

NARRATIVE OF HOPE AND DESPAIR: A CRITICAL STUDY OF GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ'S NO ONE WRITES TO THE COLONEL

U. S. Saranya and Dr. B. Siva Nagaiah

Realistic Narratives are nothing but they deal with the ordinary people and the situation that can happen in day to day life. The novel is penned down by the author by seeing such people in his personal life. The story No One Writes to the Colonel was inspired from the writer's grandfather, a colonel who never received any pension. It was also boldly published shortly after the civil war in Colombia between the 1940s and 1950s. It is a story about a poor seventy years old retired Colonel who waits to get his pension for nearly fifteen years. His name is not given in the novel as it is anonymous and it gives dignity to his position. He lives on hope that he would get his money and he can take care of his wife who is suffering from asthma. His son was shot when he was distributing a political clandestine paper. His only possession for now was the prize fighting rooster. Every week Friday he goes and visits the mail man expecting a mail in the assurance of his service in civil war and giving him pension but he returns home with disappointment without any mail but till the end he keeps waiting for the mail which never reaches him. For nearly sixty years – since the end of the last civil war – the colonel had done nothing else but wait. The proposition of the paper deals with the narrative of hope and despair in the life of colonel.

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The colonel took the top of the coffee can and only a spoonful was left. He took the pot from the earthen floor and poured some water and scaped inside the coffee can with the knife till the last coffee mixed with rust fell into the pot. He was waiting for it to boil sitting next to the fire place with confidence and innocent expectations. The colonel felt the feeling of the fungus and the poisonous lilies taking root in his guts. As it was month of October the winter season started. "For nearly sixty years – since the end of the last civil war – the colonel had done nothing else but wait". His wife raised the mosquito net when she saw him coming with the coffee. Last night she suffered with asthma attack and now she felt drowsy and got up to have a cup of coffee. Then she asked colonel weather he drank the coffee. For which he lied that he to drank and said that another spoon full of coffee powder was left for tomorrow.

The bells began ringing and colonel has forgotten the funeral. He folded the hammock and kept behind the door. And the women thought of the dead man. He was born in 1922; April 7th exactly a month after her son was born. The living room was large, with four sturdy rockers and around a little table with a cover and a plaster cat. On the wall opposite to the clock a picture of women dressed in tulle, surrounded by cupids in a boat laid with roses. It was seven twenty after winding

Address for communication: **U. S. Saranya**, PhD Scholar (English studies), School of Social Sciences and languages, V I T University, Vellore – 632014, *E-mail:* ussaranya90@gmail.com

the clock he took the rooster to the kitchen tied it to the stove, changed the water in the can and put a hand full of corn next to it. A group of children came in through the fence whole to watch the rooster. He asked the children to move because if the rooster saw them it would wear out. One of the boys took his harmonica and started tuning a song the colonel asked him to stop because there was death in the town. Then he went to dress for the funeral. His white suit was not pressed because his wife suffered from asthma and he had to wear the black suit which was folded by the newspaper and was protected from moth with naphthalene.

His wife was still thinking of the dead man. She said that 'He must have met Augustin already', she said. 'May be he won't tell him about the situation we've been left in since his death'. The colonel said at that moment they would be probably talking roosters. He took the old umbrella which his wife won in a raffle held in colonel's party. That same night they attended outdoor show which was not interrupted by rain. The colonel, his wife and their son Augustin who was then eight was seated under the umbrella. Now Augustin was dead. And the bright satin material was eaten by moth and he opened the umbrella. "Above his head a mysterious system of little metal rods opened. 'The only thing its good for now is to count the stars' (4) and his wife whispered that "We're rotting alive". (4)

The colonel got ready to go to the funeral. He wore the dress which was worn out. He shaved by touch because he lacked the mirror. He put on his shoes and only at that moment his wife noticed him and she felt as if he was dressed on their wedding. Only then she noticed that her husband has aged. She said that he looked as though he was dressed for a special event. For which colonel replied. "This burial is the special event'. It's the first death from natural causes which we've had in many years". (5). His wife seized him by the coat and asked him to comb his hair. He lived in the house which was palm thatched roof and its white wash was flaking off. He walked towards the town it started drizzling. He entered the house and he smelt the odor of different flowers. It was crowded. He saw dead man's mom shooing the flies away from the coffin. He said his condolence to her for which she never replied but left out a howl.

