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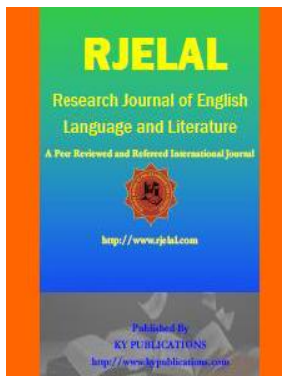
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## GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ'S *CHRONICLE OF A DEATH FORETOLD*: A PUZZLE BECOMES A CREATIVE WORK

Dr. M. ANANDHARAJ

Associate Professor

Department of English, Sir Theagaraya College, Chennai, India



### ABSTRACT

Marquez was the most notable genius among many writers who was able to function successfully in many areas of literary fiction writing like short story, short novel and novel. His contribution to world literature is credited with more than ten novels and a hundred short stories. The uniqueness of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* has a very important place among the creations of Marquez because there is a mixture of journalism and an outstanding fictitious narration. A good piece of journalism normally develops interest in the very opening and that is abundantly present in most of his novels. The details given in the text in the course of narration carries journalistic style of piling up details throughout the novel based on his close observation of the daily life in Colombia/Aracataca or in Latin America in general. The title seems to explain everything at a particular place but when we read we just come to know only about the exact things about the causes for an unfortunate murder of a young man Santiago Nasar when every one simply watched without making an attempt to stop it. The death of a man that is discussed or envisioned has its own strong reasons but no one understands why it should happen. The nature of the murder executed makes it a riddle that remains demystified even by the most experienced in the place. Nobody hates the young man but still no one tries to save him. The novel becomes a creative riddle in its pace to narrate and complete the fate of the young man Santiago Nasar put against the emotional Vicario brothers for the loss of virginity of their sister Angela.

**Keywords:** journalism, narration, unfortunate murder, riddle.

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### INTRODUCTION

*Chronicle of a Death Foretold* was published in 1981, one year before he received Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982. It was made into a film 1987 by the post neo-realist director Francisco Rosy and the effect of it was milder than the novel. It cannot be denied that this novel is an inevitable creation of twentieth century. The works of Marquez are known for the opening lines. They are very close to poetry

and that is one strong reason for the grand success of his writings. In the very first line of his works the tone, quality and the central issue are decided. The lines that follow throughout the novel will slowly release the riddle and story. Minute details of culture, journalistic narration, a prose style that is very dear to Marquez and the special vision of Marquez all mingle together to convert this small novel into an important masterpiece of twentieth

century.<sup>1</sup> The novel has only five chapters and in such a small novel Marquez introduces more than thirty characters. He is able to create an emotional picture about the main character within three or four lines. His prose style makes things appear as if they are under water and the picture that we see is both clear and unclear. It definitely creates a mysterious atmosphere in the novel.

This novel, though it remains very much within the realist tradition of the nineteenth century, exhibits one or two elements of the magical quality of reality that existed in the atmosphere of the place where the action of the novel takes place. But we can say that Marquez constructs novels with the stress upon new realities without the reflection of existing themes. After 1930s, instead of portraying regional and national life and customs, Latin American writings got influenced by the modernist writings of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and William Faulkner. This tendency was taken up in full swing by Marquez and this novel is a good example for that. A chronicle should normally deal with the events that are recorded in the order of their occurrence. But this novel is utterly the opposite of that. There is a movement of story forward and backward and there is a repeated stuff of thoughts and incidents. Such a type of writing makes the novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* a riddle as the narrative develops from page to page in describing the vague atmosphere of the small town where the Vicario brothers want to kill Santiago Nasar for the loss of virginity suffered by their beloved sister Angela.

In the novel, San Roman is married with Angela Vicario, a beautiful girl. After the marriage, he sends her back to her own family by saying that she is not a virgin. It brings shock and shame to herself and her own family members want to take revenge for the disgrace set upon Angela and the family. In their anger, they ask her about the man who is the reason for the loss of her virginity. She accuses Santiago Nasar as the reason for such an ill fate. Santiago Nasar is then killed by her drunken brothers with butcher's knives. Marquez himself admitted that the main idea for the novel is taken from the family history of a real local person by name Mr. Palencia. The names and the creative

making of the book's plot are the results of his own unique style of imagination. The very puzzling nature of the origins of Marquez's creative process is well understood by us when the book is challenged for a share in the royalties and the credit of co-author status by that person Mr. Palencia in 1994; finally it was rejected by a court in 2011 after seventeen years of legal battle.

