



The Impact of Spanish Language and Literature: Latin American Nations from Deconstruction to Reconstruction

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Abstract

Latin America is one of the ancient lands in the world where human habitation is habited more than thirty thousand years. It has its own indigenous civilization with its languages, literatures, religions and cultures. With the arrival of European, especially Spanish invaders the cults, literatures, religions and languages of Latin American nations were hybridized, reformed, and revived in such a way that it has deconstructed and reconstructed the new nations and civilizations. Spanish language and literature has drastically changed the verbal and logossyllabic communication pattern of Latin American people and endowed them Latinized Roman alphabetic script and communication system. Nevertheless, the indigenous languages and oral literatures of Latin America got scripted and documented in Spanish language for the next generation. Hence, Spanish language and literature has altered the entire resonance and thinking pattern of the people so artistically that today almost all Latin American nations preferred Spanish Language as the official language and produced main stream literature in Spanish language.

Key Words: Latin America, Destruction, Reconstruction, Language, Literature, Nation, Spanish.

Introduction:

From the inception of human civilization Language and literature primarily emerges as the means of communication which in due course becomes the tradition and culture of the civilization. Number of civilizations and nations were fostered and destroyed with the emergence and fall of language and literature. The scientific study of language is called linguistics, and its prime purpose is to represent or express the inner most feelings and experience of the person. Hence, philosophers like “Rousseau believes that language is originated from emotion while Immanuel Kant believes that it originated from rational and logical thought.” (<http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language>). Although, literature originates from such emotions and thoughts, uses languages to express its cultural code and tradition, which is transitive in time and space. The present paper argues about the impact of Spanish language and literature on Latin American countries and how it has destroyed the indigenous literary and cultural traditions and reconstructed the entire new literary resonance and conduit in these nations. Spanish language and literature has not only changed Latin American way of thinking but also the entire semantics of their cultures and traditions. It has created hybrid language and literature that further leads to change the entire pace of Latin American indigenous culture and thinking.

Latin American Languages and Literatures:

Latin American countries are culturally, anthropologically and historically complex and vivid which it showcased in its language and literary heritage. Civilizations such as, Inca, Maya, Pipil, Muisca, and Aztec fostered and destroyed in the lush valleys and land of Latin America in time immemorial which had an ancient roots of oral and written languages and literatures (some of them in forms of signs) that date backs thousands of years. There are approximately 1500 ethnic groups speaking nearly more than 560 languages and dialects across the Latin American nations. Apart from its enormous linguistic diversity, some of the primordial languages such as, Quechua, Aymara, Guarani and Nahuatl are considered the trunk of the language family tree. The indigenous literatures are available in these languages which were primarily documented and introduced systematically by the Spanish and the other invaders to the rest of the world, after 16th century. The term Latin America was coined by French intellectual Michel Chevalier during the time of Napoleon II in 1860s (Colburn, 2002, 11). As far as written and oral literary tradition is concerned, Vicuna and Grosman rightly mentioned in the preface of their book, “...In the Americas, written literature is two thousand years old and oral poetry may go back as far as ten thousand years” (Vicuna & Grosman, 2009, 17).

For Latin American native, language and literature is primarily available in an oral tradition which they pass through one generation to other; hence, the change of language is the change of indigenous literature. Though, some of the written traditions (including signs) survived with the great change in its cadence. This indigenous literature consist an exceptionally deep knowledge of Arts, Commerce, Astrology, Science, and even, they have the philosophy of universe and God too. In South America, in Brazil the Baniwa people believe that sound plays very important role “It is an integral part of time, change, and restoration” (Vicuna, 2009, 21). Another oral and

later documented book, *The Popol Vuh*, “Book of the Community” or “book of the people” an oral record of myths and history of K’iche people of Guatemala is the indigenous literary record of Mayan Civilization that talks about the creation of universe and people (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popol_Vuh). In short, the thousands of year’s indigenous languages and literatures were preserved through the oral traditions, signs, and codices, among the various civilizations and clans of Latin America; it was pure and natural, recounted about Nature’s objects, cosmic events and human complexities which were documented and preserved by European invaders in their languages mostly in Spanish and Portuguese after 16th century. Even today more than five hundred languages are spoken in Latin America; they are preserved only because of the efforts of the native speakers and the active participation of the governments of that country.

