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**GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ'S ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE –
DECONSTRUCTING THE DECADENCE OF A GOLDEN PERIOD IN COLOMBIA AND
LATIN AMERICA**

DIVYA PRABHA.P¹, Dr. G. KALVIKKARASI²

¹Ph.D Research Scholar & Asst.Prof, Dept of English, SDNB Vaishnav College, Chrompet, Chennai-44
divyavasanth1712@gmail.com

²Head, Dept of English, DRBCCC Hindu College, Pattabiram, Chennai.



ABSTRACT

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's masterpiece *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a text that reconstructs the history of the Latin American nation. Garcia Marquez relies on memory as a powerful means to rewrite the history of the glorious period in Latin America. He has always been very keen in presenting to the world the various facets of his Latin American history. When the Spanish colonised the New World, the Aztecs, Mayans and the Incas were the major percentage of indigenous populations. Therefore the three major distinct cultures that flourished with its long history within the Latin American nation clashed with the Spanish forces. As a result, the Spanish forces were victorious and took control over the land.

KEYWORDS: Memory, Spanish Colonisation, Alienation, Destruction and Decadence, The Banana Massacre, The Insomnia Plague, loss of Traditional society, Modernisation.

The novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez intends to recover the lived experience of the Latin American people and their entire culture. This novel also has helped create a Latin American identity. For over 500 years, Italians, Germans, British, French, Portuguese, Dutch, Chinese, African and many others, have contributed much to the ethnic diversity of Latin America. It has always been a multi-cultural society appreciating each other's cultures. But foreign invasions and the technological advancements that the various cultures brought along with them, made things fall apart. The writer makes an attempt to reconstruct the glorious past by deconstructing the various issues that led to the decadence of a once glorious society.

The novel expresses how the indigenous people of Latin America, unexposed to

industrialization and modern world were slowly exposed through colonization and through their crude Dictators. The novel deeply penetrates to examine and find out what caused the destruction of a powerful society. The legacy of colonisation had destroyed so many important traces of the native culture of Latin America.

Latin America had a rich historical past marked by both internal and external oppression, exploitation and violence that was developed by colonialism, slavery, marginalisation and industrialisation. The novel begins with introducing Jose Arcadio Buendia and his wife Ursula. They get married which is considered as incest in their native land since they were first cousins. Hence they move out of the land they belonged to which is compared to the Garden of Eden. They move to a new land and establish a village named Macondo, in the

Colombian region, based on their whims and fancies. Both of them fail to understand that the sin they committed cannot be subsided. They have broken the traditional ways of living by getting married to each other.

Slowly people from various regions settle in Macondo as immigrants and lead their life. The people were unexposed to any technological advancement except that Jose Arcadio Buendia would often come out with various scientific experiments. The arrival of the United Fruit Company, backed up by the U.S Government toppled the peaceful life of the people. The Company was established to grow bananas and export them. Though the banana company gave them an opportunity to earn their livelihood, it indirectly suppressed them. With the Banana Company, came the railway tracks for easy transportation of the bananas and very soon the land was easily locatable and reachable for the European explorers. There are instances in the novel that showcase how the indigenous population had to slowly adjust themselves to a modern condition due to the arrival of the Banana Company. With them came the arrival of new technology and capitalism.

The advancements made the natives move away from their own traditional norms, hence losing their identity. The natives of the village of Macondo, in the novel exchanged their traditional way of life for a modern one with hopes of a better and comfortable life. They were unaware of the destruction that the modern life would bring. The Banana Massacre that took place frightened the natives. The workers of the United Fruit Company went on a strike demanding for dignified working conditions. But the company in turn massacred the people involved in the strike. Many natives were killed and several others ran away from the region for the fear of life. Thus the society got slowly disintegrated. Garcia modelled the actual Banana Massacre that took place in Colombia in 1928 in the novel. He wished to bring to limelight how the foreign forces were a source of turbulence in an indigenous society.

