

SILENT VOICES IN MARQUEZ'S CHRONICLE OF A DEATH FORETOLD

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Abstract

Gabriel Gracia Marquez through *The Chronicle of a Death Foretold* revealed the role and importance of honor in Latin Colombian Society. Throughout the chronicle he showcased that the Colombian society was patriarchal in nature and therefore all the men enjoyed the power and dominance which privileged them to exploit the female and authorized them to be part of public sphere, he also communicated the story of the 'others' in a very strong and resilient way.

Keywords: Colombian Society, patriarchal, others

The *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* written by Gabriel Gracia Marquez was published in 1981. Marquez in this novel depicted the Colombian history. He portrayed reality in a fictitious way. In this novella he had depicted the solemnity of honor in the Colombian society. Honor was the indicator of esteem and respect. In the society chastity was of utmost important for women and any woman whose virginity was compromised with was punished along with the perpetrator. In the novella, Santiago was a perpetrator who had been blamed for taking away Angela's virginity. Consequently, Santiago had been murdered in the name of honor without any evidence. This paper attempts to analyse the role and importance of honor in Latin Colombian society. It seeks to understand the position of men and women in the society and also how honor impacts the life of the people.

This paper depicts the voices of the 'others'. Marquez has not directly communicated the story of the others but has indirectly showcased them in a very strong and resilient way. The society that Marquez has explored in *Chronicle* is a direct reflection of twentieth century Colombia. He has shown the direct divisions and hierarchies that are intricately woven in the

society with specific differentiation between men and women. The Colombian society was patriarchal in nature and therefore all the men enjoyed the power and dominance which privileged them to exploit the female and authorized them to be part of public sphere. The men were free to enjoy in brothels and were never questioned by the system. The males had the privilege to enjoy sexuality even outside home before marriage. Even though Santiago Nasar had been engaged to Flora Miguel, he found pleasure in the arms of prostitutes and this animal instinct of males was considered a sign of prestige.

Santiago Nasar went alone, just like his father, nipping the bud of any wayward virgin that would begin showing up in those woods, but in town no other relationship ever came to be known except for the conventional one he maintained with Flora Miguel, and the stormy one with Maria Alejandrina Cervantes which drove him crazy for fourteen months. (90-91)

This male domination was also enjoyed by the sons of the family. The father-son relationship also exhibited the privileges that were part and parcel of this patriarchal society. It was the duty of the father to pass on the traditional mindset to the successor which was deemed privileged only by the males. The mother played no role in the upbringing and learning of the male child. So, "From his father (Santiago's father) he learned at a very early stage the (handling) of fire arms, his love for horses and the mastery of high-flying birds of prey, but from him he also learned good arts of valour and prudence" (6). The closeness of father and son could be seen in their conversation in Arabic which was not understood by the mother as she was from different racial community. They did not want her to interfere or be a part of the discussion. Even the property of Ibrahim Nasar was transferred to Santiago (son). Both father and son ill-treated the maids of the house. Initially Ibrahim lured Victoria Guzman (maid) and left her unnoticed. Later, Santiago Nasar tried to do the same with Guzman's daughter (Divina Flor) to follow his father's footsteps.

The transference of power from father to son could also be seen in Vicario's family. When Angela had been returned by her husband on the wedding night it was the Vicario twins who took the onus of taking revenge for the family honour. Their father was old and blind so he could not fight for the honour of the family. Even without any body telling them Vicario brothers went to fight for the honour of the family. The mother Purisima del Carmen was a woman and so according to the society she could not act in the public freely. Even though the Vicario twins didn't want to kill Santiago they had to follow the unrecorded societal enigma which was expected to be followed only by men. It was the domain of men to act and seek vengeance for violation of women's nobility. By acting according to the societal expectations they re-emphasize the male dominance which empowered men in all spheres.

When one looks at the female characters of the novella one can notice a clear demarcation in their role and position within Latin American community. They were marginal to the system of the town and so they were not important part of the world of action. As one can see in the case of Purisima del Carmen, before marriage she was a school teacher and after marriage she lost all her independence and identity, "Purisima del Carmen... had been a school teacher until she married forever... she devoted herself with such spirit of sacrifice to the care of her husband and the rearing of her children that at times one forgot that she still existed.." (30). She had limited power since she could only exercise her power within the four walls of the house and that is why she was not involved in seeking revenge from Santiago. The social demarcation was so much engrossed within her soul that she brought up her children in a biased way. "The brothers were brought up to be men. The girls had been reared to get married, they knew how to

do screen embroidery, sew by machine, weave bone lace, wash and iron...”(30). Here one can clearly see that the society reared the children on the basis of their sexes. And in this process the differentiation between men and women was inculcated since childhood. The family levied duties to daughters and never gave them an option or freewill to act. Angela, being the part of this society, was compelled by the family to marry Bayardo San Roman (a rich prospective man) even though she was not interested in marrying him. Angela had only protested by saying that there would be no love in this marriage and her mother rebuked her by saying a single sentence, “ Love can be learned too”(34). This family accepted Bayardo San Roman without giving any value to their daughter’s choice and in this process reinstated her subjugation and helplessness within the structure of the family which was an epitome of society at large. On the first night of wedding, Angela was abandoned by her husband because she was not able to prove her virginity. It was then, Purisima took the duty of correcting her daughter by first beating her badly and exiled her from the town for twenty years. After this disgraceful incidence Purisima always kept Angela close to her eyes and kept a check on her. On her provocation the Vicario brothers took the responsibility of seeking revenge for the lost honour of the family.