Introduction of Spanish Language and Literature to Latin American Nations

Latin America is a world of various civilizations, cultures, languages, and literatures before the European invaders came to Mesoamerica and Southern part of Latin America in the 15th and 16th centuries to expand their territories and propagate Christianity to the newly discovered world. As Juan Carlos Grijalva writes in his article “Indigenous Voices in Literature” that, “Since the time of Christopher Columbus, the Spanish word *indio* has been used to imply the racial, cultural, linguistic, and intellectual inferiority of indigenous peoples...” (Grijalva, 2018). When European arrived to the new world they did not come to the wilderness but the advanced civilizations and cultures, which had the rich literary heritage of two thousand years, older than that of European. Cecilia Vicuna writes in her introduction:

The violence of colonization, war, disease, and enslavement wiped out more than ten million natives. Given the magnitude of destruction and the cultural shock of the forcible conversion to Christianity and systematic replacement of the native languages with Spanish and Portuguese, it is remarkable that Indigenous peoples and cultures survived at all. (Vicuna, 2009, 20)

The Spanish language arrived in the Mesoamerica and Southern America with the frequent trips of Christopher Columbus to the continent in 1492 and in later years other colonizers. Hence, Mesoamerican tradition of writing had fully flourished by the time the European came to South America in 1519. Soon Catholic Church and colonizers had started to indoctrinate the indigenous peoples and banned their writings. Colonial authorities went to the extent of burning Mayan books and made colonial (Spanish) alphabetic script compulsory. Mayan visual components of writing traditions were disappeared. Not only this, but a unique Khipu tradition of Andes people of weaving words into knotted cords, a system of writing songs, poems, stories, and keeping accounts of the people was forbidden by the end of 16th century by the colonizers and Spanish Language and script made compulsory. The Spanish Bishop and grammarian Antonio de Nebrija writes in his book *Castilian Grammar* “Language has always been the perfect instrument of empire.”(www.loyno.edu/~history/journal/rosa). Hence, the conquistadors had used Spanish language for two purposes, to control the political and economical power in the region and to convert the native people into Christianity. Nebrija argues that “a single, standard, unchanging

language is needed for national cohesion” (www.loyno.edu/~history/journal/rosa). It is believed that many languages in a nation are the threat to the nation’s stability and integrity, therefore monolingual policy is more preferable. The invaders had tried to work on “linguistic subjugation” policy to the native people of Latin America but failed to do so, consequently local languages, dialects, and literatures had to be accepted by the Spanish invaders to establish harmony and communication among them. This collaborative work ultimately resulted in Mestizo (mixed race) Poetics; a way of speaking Spanish with the native intonation emerged in 16th and 17th centuries in Latin American countries. The Spanish conquerors had the misconception that the Amerindian languages required phonetic writing system, this belief was so strong that they had systematically destroyed the indigenous texts with the argument that they were inspired by the devil. Though, initially conquerors were failed to implement Spanish language as the means of verbal communication and as the script for the Native American, but the third and fourth generation descendents of the native people had adopted and mastered Spanish language as the part of their official communication. During the time of evangelization in Latin America, Franciscan, Dominican and Augustinian friars had played very essential role to establish Christianity and Spanish Language by translating Indigenous literatures into Spanish and from Spanish into local dialects and Languages. Felipe Guaman Poma, one of the first native writers to adopt colonial script, wrote a thousand-page letter to the king of Spain, about the colonial persecution.

Hence, in 19th and 20th centuries many Latin American countries got independence from the Spanish empire had started to attract Spanish immigrants to their countries; thus, the Spanish language becomes the *lingua Franca* of Cuba, Mexico, Argentina, Chile and many other nations in Latin America.

