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LIVING TO LIVE IN SOLITUDE: A READING OF GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ'S *DEATH CONSTANT BEYOND LOVE*

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Abstract

Solitude is one of the favourite themes of the Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez, whose magnum opus *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and majority of his works circumnavigate on the said theme. In many of his works-novels, novellas, short stories and autobiography-the mood and scheme move around solitariness and seclusion. Some his titles themselves explicate the very concept of solitude. No one writes to the Colonel, One Hundred Years of Solitude, the Solitude of Latin America etc. are citable examples. For Marquez, solitude is a multi-dimensional implication, along with its personal atmosphere: the solitude of his characters, his self and the continent Latin America. The Nobel committee itself also cited this phenomenon and experience any average Latin American has. "Nobel Prize in literature 1982 was awarded to Gabriel Garcia Marquez" for his novels and short stories, in which the fantastic and the realistic are combined in a richly composed world of imagination, reflecting a continent's life and conflicts." This paper analyses the theme of solitariness in the story, *Death Constant beyond Love*, by using the conventional reading strategy of a short story. The story can be read in the light of postmodern theories of approaching a text. His texts are embellished, embedded and integrated with the strategy of magical realism. Magical realism is the amalgamation and blending of magical elements along with realistic expressions. The surrealistic meta-narration of Gabriel Garcia Marquez is tinted with life experience of Latin Americans. The Senator Sanchez Onesimo suffers from the loneliness and solitude in his life, though he was powerful and influential. His life is analysed as an epitome of solitariness.

Keywords

Solitude, Magical Realism, Mythopoeic, Nobel Prize, Death, Rose, Power, Surrealism.

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Solitude is one of the favourite themes of the Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez, whose magnum opus *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and majority of his works circumnavigate on the said theme. Actually, it seems, Marquez has an obsession with the theme solitude. In many of his works-novels, novellas, short stories and autobiography-the mood and scheme move around solitariness and seclusion. Some his titles themselves explicate the very concept of solitude. *No One Writes to the Colonel*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *the Solitude of Latin America* etc. are citable examples. For Marquez, solitude is a multi-dimensional implication, along with its personal atmosphere: the solitude of his characters, his self and the continent Latin America. Even the name of the continent Latin America is a misnomer and naturally controversial. The colonial remnants and imprints still haunt the creative cosmos of Marquez. The Nobel committee itself also cited this phenomenon and experience any average Latin American has. "Nobel Prize in literature 1982 was awarded to Gabriel Garcia Marquez" for his novels and short stories, in which the fantastic and the realistic are combined in a richly composed world of imagination, reflecting a continent's life and conflicts." (<http://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1982/summary/>)

The Nobel acceptance speech of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, entitled "The Solitude of Latin America" encapsulate all of his major themes, and it functions as an introduction to the philosophy of the writings of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, among others. His concepts about the pre-colonised pristine life of the continent, their oral transmission of histories, the European Christian colonialism, the representation of the aboriginal as cannibals, the fantastic and fabulous descriptions of the natives, the Christian colonial legacies, deterritorialization of the native cultural ramifications, the domestic and international policies of the nations in the Continent etc. are clearly mentioned in this much acclaimed talk. But the most important theme, of course, is the question of solitude and seclusion.

Marquez philosophises the genesis of his obsession with the theme solitude. The characters created by Marquez share this problem of solitariness. His innumerable characters are being

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moulded on this aspect. The following quotation from the above mentioned speech clarifies this argument. "Poets and beggars, musician and prophets, warriors and scoundrels, all creatures of that unbridles reality, we have had to ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable. This, my friends, is the crux of our solitude." (Marquez Solitude)

The purpose of this paper is textually analysing the theme of solitariness in the story, Death Constant Beyond Love, by using the conventional reading strategy of a short story. Most of the short stories of Gabriel Garcia Marquez can be read in the light of postmodern theories of approaching a text. His texts are embellished, embedded and integrated with the strategy of magical realism. Magical realism is the amalgamation and blending of magical elements along with realistic expressions. The surrealist meta-narration of Gabriel Garcia Marquez is tinted with life experience of Latin Americans.