Like the Buendia's family, the native population started moving away from traditional practices for living. The idea of Capitalism penetrated. The people of the village of Macondo, like the people of Colombia, gradually started working endlessly for monetary benefits and their concept of work got totally transformed. Their age old value of working to make the ends meet got changed to working for maximum savings. Family and home had no place under societal norms. Garcia portrays the actual situation that was prevalent in the Latin American society in the chapters of the novel.

Garcia looks at technological advancements and progress as opposed to tradition. It in a way erases tradition permanently by directly and indirectly protruding into the lives of individuals and their collective memory. Another instance in the novel is the arrival of an orphan girl Rebecca, who brings with her a grave disease called the insomnia plague. The plague spreads throughout the village of Macondo and the people spend time without proper sleep. Slowly they accept it as fate and indulge in various other activities. The loss of sleep psychologically disturbs them and they get pushed to a situation wherein they completely forget the names of common things. They begin to write the names of those things over the objects in order to remember them. Jose Arcadio Buendia writes the names and use of things on pieces of papers and pastes them on the things.

"The sign that he hung on the neck of the cow was.... This is a cow. She must be milked in the morning so that she will produce milk, and milk must be boiled in order to be mixed with coffee to make coffee to make coffee and milk." (One Hundred Years of Solitude, 43-44)

The writer suggests that the influence of foreign culture would definitely change the ways of thinking and erase the glorious past and indigenous native history.

Tradition and history goes hand in hand. Jose Arcadio Buendia and his wife run away from their native land for the sin they committed long back and stayed in a self-established village. Till the

novel ends, they wander all around the village of Macondo unable to live peacefully. The past and its rich heritage are highly inevitable for a person in order to reveal his identity. Without the past or idea of lineage, survival seems to be very hard. Jose Arcadio Buendia feared that the village would slowly forget God and puts up the sign "God Exists". He strongly believed that at least fear of God could make people lead a highly moralistic life. Here Garcia stresses on the turn that the modern world would take. The modern world questioned on the traditional belief of the mere existence of God. Modern ideas made the individuals lose their fear and trust in God which led to the decadence of the society.

The society of Macondo was once a unified one without any groups and did not own any arms. They managed to solve their internal problems among themselves without creating any problems. This was a traditional way adopted to solve issues. But the contact with the Western world gave rise to internal conflicts which could not be solved. It led to so many communal problems. The various advancements in science and technology forced the native people to import arms and adopt modern political structures of the developed nations.

As a result the people of Macondo got divided into two major political parties comprising of the Liberals and the Conservatives. The traditional society with striking memories got completely shattered. They began waging wars and fighting against each other. This is similar to the political situation that prevailed in Latin America. There always existed a tension between the Liberals and Conservatives. Colonel Aureliano Buendia becomes unbeatable in the war but soon he realises the futility of war. This is because he doesn't remember any of his enemies and questions to himself the purpose of waging wars. All the thirty- two wars that he waged never gave him a meaning in life. He gets completely lost in solitude. He understands that wars begin in a different historical period and continues for generations.

The novel thus becomes a microcosm of the life led by the Latin American people. Solitude and alienations last until the end of their lives. The

natives including Buendia fail to understand that utopia is an illusion. The people who ran behind the modern means of life failed to understand that loss of age- old tradition and identity has deep roots in the loss of history and cultural heritage. The people never made any effort to remember or revive their forgotten past as they did not know that they have actually forgotten their past. They have almost travelled a path wherein they cannot trace back their shared cultural memory. Capitalism reduced the sacredness of the past, the traditions, religious concepts and replaced them all by pseudo- ideologies.

One Hundred Years of Solitude is almost a warning that expresses a strong note the loss of tradition and cultural history will definitely lead mankind to doom. The various stories told by their ancestors about different places, the songs sung in relation to their rituals, the rivers that flow through their region, the food habits and their dressing patterns are elements that compose the culture of a place. This culture can be preserved only when memories of one generation is transferred to the next. When the society disintegrates, this lineage of collective experiences undergoes decadence.

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