

POLITICAL VIEWS ON MARIO VARGAS LLOSA'S CONVERSATION IN THE CATHEDRAL

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Abstract:

'Conversation in The Cathedral' by Mario Vargas Llosa is the greatest novel about Peru. This novel beautifully describes about corruption in Latin America. Vargas Llosa's main theme is the brutality of a corrupt, unjust, hypocritical and frivolous society. It is also unsurpassed as a work of narrative fiction in its ability to explore how individuals, communities and even an entire social world can be undermined by the effects of corruption. This novel shows how a Peruvian dictatorship in the 1950s not only determined but destroyed its citizens' lives. This novel shows that every level of society, from the upper-class to the downtrodden, is poisoned and violated by a corrupt, immoral and evil system. Llosa uses postmodernist technique to explain the postcolonial position. The novel offers a powerful reflection of miserable social reality of Peru.

Key Words: brutality, unjust, hypocritical, frivolous society.

Many colonies were fighting for their independence. Simultaneously Postcolonial literature was also emerged. The postcolonial writers are emerging from Africa, South Asia, The Caribbean, South America and other places. It really began picking up as a coherent literary movement in the mid-twentieth century. Many classic postcolonial texts were published between the 1950s and 1990s. In this period, the novel defines this movement than the drama and poetry. The postcolonial writers are “wrote back” to the empires like the Britain and the France. Through their novels postcolonial writers tell history from their perspective and show how the histories written by colonizers are totally biased against the colonised and toward the colonisers.

The colonialist group complains that Spanish and Portuguese America has remained absent from the discussion of North-Atlantic postcolonial theory and criticism. The study of Contemporary postcolonial situations could have been enriched by Latin American literary critics and Iberian colonialism should play a great role in the postcolonial debate, due to its prior and distinct form of European modernity. By challenging the applicability and originality of North-Atlantic postcolonial criticism, the colonialist Group presents arguments and considerations that need attention of scholars across the humanities and the social sciences.

Glimpses of political in *Conversation in The Cathedral*:

Mario Vargas Llosa is one of the most significant writers among the Latin American novelists and essayists. Vargas Llosa belongs to the first generation of Latin America novelist to capture fully the attention of an audience beyond their national borders. His novels can be considered as microcosms of Peruvian society. He is the mouse piece of Peruvian society. He has used the mythical, popular and heroic elements in his texts to capture the social, political or cultural reality of his country. Vargas Llosa has been writing on politics since the early 1960s. Many of Vargas Llosa's works are influenced by the writer's perception of Peruvian society and his own experiences as a native Peruvian. Vargas Llosa has been

politically active throughout his career like many Latin American writers. He initially supports the Cuban revolutionary government of Fidel Castro. He leaves the communist Cahuide party after participating in the workers strike at San Marcos University. In 1990, he ran for the Peruvian presidency with the center-right Frente Democratico coalition. But he lost the election to Alberto Fujimori. In an interview, a question was raised by Mel Gussow towards Vargas Llosa that, "Why he wanted to be president?", Mario Vargas Llosa answered that "Because I was an idiot," and laughed heartily. "I don't think there is another explanation. I thought I could help. I was very naïve, but I learned a lot. It was very instructive" and he said that, "One of the reasons I went into politics was because I thought that democracy was so fragile that it could collapse and that would be a tragedy" (New York Times).

Mario Vargas Llosa was attracted towards Jean Paul Sartre's ideas of commitment. When he left from leftist ideology, Albert Camus became his ethical model. Camus has rejected totalitarianism as a social system where human beings became an instrument of state power. He turned away from Sartre's view that creative writers play a key role in transformation of society. The political leadership of Latin America is as diverse as its culture. The region has seen many populist, capitalist, dictatorial, socialist and military regimes. The region has suffered because of unequal distribution of resources among nations, classes and races. According to Teresa A. Meade: "A key feature of Post-colonial life that exemplified the nature of class relationships in Latin America was the concentration of wealth in few hands..." (82). Vargas Llosa has tried to explore diverse issues of Latin American nations from violence to political corruption and its ever present neighbor USA, in his fiction. Like a postmodernist fiction, Vargas Llosa, in his works, uses temporal distortion, detective fiction, metafiction, fictional history mixed together with real, contemporary and historical figures. According to Lois Parkinson Zamora:

Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Vargas Llosa's novels have linked their novelistic and journalistic writings to the political responsibility of the intellectual in Latin America. They argue that journalist and fiction may be less clearly separated in Latin America than elsewhere and imply that the novel like newspaper must address political and social issues if it is to serve as an instrument of knowledge and hence as an instrument of social change. (42)

Conversion in the Cathedral is a third novel and one of the major works of Mario Vargas Llosa. In this novel, he describes about political corruption, dictatorship and sufferings of people in Peru. In this novel, Vargas Llosa talks about the Dictatorship of Manuel A. Odría, a military officer who served as the 34th president of Peru. The victimization of an entire generation through political oppression is the main theme of the novel. In an interview by Elizbieta Sklodowska, Vargas Llosa said that it was an important period for his entire generation because during those eight years they passed from childhood to youth to adulthood:

We were marked by a dictatorship which was maybe less cruel than other Latin America dictatorships of the times, but probably much more corrupt. Corruption impregnated the whole life in Peru during those years. I wanted to write a novel about the way in which this corrupt system would infect everything, even the most remote activities from the political center.

