia, 324). Mr. Brown’s ability to abdicate responsibility and change his identity shows the power that narrative has and the impotence of a past. The concerns of those seeking justice are then dismissed by higher courts, leading to strike. The army is then sent to establish order. The day of the massacre the people are led to the town square under the pretense that an agreement will be reached between workers and company officials. Instead, the government opens fire on unarmed citizens under the orders of General Carlos Cortes Vargas, a name Marquez deliberately does not change from that of real person. The presence of Jose Arcadio Segundo at the massacre makes him only witness to the event. He wakes up in a train full of dead bodies that are set to land in the ocean in order to dispose of the evidence of the massacre. When Jose Arcadio Segundo escapes the ill-fated train, the first news he receives is an account: “there weren’t dead” (Marquez Gabriel Garcia, 331). Returning to the scene of the crime, “he went through the small square by the station and he saw the friter stands piled one on top of the other and he could find no traces of the massacre” (Marquez Gabriel Garcia, 331). An event that is rejected in the novel as being solved peacefully haunts the character with the recollection that “there must have been three thousand of them bodies” (Marquez Gabriel Garcia, 331). This

erasure of history demonstrates the importance of narrative and of producing an accurate past that cannot be forgotten. In the novel, the retelling of the event from the narrator's point of view shows the event was not forgotten, and there was at least one witness.

What irks Garcia Marquez most in the entire history of Banana incidents is the number of people killed in the strike and the United Fruit Company's ability to obliterate the entire happenings from the consciousness of Columbia. But his conscience is awake and he wants to tell the truth to the world. He estimates the number of casualties to be three thousand. Garcia Marquez shocked to learn that the Banana Company is able to distort the number of casualties. A careful revision of the Banana Massacre reveals that casualties were too high; that Cortes Vargas and the army behaved ruthlessly; that in the final analysis the arrogance of the United Fruit Company and its reluctance to come to terms with labour demands were ultimately responsible for the tragic outcome. The portrayal of Banana Company as the benefactor in the school history shocked Garcia Marquez in which it represents prosperity and progress. But in reality, the Banana Company creates violence and loss among the natives. Thus, Garcia Marquez highlights the Banana Massacre with minute details and defeat the conspiracy of silence and distortion in Columbian national history.

Conclusion

Writing from Columbia, Garcia Marquez depicts the history of the Spanish domination in Latin America and writing from Assam, Bhattacharyya depicts the history of British domination in India. Though, both the novelists belong to different countries, they represent similar historical issues through vivid representations of the past. They rewrite history as it was misrepresented since independence. Through the imaginary characters of the novels, it alternates the wrong configuration of history and fills the gap of misrepresentation in country's history. In *One hundred Years of Solitude*, the fictional setting is in Macondo and it is a symbol of nation's disintegration when the colonizers dominated them. The history of Macondo blends the conflict ideologies of the Conservatives and the Liberals, and the Banana Massacre of 1928. Bolivar and Santander that dominates Columbian Politics. Bolivar's supports Conservative party and supported the Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand Santander's followers, forrunners of the Liberals, wanted a decentralized government state. This reality of history is shown through the characters like Don Apolinar Moscote of the Conservative Party and Colonel Aureliano Buendia of the Liberal Party in which there is a stagnant in Columbian politics because of meaningless ideologies. Colonel Buendia is closely modeled after General Rafael Uribe Uribe, a legendary figure of Liberal politics and of the Thousand Days' War. The Banana Massacre of 1928 shows the distorted history where it says that it developed the people of Colombia. But in reality it was in this period, many people were killed and the actual causalities were shown less by the Colonizers' history. The school textbook also represented the Banana Company as a benefactor. So, Garcia Marquez brings all these hidden issues to the fore and suggests to alternate history according to the truth of country's history, and to form an holistic approach for the truthful recovery of national history.

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