Then colonel went to buy a can of coffee for them and corn for rooster. The colonel returned home and his wife asked what do they say? Very enthusiastically the colonel replied they are saving money to bet on the rooster. For which she replied that she doesn't know what they see on the ugly rooster. The colonel said to her that they say he is the best in the district he worth fifty pesos. The colonel determined to keep the rooster as a legacy for their son who was shot dead nine months before at the cock fights for distributing clandestine literature. His wife said to colonel that "When the corn is gone we'll have to feed him on our own livers."(10) Before that on January we can sell him for more replied colonel. And he was in a hurry to go out. His pants need pressing. He got ready he was pant less. His shoes are ready to throw out. Whenever he wears it he feels like fugitive from

an asylum. He was getting ready to receive mail. For which his wife stated that “we are the orphans of our son” (10) the colonel walked towards the harbor before the whistle of launches blew. The last one was the mail launch. “Fifteen years of waiting has sharpened his intuition and the rooster has sharpened his anxiety” (11).

The doctor was waiting for the news paper at the post office. The colonel said to doctor that his wife asked him as if we threw boiling water on you at our house. The doctor asked after the health of the asthmatic. The colonel gave a detailed report of his wife. Then doctor received his newspaper. The colonel watched the compartment which corresponded to his letter in the alphabet. Doctor started reading the news paper. The colonel was watching the postman. The colonel said we are leaving for which the postman never raised his head. “Nothing for the colonel”, he said. The colonel felt ashamed. ‘I wasn’t expecting anything’, he lied. He turned to the doctor with an entirely childish look. ‘No one writes to me’ (12) said colonel. The doctor gave him the newspaper. Doctor said it was hard for him to read between the lines. And he read the headlines and returned the paper for which doctor said to him that he can take it home. He reached home he tied the rooster to the leg of the cot he sprayed some insecticide in the bed room. He locked the house and put on the lamp, hung his hammock up, and lay down to read news paper.

The colonel read the news paper fully and he put out the lamp. His wife asked “Nothing about the veterans? Colonel replied nothing and continued saying that in the beginning at least they published the list of the new pensioners. But it has been above five years they have said anything. They both slept and in the night it started to rain and colonel got up to see the leakages in the roof. He was sweating coldly he had fever. He felt as though he was floating on concentric circles inside a tank of jelly. Someone spoke and colonel answered it. His wife asked to whom you are talking to? For which he said the Englishman disguised as a tiger that came into Colonel Aureliano Buendias camp. It was Duke of Marlborough. The sky was clear the colonel got up by crowing of rooster. His wife asked him last night you were delirious from fever. It wasn’t fever colonel lied.

His wife emerged from her attack full of nervous energy. She cleaned the house. Both of them were having coffee in the afternoon. And the doctor came to their home and asked “Everybody dead?” the colonel opened the door. His wife went to get ready for checkup in the bedroom meanwhile the doctor gave an envelope to the colonel it was about the events in the country, mimeographed for clandestine circulation. After checkup the doctor came out and said she is healthier than I am. He gave the cover to doctor for which he said to pass on the envelope. His wife told to doctor that last night he had fever and he talked about the civil war for 2 hours. But colonel rejected it by saying if he was ill he would throw himself in garbage can. Then colonel asked in a low voice to doctor about the bill? For which the doctor patted on his shoulders saying when the cock wins he will send a fat bill.

For nine months they had spent penny by penny parceling out between their needs and rooster. Now there were only two twenty cent pieces and one ten cent pieces left. She said the colonel to buy a pound of corn, coffee and cheese. But colonel replied that corn alone would cost forty pesos. Then she said him to get the corn and she managed the house hold by sewing mending. She cut colonels hair by herself and she told him that there was nothing left in the home to sell except the picture and the clock. It was Friday he went to the dock. Doctor got his newspaper the postman said nothing for the colonel and as the post man was leaving he said No one writes to the colonel. He couldn't face his wife with empty handed. His wife asked nothing? Then colonel replied nothing. For which she said "one must have the patience of an ox, as you do, to wait for a letter for fifteen years" (23) and he replied that we have to wait our turn. Our number is 1823. He started reading the news paper. And he was about to put off the lamp. He found his wife was awake. She went to the closet and took a bundle of letter and said we could have spent the money in time without wasting the time in convincing you to change the lawyer. For which colonel said that we need money to change the lawyer. His wife told him to tell the lawyer to discount the money from the pension when they collect it. Its only way they will take the case. Saturday he went to see the lawyer. The lawyer asked him to wait for some more days. It has been the way for fifteen years. "This is not charity; it's not a question of doing us a favor. We broke our backs to save the Republic." (25) The lawyer threw up his hands saying 'human ingratitude knows no limits'.