At the end of the novel, who robbed the virginity of Angela; why Angela used the name of Santiago Nasar; whether Vicario brothers really wanted to kill Santiago; why nobody, even the police, does not want to intervene in the murder which has almost become an open secret- all these questions are not fully answered by the narrator and it is left to the guess of the readers. It is possible to guess that not only the Vicario brothers but also the entire society has a role to play in the death of Santiago. The arrival of the Bishop and the arrival of death denote different symbolic representations and they overlap with each other to move the novel to many levels of understanding. It is well known that all great works of art possess a kind of directness and simplicity in their expression. It is very much true with the case of this small and powerful novel. Also it is known that only a weak work of art allows the main point or the focus to be removed from it. Then the meaning of the novel is spread throughout the novel in an inseparable manner, it reaches the height of creation. Something that cannot be told otherwise becomes a novel, or a short story or a poem. Only when in each and every word its meaning mixes and mingles, it is able to share with the readers of many generations the secrets of time, universe and human being.

Further the ways of using names is one aspect of Marquez's narrative that causes confusion in the flow of the story. The same thing is seen in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* when we come across the names Aureliano, Arcadio and Amaranta. Like that the way in which Marquez uses names in this novel also adds to the confusion between reality, fiction and form. While the story is based on a real life incident, the novel seems to be journalistic and anecdotal informations are used here and there often as it tries to provide the reader with the facts of the murder. There is a reference to the

relationship between Santiago Nasar and Maria Alejandrina Cervantes at the age of fifteen when the narrator speaks about it for few pages. But there is no clarification of evidence for the guilty consciousness of Santiago Nasar about the crime he died for. It is a very important question to be answered in terms of the plot of the novel, but there is no sign of it.<sup>2</sup> It surely puzzles a reader and drives him to go beyond the narration even when he is reading the novel. The title denotes that the novel is going to be simply a 'chronicle' of a death. But the narration shifts between the past and the present to create an extraordinary, mysterious and magical atmosphere and there is no clear chronicle explaining the reason for the murder of the young man who is at once innocent, undoubting and at the same time unprotesting about his own murder.

There is nothing to hide about the evil deed for the brothers. They repeatedly state their idea of murder to almost everyone who is available. What is puzzling is why no one is ready to stop the Vicario brothers from doing the act provided the fact that Nasar is very adjustable to all people. Misunderstandings and miscommunications go unchecked by each and everyone as unknown reasons rule them in a very horrifying manner. It is quite strange that the foreknowledge of the people in that village does not stop a crime from happening.<sup>3</sup> The narrator looks like an investigator and he tries to relate his story after twenty seven years of the tragic incident. His tone is that of deadpan tone of a journalist (that of the grandmother of Marquez!) trying to arrive at the truth behind the murder. But what makes the text more and more a riddle is that the more he learns about it, the more mysterious the story becomes. At the end, his interrogation or investigation does not stop with a murder committed by two brothers but it reveals the mind and culture of a specific kind of people.

As the novel does not explain the reasons and the questions related to the murder, the reader has to imagine and gets perplexed about the motives and the nature of the crime. Even it raises certain questions about the ethics of love and honour in a place where knowledge is not deeply intrusive. It remains a riddle whether the one who is

murdered or the people of the place where the tragedy takes place feel guilty of the crime and sure of the legal punishment for it. And if they are very much particular about the dignity and other equally strong and vague issues, what is the reason for these crimes in such a 'cultured' place that cares for morality? The condition of the narrator is also the same even at the end of the book knowing only when he began. It appears as if the narrative throbs to disclose something in the next sentence itself but it does not happen anywhere. That too gives a colour of riddle to the text. The tone of the novel gives a kind of pressure to the reader to expect a purpose behind the happenings of the novel, at least behind a big event like a murder, and so any reader expects a conclusion. But there is no fulfillment of such expectation. Marquez, in fact, tells very early in the novel that Santiago Nasar is going to be killed. What the text does is to simply throw light on the death of Santiago Nasar without explaining it.

The absurdity of the whole situation is finely dealt with by Marquez in the last pages of the novel. What is painful is the fact that the bloody event could have been avoided at any moment of the development of the happenings towards it. It also explains how the small town is able to cope with the vague issues of honour, dishonour and guilt. As the Vicario brothers are not guilty of the murder, the people of the small town do not feel guilty of the abstract ideas of honour and revenge. The tone of the novel too implies a kind of dreamlike situation to represent the confusing actual events. Everything happens as if the whole town is in dream. When the narrator tries to put things in a neat order, the story is not cooperating- it becomes a puzzle.

#### Conclusion

*Chronicle of a Death Foretold* demonstrates the journalistic skill of Marquez rather than that of a novelist in the narration of an untoward incident in a place where honour is regarded as a higher ideal than life itself. It is revealed by the flow of the journalists to Sucre, the actual place where the real murder that inspired the book took place in order to interview the surviving characters. The impact of Marquez on world literature became unbelievable after Marquez's writings were translated into

English. Mostly from English it was translated to many other languages all over the world. The wave reached India too and this particular novel was translated into Tamil (an Indian regional language) also in 2004. It had a tremendous impact on modern Tamil writing with its strange mixing of journalism and creative writing. Indeed, such an effect of a literary text on an alien soil also looks like a puzzle!

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