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THEMES OF SOLITUDE AND DEATH: IN LITERARY TEXTS

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Abstract

Solitude allows one to explore one's own mind without outside interference. A person gets enough time for self-introspection to understand the best course to apply to make life bearable apart from developing positive thoughts for those who are responsible for negativity in one's life. A solitary worker is taken to be a productive and creative worker. But too much of anything can be bad. And time and again authors have dealt with this issue of solitary existence. Solitude becomes source of sickness when man being a social animal misses out on the need to have human connect. Much read work of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, might strike a chord with those who believe in Stoicism that people go through periods of solitary existence through circumstances, generally not created by them.

Keywords: Isolation, Solitude, Death, Alone, Solitary, Magical Realism

Introduction

Melquiades is the prophet who prophesises apocalyptic doom of Buendias and there once utopian Macondo. The fantastic narration of Garcia unfolds different facets of an emotional man in his *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Authors have normally come out with women as emotional beings; but Garcia spins a tale where men are overpowered by something that is beyond their comprehension. There is almost mournful quality to **solitude** that is sought by men in this novel. Psychological **solitude** stares out of pages of this novel that is steeped in **magical realism**.

Methodology

Literary research allows one to study and critically analyse texts. Following paper comes with

critical analysis of characters under lens from different texts. These texts deal with universal problems of isolation, loneliness, suffering and death. Selected texts come with different background of the author, the socio-politic environment, different tradition and culture, and different literary age. Emotional state of "mind" of characters from these texts has been discussed to come out with what ails the mind in answering questions related to death and solitude.

Literary Review

Jose Arcadio Buendia, founder of Macondo, is like Adam of Bible. He creates a world of isolation where its inhabitants are happy in their **solitary** existence. He little realises that what was deeply feared by him and his wife, was about to materialise

in actual through his one step. The couple had run away from repercussion of committing sin of incest, solitary and **isolated** existence on Macondo provokes incestuous feelings. One cannot forget Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and the tragic story of twins who commit incest that jars sense of the reader. Intense **loneliness** had been gifted by socio-polity caste ridden society, that had forced the two to find physical and mental solace in each other's company. **Solitude** is way of life on Macondo but enforced in *The God of Small Things*.

People of Macondo live in cocoon of their own. They feel safe amidst their loved ones. But soon this love becomes claustrophobic as it does not allow for outer entanglements that could have become source of invigoration to something that was left to smolder and die ultimately. Love that should be free, is used as self-preservative measure to protect themselves from people outside Macondo. Solitary existence further fosters rote that sets in due to inactivity around the place. Nothing constructive happens till Ursula decides to look into material progress of the place with help of professionals from outside Macondo. Life without any kind of aspiration or goals to be achieved, stops to some extent. Ursula's action opens gates of Macondo to fantastic opportunities. Macondo becomes liberated from its own magical innocence and stifling isolation.

End of **isolation** for Macondo spells death for hold of Buendias over Macondo and its vast entourage. **Solitude** had stifled natural flow of emotions and now openness to the world becomes death of what was held dear as familial ties by the patriarchs of Buendia clan. The comic tragedy of Gabriel Garcia does not boast of accepted social cultural values from the very beginning. Macondo has its own set of rules, and these rules are unwritten and non-existent at the same time. Death of what is valued by people of Macondo is then understood best as giving in to attractions offered by outside world. Loss of innocence is Death that can be understood well through texts like *Lord of Flies* by William Golding. Young schoolboys turn out to be barbaric killers on a remote island. Death like existence is what is death for healthy humans. Circumstances in one's life can mortally wound a

heart that is full of emotions. Albert Camus felt like death each time when his mother slaved for someone to provide for her family. Jean Sullivan, priest and author felt lost on losing his father during 1st World War. But actual death struck him on coming home to his mother's second marriage that took place due to dire necessity. Death lurks through Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Ironically it is not the monster of Victor who is harbinger of death, it is the protagonist himself. He invites **death** of innocents by enraging the monster. Victor is cruel and the monster is 'humane' at first. Here harsh reality of man's true nature is responsible for loss of innocence. Victor had gone in pursuit of forbidden knowledge; he pays the price with his death. Monster becomes truly hideous when love within him is crushed down by his maker. Jose Arcadio Buendia, Patriarch of Buendia family, invites death like existence when he starts pursuit of knowledge brought by the gypsies. He retreats into **solitary** existence to get knowledge of unknown. His sons follow the path of their father and are often seen closeted in enclosed space. Colonel Aureliano tries to break away from his solitary existence but comes back to make his little gold fishes as outside world disgusts him. Thousands die at banana plantation. Here one comes across brutal hand of power politics.

