



# THERAPEUTIC RHYTHMS IN LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE – A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO *LIVING TO TELL THE TALE* BY GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ

Dr. DIVYA PRABHA PAZHANI

ASST.PROFESSOR, DEPT OF ENGLISH

SRIMATHI DEVKUNVAR NANALAL BHATT VAISHNAV COLLEGE FOR WOMEN,

CHROMPET, CHENNAI- 600044

## ABSTRACT:

Recently, studies on the concept of psychoanalysis have gained wide momentum. There is also a considerable growth in genres that speak in volumes about tormented history and lifestyle. All these writings in a way, call for psychoanalysis. The Latin American history is a classic example to showcase numerous wars, massacres and harsh memories under wicked Dictators. Gabriel Garcia Marquez in his memoir *Living to Tell the Tale*, talks of how constantly the memories of the happy past torments him in particular and the people of his nation on the whole. The text almost becomes a vehicle to vent out his emotions, so that it gives him a healing effect.

**Index Terms:** Spanish Invasions, Banana Massacre, La Violencia, indigenous people, Dictators, Trauma

All academic fields of study not only broaden the perspectives on Literature but also help to understand the human civilization. Right from the beginning of the colonial era, the Latin American continent has been subjected to many forms of violence and suppression. The culture of the land has been a combination of repression and oppression in politics, romance and lamentation. The brutal violence was exhibited even after independence from the Spanish forces. Violence offered its presence in the neo-colonial and postcolonial period in Latin America in the name of modernisation, progress and development. It continued to fool the people of the nation in terms of rebuilding and developing the nation from the aftermaths of colonial rule.

The native land of the writer, Colombia, in Latin America once survived a luminous past. It remained undisturbed and practised the traditional way of living. With the passage of time, the resources of the land paved way for Spanish Invasions. With their advent, the land undergoes tremendous changes. Spanish culture and Christianity begin to play a dominant role in the lives of the indigenous people steadily. Most of them run for their lives to different land, in order to adapt to the new way of living. But majority of the natives get accommodated to the new means unable to fight back. The writer very painstakingly records these events in his memoir which is seen as more of a narrative therapy that soothes his trauma.

In *Living to Tell the Tale*, Garcia shares the collective experience of the people of the land. Garcia's grandfather was a much revered hero of the Thousand Days war. Garcia remembers how his grandfather would tell him stories of how the land suffered under the hands of various rulers at different junctures. There remained a repulsive race among the local conservative and liberal parties to hold power, as the Spanish leave the land. In this cruel race, the victorious team, gains the support of the American forces and thereby tries exploiting their very own people. One such incident happens to be the Banana massacre and La Violencia. Both these events topple the history of the nation. Numerous men of the land, run to different zones in order to save themselves. Thus the indigenous population of Latin America got disintegrated. People almost become trauma survivors, due to the bitterness of the past. Garcia has developed a very strong feeling that it was always the interference of United States into the affairs of Latin America that brought economic backwardness.

Garcia's grandfather was a Liberal soldier who fought for the country against the conservatives. But once the war gets over, the government failed to recognise the service rendered by the soldiers. They are denied their right to pension. Cruel punishments and death sentence was given to anyone who failed to obey the orders of the land. The rulers almost became Dictators. There was press censorship throughout the nation and the people were kept uninformed. The Dictators failed to work for the common good but rather indulged in uncouth activities. Official records of the land were rewritten to show the power of the Powerful.

In his memoir, *Living to Tell a Tale*, Garcia denotes,

“ My grandfather and I were the only males and he initiated me into the sad reality of adults with tales of bloody battles and a scholar's explanations of the flight of birds and claps of thunder at dusk, and he encouraged me in my fondness for drawing” ( LTT 83).

Garcia also mentions that his grandfather had often with pride, shared stories of his experiences in battlefield and how even today, he was held with high regard in Colombia. He acknowledges how his grandfather's lineage was treated with high regard and was well recognised even by the notable personages of the Banana Company.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez was the apple of his grandfather's eye. The stories of the Colonel, who was a liberal veteran of the Thousand Days War, always interested Garcia, as he was an excellent story teller. He got completely engrossed in the stories of his grandfather and loved calling him as his umbilical cord with voracious love for history and reality. He was the one who disclosed the power of words to young Garcia. In one of his interview with Mendoza, Garcia answers when questioned on his political ideas that

“My grandfather the colonel was a Liberal. My political ideas probably came from him to begin with because, instead of telling me fairy tales when I was young, he would regale me with horrifying accounts of the last civil war that free-thinkers and anti-clerics waged against the Conservative government” ( 96).