Development of New Literature in Latin America

The hybridism of Latin America had created in Jose Lezama Lima’s words, ‘a verbal mix’, (Vicuna & Grosman, 2009, 17) a Mestizo poetics which is experimental and unique in its linguistic presentation. As Spanish invaders and missionaries had adopted native language and literature and translated into Spanish vice versa Native people had adopted the script and prosody of Spanish language and literature. On the other hand cross-cultural marriages and Spanish migrants’ settlement in Latin America had given the birth to the authentic Spanish speaker and writer. Alonso de Ercilla, was born in Spain (1533-1594), had written *La araucana*, an epic poem of military exaltation in Chile in thirty seven cantos in Spanish language about the difficulties faced by invaders and heroic deeds of Native people. It is considered most trustworthy and historical document by many historians till date. Another Spanish-Peruvian writer Mateo Rosa de Oquendo is considered Peru’s early satirist, who satirized social life in colonial Peru and sexual lives of a variety of women. Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (1530-1616), the Inca decent learned Spanish language and wrote a long letter known as *Coronica* to the king of Spain, which did not reach to its destiny at that time, but in 1908 its manuscript is found in Denmark which is in 20th century in Latin America considered one of the masterpieces of Incaic tradition and historical document.

Francisco Acuna de Figueroa, prolific Uruguayan writer wrote hymns, odes, anagrams, epigrams, and the national anthem of Uruguay. Today he is known for his enigmatic and numerical style of writing poetry. His major experimental works *Mosaico poetico* (1857) and *Obras completas* (1890) had changed the entire pace of writing pattern in Latin America. Another writer Sousandrade (1833-1902), was born in Brazil. He was completely radical in his subject matter and style than of his contemporaries. He is generally considered a forerunner of 20th century Imagism and Modernism movements in Latin American Literature as well as in world Literatures. The Cuban writer, poet, journalist, and philosopher Jose Marti (1853-1895) had converted his experience into *El presidio politico de Cuba* (The Political Prison in Cuba) in 1871, evolved as the epitome of Latin American *modernismo* movement. Ruben Dario (1867-1916) was born in Nicaragua, had left everlasting literary legacy that even today enlighten new poets. He was the first Latin American writer who produced such literary body of work that influenced European literature. His major works are *Azul* (Blue) (188), *Profound Prose* (1896), and *Cantos of Life and Hope* (1928) had initiated *modernismo* movement. The first Noble Laureate of Latin America, Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957) had rejected Mestizo and Indigenous traditions in her writing rather she changed the syntax to create new style. On the other had Peruvian writer Cesar Vallejo (1892-1938) used mestizo voices in his poetry and his book *Trilce* changed Spanish poetry forever. In the words of Thomas Merton: “the greatest universal poet since Dante” (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cesar_Vallejo). Pablo Neruda, one of the greatest 20th century poets was born in Chile. Who had inaugurated a new tradition of writing poem which is passionate, erotic, and full of despair, has forever changed the mundane way of writing Spanish poetry. His great corpus of work in Spanish language has given a new identity and dimension to the Latin American literature and language. Neruda’s book *Twenty Love poems and Song of Despair* has given a new definition of love and sorrow to the Spanish Latin American literature. His epic work *Canto General* has redefined the entire history, culture, literature, and geography of Latin America. Another stupendous Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges’ literature has introduced the complexities of human nature and philosophy in his short stories. In 20th century a new genre came into existence that is known as “magic realism” oftenly, associated with Latin American literature. It is a narrative technique largely associated with fiction with the realistic view of the world with some magical essence, like myth, allegory etc. Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Isabel Allende are the chief exponent of this technique. As Salman Rushdie argues:

“El realism magical”, magic realism, at least as practiced by Marquez is a development out of Surrealism that expresses a genuinely “Third-World” consciousness.

(Rushdie, 1991)

In short, the emergence of new literature in Spanish Latin America has changed the entire pace of native language and literature. It has reconstructed an entire new paradigm of mixed sensibilities of the native indigenous people and the Spanish invaders. This hybridization has given the birth of so many traditions in the world language and literature.

Conclusion

Spanish language and literature has not only built and rebuilt the nations but changed the entire way of thinking, writing, and communication of the Latin American, though not completely but collaboratively in such a way that the new consciousness has been developed among the native Indians. Spanish language has prefabricated and systematized the entire Latin America as the “one”, which shared common culture, tradition and emotion.

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