The novel expresses the feelings of frustration and failure that a society experiences, when a political regime foments widespread corruption. The novel can be considered as the true culmination of his personal anguish for Peru. This novel probes Peruvian society from a political perspective.

Conversion in the Cathedral shows how a Peruvian dictatorship in the 1950s not only determined but destroyed the lives of its citizens. That historical movement is recreated through a conversation which denoted in the title of the novel. The conversation is between two Men in a seedy downtown Lima bar called the cathedral. This conversation occurs several years later in 1963. The hero Santiago Zavala is partly the autobiographical character of the author. In this novel, Santiago Zavala is a student of the National University of San Marcos in Lima. And he is an activist with the government of Peru. The

character of Santiago is based on some real life experiences of Vargas Llosa, during his first year at university of San Marcos and as a member of the activist group Cahuide. The conversation is between Santiago Zavala, and Ambrosio, former. Santiago is a rueful journalist and embittered son of a wealthy and influential businessman, from southern Peru, who once worked as a chauffeur for Santiago's father and also for Cayo Bermudez, who is the Minister of security during the Odria regime. After long year, Santiago & Ambrosio have met each other, when Santiago goes to claim his missing dog in the dog pound, where Ambrosio is working. Actually, the novel begins in a "present" of the 1960s. They are surprised to see each other after so many years. Santiago invites Ambrosio to have a drink with him at The Cathedral. They have their drinks in that seedy bar and revive their past through sharing their memories.

Vargas Llosa adds some conversation and voices of many other people who, directly or indirectly, have touched the lives of Santiago and Ambrosio, through the conversation between them. Santiago hates his father, Don Fermin, because he supports the Odria regime and receives important favors for his business enterprises. He also holds close ties with Cayo Bermudez, Minister of Security during the Odria regime, who is largely responsible for repressing the regime's political enemies. Santiago despises his father's wrong activities and grows uncomfortable with his privileged social status. He attends, San Marcos, where he joins a clandestine Marxist cell when the group is discovered by Odria's secret police, Santiago and his comrades are detained. But while the latter are punished, Santiago is freed in less than twenty-four hours because of his father's connections. Santiago abandons his house and joins as a crime reporter for the daily newspaper called La Cronica. Through his job, he learns even more about the life of fear and violence that affects many Peruvians.

During the conversation with Ambrosio in The Cathedral, Santiago learns of his father's sordid behavior behind the public life. Cayo Bermudez also keeps two whores: La Musa and Queta, for his entertainment and also to blackmail many upper-class men who support Odria. Don Fermin frequently attends the Minister's parties. Don Fermin is a well-known homosexual in reality that Ambrosio becomes his lover. Santiago learns of his father's true identity when he investigates La Musa's murder. La Musa was killed by Ambrosio to protect Don Fermin from being blackmailed. Santiago comes to know this truth through Queta.

Santiago Zavala is the most fully developed character in the novel. Through the conversation, the reader begins to pick up his details beginning with the year of his graduation from high school, a university student and ending when he is married; thirty years old as a journalist. The conversation includes the past lives of other characters too. The life of Ambrosio as Chauffeur, bodyguard and political thug during the Odria regime is presented in great detail. Other prominent character includes Cayo Bermudez, Don Fermin and Amalia, the Zavala family servant who, after a stormy life with Trinidad Lopez, marries Ambrosio and dies giving birth to his child. Santiago has no doubts about solutions, "The worst thing was to leave doubts. Cleaving your fist, grinding your teeth, Ambrosio, APRA is the solution, religion is the solution, communism is the solution and believing it. Then life would become organized all by itself you wouldn't feel empty anymore, Ambrosio" (*Conversion in the Cathedral* 99-100).

Conclusion:

The meaning of truth plays a dominant thematic role in the novel. Santiago cannot free himself from his search for truth and ultimately he pays for the truth which he cannot deny because it will be another form of rumors. In totalitarian regimes, truth is not printed in the newspaper. Everyone knows about it, but officially it is denied. Through this novel, Llosa has tried to bring out the consequences of the denial of truth. Thus Llosa has used postmodernist techniques to explore postcolonial situation. It is a powerful indictment of miserable social reality of Peru whose upper classes' comfortable lives are the cause of exploitation of lower classes. According to Klaren: "Because the novel brings its major character, Santiago Zavala, to the most abject level of depression, disenchantment and cynicism, some critics have seen it as a culmination of modernist ideology" (78). Post colonialism examines the nature of the

postcolonial state where many of the corrupt practices and problems. History is the central theme in postcolonial literatures through reconstruction of cultural and national histories.

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