The Colonel gifted Garcia with a dictionary that made him get acquainted with words, which at a later point of time groomed him to become a writer. He once took his grandson, Garcia to the United Fruit Company's store and introduced to him the not much known ice, which was found only in the United Fruit Company at that time. This incident finds a place in Garcia's masterpiece, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Garcia's memoir reveals the author to be a man of deep convictions. In his memoir, Garcia mentions that his grandfather was given an urgent and secret funeral which as a child he could not understand. As he grew up, he realised that it might have been because there would be a lot of humiliation, if people got to know that he died of poverty. He had high regards for him and felt that all his doubts disappeared with his grandfather. The colonel almost resembled to him a guardian angel. The writer wished and aspired to become more valiant and realistic like his grandfather as his grandfather's conservative friends remember him as an enemy to be feared in war. He was a man deliberate in his speech, kind and understanding in his approach and appeasing in times of peace.

Not only his grandparents played a vital role in shaping his memories, but even the entire landscape of the Caribbean region, gave form to his memories in writing. It is here that the political awareness of Garcia began. In his memoir Garcia mentions that he did not exert himself academically but his extraordinary and voluminous reading allowed him to win over his teachers. Though in order to attend good schools, he had to separate himself from the family, he understood the situations. He describes himself to be always passionate of his writing ambitions. His ancestral house created an environment for writing and the stories of his grandparents tickled several creative ideas in young Garcia.

To the writer, the town always reminded him of a happy life where everyone knew anyone within the village. The air was pure and the village was located on the banks of the transparent Magdalena river water. In his interview with Claudia Dryfus in *Playboy*, Marquez points out that:

“Clearly, the Latin American environment is marvellous. Particularly the Caribbean. I happen to come from the Caribbean part of Colombia, which is a fantastic place—completely different from the Andean part, the highlands. During the colonial period of Colombian history, all the people who considered themselves respectable went to interior—to Bogota. On the coast, all that were left were bandits—bandits in good sense—and dancers, adventurers, people full of gaiety. The coastal people were descendants of pirates and smugglers, with a mixture of black slaves. To grow up in such an environment is to have fantastic resources for poetry. Also, in the Caribbean, we are capable of believing anything, because we have the influences of all those different cultures, mixed with Catholicism and our own local beliefs. I think that gives us an open-mindedness to look behind apparent reality. As a child growing up in the Caribbean village of Aracataca, I heard wonderful stories of people who were able to move chairs by simply looking at them” (112).

The writer begins the memoir when he travels along the Magdalena river of his native, with his mother after several years to sell his ancestral house. On his travel, he remembers the happy past just like the people of his nation. His mother gets lost in thoughts. His mother, a native of the land remembers how the land once remained undisturbed and followed the traditional way of living. Several cruel incidents in history silenced the voices of the indigenous groups. He happens to meet several people who he met years back and feel pathetic for their present conditions. He understands that almost all of them suffer from trauma caused by various wars and upheavals. When he stepped into the village, the people believed that it was someone from the United States and are scared of the changes that he would bring. Garcia understands that to the people of the land, anyone with big trunk boxes and American accent is from the United Fruit Company that was responsible for the Banana Massacre. Such was the traumatic effect created on the minds of the people. On his return, the writer feels that the land still remains to be a land of silence. This the writer explains as,

“ The First thing that struck me was the silence. A material silence I could have identified blindfolded among all the other silences in the world. The reverberation of the heat was so intense that you seemed to be looking at everything through undulating glass. As far as the eye could see (LTT- 28)

This is how throughout the memoir, the writer speaks in volumes about the fragmented history of a nation, that once led a very happy life. He also discovers that his mother also has the very same feeling for the country only through the travel. It is mostly through symbolic references in the memoir that several hidden truths in the history of the land are unearthed. This is due to the fact that it provides evidence about incidents, cultural activities and lifestyle of the people of any nation. It helps in a better understanding of individuals and institutions belonging to a particular era. Reconstruction or reviving the past hence discloses the untold stories and sufferings that lie deeply embedded under the manipulated history. The study has also meant that certain notable towns and villages of Latin America, events of historic importance, prominent personalities and cultural signs have become symbols to mark the rise and decadence of the Latin American region. The writer has revealed that the native’s primitivism, lack of intelligence and psychology has been attacked brutally by the Imperial powers. Weaker sections of the society has been exploited by the military regime and the power game exhibited by both the colonial forces and local leaders made the natives run for their lives to a different land. Thus common man’s hope to lead a happy life in his native land got completely washed out in Colombia.

Writing in a way creates a soothing effect to the tormented mindset of the writer in particular and the people of the Latin American nation in General. Thus narration here becomes a therapy which possesses the power to heal the wounded soul. It provides with a chance to let out all suppressed emotions.

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