Physical death is present through out the novel. Patriarch of the house dies after turning crazy. Ursula dies of old age but dies much before when she starts living in her mind in distant past. Both the characters had come to Macondo after Jose had killed Prudencio Aguilar in a cockfight. Living with ghosts like the ghost of Aguilar is akin to **death** like ghostly existence for Jose and Ursula. There is death of Remedios due to complications during childbirth. Deaths due to black magic spells can be traced through the story but they leave little impact due to comic narration of the author. Violent deaths too are seen across the pages. Colonel's seventeen sons are shot dead. Final **death** occurs at the end of the novel where city of Macondo vanishes from the face of the earth along with all its inhabitants.

Darker side of '**solitude**' is brought up through literary works. David Vincent, author of *A History of Solitude*, claims that "**loneliness** is failed

solitude", meaning thereby that gifts of solitude have not been appreciated. If one were to appreciate it, then Wordsworth could have been quoted with famous lines from his poem, *Daffodils*;

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of **solitude**;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

Wordsworth talks about joyful bounties of the natural world. Keats too continues in the same vein in his **Solitude** poem;

O **Solitude!** if I must with thee dwell,
Let it not be among the jumbled heap
Of murky buildings; climb with me the
steep,—
Nature's observatory—whence the dell,
Its flowery slopes, its river's crystal swell,...

Here Keats is emphasising on the fact that a person can be solitary amidst masses in a crowded place. Like Wordsworth, his preference is to be 'lonely and alone' above being 'lonely amidst company'. Virginia Woolf loved urban surroundings. She felt the rhythm of life coursing through its crowded pavements; for her solitude meant felt separateness from social world where friends surrounded you. Woolf's stress is upon privacy of 'mind' that is a wellspring which stays unpolluted by the world at large. *Mrs. Dalloway* talks about Woolf's privacy that can be distressing too. Protagonist of *Mrs Dalloway* is envious of woman across the street who lives alone. **Psychological solitude** in the novel is brought to the reader through Septimus as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, a result of World War 1 atrocities. Medical science has come with specific names to such disorders of the mind. Insomnia Plague of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* talked about collective semantic dementia years before the term evolved in medical field. Forgetfulness in the book was another kind of 'solitude' where present worries go missing. War novels of Earnest Hemingway talk about after effects of wars. Alienation and **isolation** become part and parcel of soldiers' lives. They live away from their families and keep missing them, on coming back

they find it difficult to fit back in normal society. His *Old Man and the Sea* comes up with great potential that a man carries within himself. Santiago the protagonist of the novel is not able to live amidst humans, but this makes him look around for an alternative way. He has solitary existence with nature for its companion and he does not mind it.

Strange narrative of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* allows its author to come up with different ways of expressing himself. When Colonel Aureliano Buendia's beloved Remedios dies, he does not feel any pain because he is like everyone else around him, blessed with different kind of happiness in his newfound solitary state. Solitude in the novel is all about shallow feelings. Buendias are cursed with it. Buendia men find comfort when alone. This comfort is without feeling of joy and vitality that marks presence of life force.

Conclusion

Creator was not pleased with man's solitude. He did not want Adam to be alone, so he made Eve, one flesh in two forms complementing each other. God did not want separated, isolated and solitary man; he came up with land, seas, vegetation, fruit bearing trees, fish, birds, and animals. And on looking at his creation, declared "very good".

Authors are emotional and introspective. They suffer, feel, and observe world with higher degree of sensitivity. Texts come with warning about dangers of isolation. Literature serves as entertainment. And this entertainment comes with its own unique therapeutic power. Powerful stories with their powerful characters promote empathy and sympathy. Reader gets to understand his own befuddled emotions as those of the others. While he moves through the text, he gets enough time to explore universal emotions along with his own space in the whole wide world. Different types of solitary existences have been discussed to get better understanding of what is positive and negative about the term.

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