This society was not only based on sexual differences but also intricately divided on the basis of class. The novella has very clearly portrayed the richness and power of the bourgeois. The Nasars represented the upper rich classes, within the town. Santiago’s lifestyle (love for horses, etc.) and the property he owned reflected his class. The San Roman family also occupied higher place in the society. The father of the family enjoyed the powerful position which motivated Bayardo (Angela’s husband) to choose any woman to become his bride. “... he was going to marry whomever he chose” (33). It is this attitude which had driven him to choose Angela even when she was not willing to marry him. His class gave him the power to choose and select anyone he liked. The Vicarios also understood Bayardo’s powerful status and did not think of going against his wishes. Bayardo was licensed to use his money and so he forced poor Xius to sell his house to him because Angela liked that house. He believed that money could buy happiness and so exhibited his wealth and power even on the day of his wedding.

In sharp contrast to the bourgeois, the Vicarios were representative of lower classes. They were very poor. When they were convicted for Santiago’s murder they had to stay in prison for three years as they were unable to pay for their bail. It was this poverty which had compelled the family to force Angela to get married to Bayardo because he came from a very rich and well-known family. After Bayardo abandoned Angela on their first night, she came back to her family, therefore her twin brothers decided to take revenge for their family. Many people in the town had doubts on the twins’ decision of seeking revenge from Santiago because of his privileged class. The people also had a doubt that Santiago and Angela could never have an affair since both of them belonged to different classes and social circles. The narrator has clearly portrayed the helplessness of Angela by showcasing her as a woman belonging to a poor family.

Within this social set uponly the males were legitimately allowed to act. But it became apparent towards the end of the novella that it were women of this society who performed. It was they who tried to question and challenge the existing norms for the sake of humanity and the betterment of the society. All the men decided not to act and synchronously supported the twins to kill Santiago without even checking the facts whether he was involved in ‘deflowering’ Angela or not. The murder carried out in the name of honor was also justified by the legal system of twentieth century Columbian society. “The lawyer stood by the thesis of homicide in legitimate defence of Honor, which was upheld by the code of good faith” (48). The men did not

even take the pain to inform Santaigo about his impending murder and in this process indirectly conformed to honor code. Colonel Lazaro Aponte, the mayor, was told about the murder before hand but he didn't believe it. Similarly, the priest, Amador was told about the murder but he took it casually and was more interested in the coming of bishop to the town. The Vicarios twins were the only ones who took action because they unwillingly had to obey the unwritten law of the society. "Clotilde Armenta was certain that the Vicario brothers were not anxious to carry out the sentence as to find someone who could do them the favour of stopping them" (57). Here the honor code overpowered the males who were considered the dominant beings within the society.

The anomaly within this society occurred when women who had been depicted as feeble since the beginning turned out to be the most strong and commanding. They were the ones who stood and questioned the unquestionable law of honor. Among all the female characters and infact all the characters of the novella it was only Clotilde Armenta, who had the wisdom and courage to openly challenge all the onlookers at the murder site of Santiago. She tried her best to physically stop the twins but was not successful. This incident depicted the actual courage of a woman who did not want to blindly follow the masses' notion of justice. And she realised the true position of a woman within the society and exclaimed, "That day... I realized just how alone we women are in the world!" (63). The chronicle is a very beautiful tale of womanhood as a daughter, lover and mother. But it again depends on the open mindedness of females whether they want to restrict themselves to the four-walled house or are strong enough to revolt and fight for their rights in the society.

Another woman character who questioned the existing structure and norms of the 20th century Columbian society was Angela Vicario. She had lost her virginity before marriage and this was considered a sin in the society. She was conscious about the rigidity of honor code but she decided to act as per her individual will. Also, she had blamed Santigo out of confusion to prevent herself in the eyes of others. It was she who had taken the initiative of getting her husband back few years later when she was on exile from the town (Sucre). She had continuously written love letters to Bayardo. She was a woman and was conscious of her life so she did not let anyone interfere in her married life. She tried to be in touch with her husband through letters and was successful in winning his heart in the end. She was able to restore her marriage.

This paper tries to show that it is both the women and men who work for the well being of the society but in the 20th century Colombian society the men were the centre of the action and the true practioners of honor code. The honor code indirectly empowered the men. The code of honor did not give any space for the individuality and identity of women. The men served the honor code and never dared to question it. The honor code did not even spare anyone belonging to higher class. In this paper, it is shown that the surface reality was different from internal reality. On surface, the men seemed to be more powerful and the ones who worked but in reality they were slaves to the code of honour. The women were the only ones who executed and towards the end of the novella proved to be more dominating over the code of honour. It was only women who exercised their individual wills. Hence, the women represented the voiceless voices of this society.

Work Cited

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