In the opening line of the short story itself, the author Gabriel Garcia Marquez introduces the character Sanchez, so as to get a clear picture about the development of the story. "Senator Onesimo Sanchez had six months and eleven days to go before his death when he found the woman of his life" (Marquez Death 77). Senator Onesimo has all attractions, in his life. He is a successful election campaigner, and really a tall crowd puller. But he has a divided self. He is artificial and insincere. The depth of the solitude is the result of his insincere attitude to life. He is married to a German woman, but only when he finds Laura he sees a real woman for him. This artificial nature of the Senator is highlighted, by many critics.

No doubt, Senator Onesimo Sanchez is cynical and corrupt to the core and illusory props of his electoral campaign neatly symbolize the empty ritualism of his speeches and slogans. And yet one cannot but feel touched by his desire for simple companionship with the young, ...Afro-French beauty Laura Farina during his last few months alive....To add to the ironies, he gains "the woman of his life" only by finally giving in to a long-standing request from Laura's criminal father for a phony residence card. Love thus flowers thanks to a secret and sordid deal (Bell-Villada 139)

But his inner self always live with an air of loneliness. This loneliness, he tries to avoid, but he was again ensnared by the feeling. He was well educated. He was graduated from one of the best colleges in the world. A metallurgical engineer by profession Senator Onesimo, succeeded in every walk of life as far as an outsider is concerned. A voracious reader he was, and travels in the air-conditioned car. But he feels alone. More lonely than he was in the past. Feels poor in the midst of prosperity. "Senator Onesimo Sanchez was placid and weatherless inside the air-conditioned car, but as soon as he opened the door he was shaken by a gust of fire and his shirt of pure silk was soaked in a kind of light coloured soup, and he felt many years older and more alone than ever". (Marquez Death 77). Senator Onesimo's life was boisterous. He was happy and unhappy for many reasons. He was going to face the election. mammoth rallies were arranged, in different parts of the country. There also he faces the seclusion. "While the preparations for the public rally were being completed, the senator managed to have an hour alone in the house they had set aside for him to rest in. Before he lay down he put into a glass of drinking water the rose he had kept alive all across the desert, lunched on the diet cereals which he took with him so as to avoid the repeated portions of fried goat that were waiting for him..." (Marquez Death 77).

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The feeling of solitude and loneliness is conspicuous everywhere, in the short story. Even when the Senator was having some personal relationship with his lover Laura Farina, he was preoccupied with the feeling of loneliness. He was sitting down on an army cot, and unbuttoning his shirt. The conversation between the Senator and Laura Farina is interesting. They were speaking about her age and health. According to the Senator, Laura Farina is a child. She proves that she is getting nineteen, next April. Suddenly, in between the conversation, he becomes conscious about the solitude in which both of them were cobwebbed.

"You're just a child," he said

"Don't you believe it," she said. I'll be nineteen in April."

The senator became interested.

"What day?"

"The eleventh," she said.

The senator felt better. "We're both Aries," he said. And smiling, he added:

"It's the sign of solitude." (Marquez Death 80)

The very beginning of the story emblematically picturises the main theme of the story. The village was described in such a way that it demonstrates the magicality and loneliness a situation and context, from which even Gabriel Garcia Marquez cannot escape. The village, its name, its inhabitants, its neighbourhood, its administration all are suffering from this anonymity. The village becomes a microcosmic representation of the macrocosmic Latin America. As pointed out by Marquez in his Nobel acceptance speech, the whole Latin Americans are suffering from this anonymity and exclusion. The village name is significant. That may be any village in Latin America, or more precisely any Colombian village.

He met her in Rosal del Virrey, an illusory village which by night was the furtive wharf for smugglers' ships, and yet it seemed in broad daylight the most useless inlet on the desert, looking out on an arid and directionless sea, so far removed from everything that no one would have suspected that someone capable of changing the destiny of anyone lived there. Even its name was a kind of joke, because the only rose in that village was being worn by Senator Onesimo Sanchez himself on the same afternoon that he met Laura Farina. (Marquez Death 77)

This is the description of the village. It was illusory or magical. It is the Latin American reality. They live in illusions of being recognised with their colonisers' descendants. On many occasions Marquez made it explicitly clear that Latin American reality is different from that of Europeans. European sensibility and approaches are based on rationality, in contrast to Latin Americans. Marquez's mythopoeic sensibility was based on the premises of the mythic consensus of the people. The said village is least prosperous in economical terms and it is ostensibly isolated from the rest of the continent and the world.