The lawyer turned the office upside down looking for the power of attorney. He picked up a roll of papers and gave it to colonel with a seal on it and told him to tear up. For which colonel said these are twenty years of memories. And asked for the documents that is the proof of claim. The lawyer said that won't be possible. The colonel stated that those documents have an incalculable value. And there is a receipt from Colonel Aureliano Buendia written in his own hands. The lawyer said to colonel that those documents have passed through thousand and thousand of hands for fifteen years and God alone knows which department it reached in the war ministry. The lawyer asked him to wait. For which the colonel said that "it doesn't matter. If you wait for big things, you can wait for the little ones" (28). Then colonel reached home and he started writing letter he asked his wife. What's today's date? She told its October 27th. Again he asked when was he put on rolls? She told it was August 12, 1949. It began to rain. He read the letter to his wife she gave a nod for each sentence and approved it. The rain made them sleep and colonel spoke consciously the women asked him to whom was he speaking to. No one the colonel said he said he was thinking of Macondo meeting we were right when we told the Colonel Aureliano Buendia not to surrender. That's what started to ruin everything. It rained the whole week the second of November the women took flowers to Agustin,s grave she fell sick the doctor came to visit her and gave a prescription of special medicine .

Everytime when colonel went to buy the grocery he would tell that he would repay the amount within next Friday. Then he knew that his rooster will die out of hunger within two days and he remembers a pot of bean which he kept in the month of July and gives it to the rooster. His wife asks him to sell the rooster. For which colonel said that he just kept it for his son. Remember his face when he came to tell us the rooster won. And his wife replied that it was all because of the accursed rooster were his downfall. If he had stayed home on January 3rd his evil hour wouldn't have come. Then she said to that she remember her son taking the rooster in his arms for cock fight she told him not to go but he asked her to shut her mouth because that afternoon he told that we will be rolling in money and now he is no more. Colonel said that for three months no one would die of hunger and in mean while what are we going to have she claimed for which he left the house unanswered and roamed in the street for a while and he came to home saying that he would sell the clock. For which she told that Alvaro will give him forty pesos right on spot. He felt ashamed but his wife packed it and gave it to him and he carried it to the shop. He gave the clock but none accepted it. They asked him about rooster and he was about to sell it but people around the shop told him that it was only one two months for the fight. But two months are great to survive. Then Herman understood the situation. The colonel returned home with the package. His wife asked nothing? Then he said nothing. But the boys will take over feeding rooster.

It was Friday he went to check for the mail. It was raining so he sought shelter in sabas house. Then he saw the post master and he asked him that the mail was supposed to come today. The post master shrugged and said that "The only thing that comes for sure is death"(41). Then he went home his wife gave him a corn mush to eat she saw his face changed. He lied that he was thinking about the employees. . "In fifty years, we'll be peacefully six feet under , while that poor man will be killed himself every Friday waiting for his retirement pension"(42) and asked her where she got the corn for it she said that the boys brought a lot of corn for the rooster and they shared it with us. And he told her that his rooster is worth in weight with gold He said that his cock would feed him for three years. For it his wife said that you can't eat hope. For which colonel replied that we can't eat hope but we can sustain from it. The following day for lunch again she served two plates of mush. The colonel felt himself catching her with the dark mood. She asked her where she had been for a long time in the rain for it she replied she went roundabout but she never answered him later on he said that he can understand and the worst of it is to tell lies. Then she said that she went to meet father Angel and ask a loan on wedding rings. For which he told that it's a sin to barter on wedding rings and two days ago I tried to sell the clock but no one is ready to get it because it is old fashioned. And people are not ready to get the picture to. The colonel felt bitter. And now she told that everybody knows that they are starving.

"I m tired, the women said. Men don't understand problems of the household. Several times I've had to put stones on to boil so the neighbors wouldn't know that we often for many days without putting on the pot" (45).