The reason for the feeling of solitariness of the Senator Onesimo is multiple. It is related with power and his personal life. Power isolates individuals from others. Though the rulers were surrounded by sycophants and other associates, at the core they are facing and feeling loneliness. It is the case with Senator Onesimo as well. The immediate reason for his particular loneliness is the warning of his imminent death. In the first sentence itself the narrator makes it very clear that the senator is facing his death. "Senator Onesimo Sanchez had six months and eleven days to go before

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his death when he found the woman of his life" (Marquez Death 77). The oracle like revelation about his death was a top national secret, about which only a very few confidants know. Only his private doctors are aware of this, except the Senator. They too keep this as a top secret. He was never taking his wife and children during his campaign. He was keeping aloof from there, because of this alarmingly looming death over his head. He keeps his German wife and children away from him, when he was in the campaign mode. "He was married to a radiant German woman who had given him five children and they were all happy in their home, he the happiest of all until they told him, three months before, that he would be dead forever by next Christmas." (Marquez Death 77).

The theme of solitude and isolation is the connecting thread of the story. It binds the characters together. All the characters in the story, this way or other face the issues of seclusion. The character Senator Onesimo is a typical Marquezian character. His life is fantastic and complex. His behaviour leads the reader sometimes in a perplexed mood. Embellished with magical realism and defines inner conflicts, senator Onesimo moves through his artificial and pretentious life. The commitment and ambition of the Senator is noteworthy and interesting. Though he was aware of the fact that he has "only six months and eleven days to go before his death" (Marquez Death77), he never leaves the election campaign unattended. He leads his boisterous election campaign with assured confidence and overarching enthusiasm. His life and philosophy is that of an illusion. The village is illusory though it has a name Rosal del Virray. Though he has a wife and children, he calls his fiancé Laura Farina the woman of his life. The words associated with the Senator and his arrival at the illusory village invite attention. Gabriel Garcia Marquez used some words that are highly suggestive and explanatory. The words like the illusory village, placid and weatherless, real life, gust of fire, hot, unreal, desert etc. are multi suggestive. The flower rose is one of the powerful symbols, associated with the Senator and is directly related with his personal moulding up with his version of solitude. The illusory village has name embedded with the word rose: village name is Rosal del Virrey. The flower rose and its shadows were explained in great detail for many places. Rose is the central figure that was used to ease out his personal feelings and loneliness. The only comfortable item that serves as companion when he was in a distressed mood, there is only one rose in the whole village. The only rose was used by the Senator, and not ready to part away with it. And the rose plays a vital role in his life. When he was meeting his woman Laura Farina, he was associated with the flower. Both are his leisure time and serious time distractions and attractions. "Even its name was a kind of joke, because the only rose in that village was being worn by Senator Onesimo Sanchez himself on the same afternoon that he met Laura Farina." (Marquez Death 77). The flower rose is his friend always. A real friend indeed. He pays utmost care to preserve it during all seasons of time: be it in the desert or otherwise. The rose was given drinking water. Gabriel Garcia Marquez suggests that the rose is like drinking water to the Senator. Wherever he travels, he keeps the rose sufficiently watered and unfaded, because it is very much associated with his destinies and absolute power, as he only owns the rose in the village. "Before he lay down he put into a glass of drinking water the rose he had kept alive all across the desert, lunched on the diet cereals which he took with him so as to avoid the repeated portions of fried got that were waiting for him during the rest of the day..." (Marquez Death 78).

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The rose functions as an elixir and motivational force. It is like a straw, in which he believes in, just like a drowning man relies on any straw that comes before him. He wants not to remember his death. His death was predetermined, and the last minute counted. The flower rose is so intimate that he keeps it even when he was naked. Rose and its shadow was enthralling and invigorating his spirit. "Then he put the electric fan close to the hammock and stretched out naked for fifteen minutes in the shadow of the rose, making a great effort at mental distraction so as not to think about death while he dozed." (Marquez Death 78)

The theme of solitariness moves to the end of the short story. Senator keeps his loneliness and rose till the end of his life. The loneliness, the rose and the woman keep the Senator lively and active till death visits him as forewarned. "Then she laid his head on her shoulder, her eyes fixed on the rose. The senator held her about the waist, sank his face into woods animal armpit, and gave in to terror. Six months and eleven days later he would die in that same position, degraded and repudiated because of the public scandal with Laura Farina, and weeping with rage at dying without her." (Marquez Death 81)

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