The colonel got offended. And she started shooting questions on him. For which the colonel said that his friend sabas came before twenty years and now he has two storied building. But now he is dying of diabetics. For which his wife said that now you are dying of hunger and you can't feed on dignity. Then he said that he is going to sell the rooster to sabas for nine hundred pesos and he went to meet him. He waited for two hours and saba came along with some workers. And he said to the colonel that he will be right back. And colonel waited for him. Meanwhile he slept. And sabas wife came around and he woke up and she asked him do you dream? Sometimes replied colonel. "Almost always I dream that I'm getting tangled up In spiders web"(48). Sabas entered the house gave some bills to his fore man and he asked colonel the reason for his visit He murmured that it was about the rooster. Then sabas told him that the sky is falling and you are worried about rooster and he said he will be right back and he went away.

In the home his wife waited with lunch and she told him that she got it on credit saying that she would pay it tomorrow. Then he narrated the events which happened in sabas house for which she said the trouble was in his character. She told him the way he must have done to sell it. "You present yourself as if you were begging alms when you ought to go there with your head high and take our friend aside and say, "friend, I 've decided to sell you the rooster".(50). And she told him when you are going to sell something you shouldn't put on the same face as when you go to buy. She took the rooster by herself to sell. The cock fight started and colonel left the house in a hurry to check for the mail. He went near the pit where the rooster was fighting. The crowd enjoyed the fight as the colonel's rooster performed well. Herman jumped and took colonels rooster in his hands. Colonel hurried near him caught hold of his rooster from Herman's hand and started walking fastly. While Herman told him since he was not there so he brought the rooster out of his house to fight. Colonel never replied but walked fastly and reached home and tied it to the cot. His wife told him that they took it by force. She even told that she will never leave the rooster out until she died. And people said it was public property and they will take the rooster over the body. Then colonel said that roosters are not for sale.

He checked his pocket he had only 29 pesos. And said that he will return the amount to sabas as soon as the pension returns for which his wife said that if pension doesn't return. Then colonel said to her that he won't get his money back and he took the new shoe from the rack and said that he will sell it for 13 pesos. His wife told him that the turks won't take the shoe. For which he said that only twice he had used the shoe. Later in the night his wife asked to think over 400 pesos it was a huge lump of money for them so that he can talk to sabas. But colonel said

very soon he will get his pensions. For which his wife said you have been saying the same thing for fifteen years. She does have the impression that the money will never arrive. For which colonel couldn't find a voice to answer he kept quiet and slept.

Morning he got up and continued his regular work. His wife also got up and they had their black coffee in silence. Then he went to the tailor shop and spent half day in it and returned home and found his wife mending clothes. He asked for lunch for which she said there was no lunch. And he went in and blocked the hole in the kitchen to prevent the children's from entering inside. When he came out he found the lunch on the table he started to eat and he knew that his wife was controlling her tears. She said to colonel that he has no consideration and he was willful, stubborn and inconsiderate. For entire life time she has been eating dirt and now it turned out that she deserve less consideration than a rooster. That's different said colonel. But she said "It's the same thing, the women replied. 'You ought to realize that I'm dying; this thing I have is not a sickness but a slow death'"(66).

Then colonel didn't speak and after his dinner he said to her that if doctor guarantees him that by selling rooster she will get rid of your asthma then immediately he would sell it. That afternoon he took the rooster to the pit and returned and in the night again his wife started to fight with him he felt that he will sleep that night and wake up after 44 days on 20th January at 3 in the afternoon, in the pit, and at the exact moment to let the rooster lose. She said that everybody will win the rooster except us because everybody has the money to bet and we don't even have a cent. She was talking continuously while the colonel fell asleep and in between he woke up and found his wife walking and said that he is going to do one thing for which his wife said we can only sell the rooster. He said we can also sell the clock. His wife told no one will buy it. Then we can sell the picture said the colonel and again she said they won't buy it. Then he asked her to sleep and said if we can't sell anything tomorrow we will think of something else and started to sleep later he felt himself shaken by the shoulders. The dawn was breaking his wife asked him to answer her. She asked him what we will do if we can't sell anything. But then it will be January 20th and they will pay the twenty percent that very afternoon said colonel. Then his wife argued to him that it will happen only if rooster wins but if rooster loses. For it colonel said that the rooster will never lose. The women lost her patience seized colonel by the collar and asked him in the meanwhile what do we eat? Immediately the colonel replied 'shit'. And it took him seventy five years of life time to reach that moment. The sufferings that colonel faced in his life for waiting for a pension with patience, hope lead to despair.

Reference

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