“Stories don’t just exist, they are told, and not just told but told from some perspective or other” (Lamarque 131). Lamarque’s statement informs a crucial point about representation — that is “even purely ‘aesthetic’ representation of fictional persons and events, can never be completely divorced from political and ideological questions” (Mitchell 15). Literary works have since been considered to be reflections of a particular society or culture. Beginning from Plato’s focus on the Greek texts as representative of a particular worldview and values, literature has come to embody a “specific view of human nature and the universe” and in fact, it “portrayed and (implicitly) endorsed an entire value system” (Nightingale 37). Literatures claim not only to represent “life” or “society”, but at most times, they even ‘define’ values and morals, codes and philosophies. The equation between society and literature is that while ‘literatures’ reflect social, economic, cultural patterns; society in turn shapes particular literature. Ideas, values, opinions are moulded by socio-historical conditions which in turn gets reflected in specific texts/literatures. Echoing a similar belief, V.Sujatha states: “Society plays an important role in shaping literature. Literature, in turn, reflects the social and economic patterns of the society wherein the art is produced. Literature is viewed as a social activity, a criticism of life and a mirror of its age” (59). Pam Morris’s statement that “Representation is perhaps the most fundamental of human activities, structuring our consciousness of ourselves and of external reality” (7), holds true especially in the context of considering literature as a powerful medium that shapes beliefs, opinions, and worldviews.

Texts are not written in a vacuum, and as Terry Eagleton says, there is “no way of viewing reality except from a particular perspective, within the frame of specific interests or assumptions, which is one reason why some people have
considered that all our thought and perception is in fact ideological” (11), which would mean that a critique of any particular writer’s work requires an understanding of the ideologies at work as also the conditions that are responsible for creating a particular perspective. Such a reading implies that “instead of seeing authors as primarily autonomous ‘inspired’ individuals whose ‘genius’ and creative imaginative enables them to bring forth original and timeless works of art” (Barry 158), rather they are “constantly formed by their social contexts in ways which they themselves would usually not admit. This is true not just of the content of their work but even of formal aspects of their writing which might at first seem to have no possible overtones” (158).

Proposing a similar idea, Frederic Jameson insists that the interpretation of literary texts should be based on history; or rather, the social, economic and political factors that might have shaped that literature — that is, the analysis of a text should begin “with the recognition that there is nothing that is not social and historical — indeed, that everything is ‘in the last analysis’ political” (20). Jameson argues about the importance of political interpretation of literary texts and he conceives of the political perspective not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today — the psychoanalytic or the myth-critical, the stylistic, the ethical, the structural — but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation. (17)

Political ideas and beliefs are moulded by the historical conditions of a particular period and as Adam Roberts says: “No critic can afford to ignore the ways that history
has shaped the literature written during that time” (50). Seen in such a light, literary texts do not just remain ‘aesthetic’ creations but implicit within them are manifestations of a particular culture, values, ideologies, belief systems, worldviews and which can serve as instruments or medium to reflect on (as well as protest, if required) a particular society, community, nation or nations.

Since its encounter with the European world and its subsequent forceful colonization, the fight for independence and then the perennial conflict for power and rule across the nations — Latin America has witnessed and experienced inexplicable violence and mayhem; pathetic demolition of the hopes and aspirations of millions who had dreamt of a peaceful, progressive and a beautiful world; and reflecting such absurd yet brutally truthful condition, Latin America as viewed through most of its (representative) literatures “is a continent of great dreams, vast mirages and shattering disappointments” (Martin, “The Novel of a Continent” 633). A close relationship between literature and political thinking as well as activism has been a constant feature of the Latin American literary scenario, which in fact, began during the early period of independence when the writers “approached their native countries’ specific needs by serving in two important roles: they became chroniclers of the sociopolitical events taking place, and they started the first attempts to produce a national literature” (Ocasio 35). Latin American writers hence, initiated what Ocasio calls “an ambitious project” that merged social needs with an intellectual project to produce a ‘native’ literary production. One important by-product of a national literature is the emergence of a local readership. Another is the beginning of a strong presence of writers in the political arena. A considerable
number of writers took active part in political events in their native
countries. This political involvement of Latin American writers is still
a common practice today. (35)

On receiving the Rómmulo Gallegos Prize in 1967, Mario Vargas Llosa in his speech
“Literature is Fire” declared that “literature was a desperately serious activity, a
matter of life and death, and that it was always feared by reactionary regimes”
(Martin, “The “Boom” of Spanish-American Fiction” 486).

Writing during a period (which eventually came to be labeled as the ‘Boom’
period), Márquez and the contemporary writers “broke with the established
inclination to concentrate on regional or indigenist themes and instead tended to revel
in narrative experimentation, self-referentiality and increasing demands made upon
the reader” (Standish 71); but they also “drew upon the venerable tradition of the
Latin American writer as social critic, as voice of its indigenous traditions, its historic
past and political present and its vast and heterogeneous cultures” (Williams, The
Columbia Guide 7). And as Michael Wood states — with the works of such writers as
Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, García Márquez, José Donoso, and others

Spanish American fiction found a new confidence, a sense of its place
in the world, and of what its sources of power were: strong local or
family traditions of oral narrative; a set of political realities which were
often already, without having to be arranged or refocused, operatic or
farcical; a long tradition of dead-pan irony, and a remorseless
commitment to jokes. (“Spanish America” 393)
As Frederic Jameson writes: “Always historicize!” (9), the thesis will make an attempt to read García Márquez’s selected novels in the context of socio-political and historical conditions of Latin America (and of Colombia, in particular), as well as try to trace the major issues that dominate his literary works which are again a reflection of his reaction and answer to the Latin American political scenario.

Latin American / Colombian Political History:

Latin America — the geographical region as we know is not simply a landmass with a particular size and volume, rather it is a rich cauldron of various cultures and people which has evolved over ages and is still evolving. It is an amazingly diverse composition of people and culture, but, with a shared past.

Although Latin America now is a conglomeration of some twenty nations, amidst the diversity and differences of each nation, every Latin American nation is connected to each other through a colonial past — they have shared the days of conquests, settlements, upheavals, revolutions, nation-building processes; ultimately forging a unity which is truly unique. Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans — the collision of these three peoples gives rise to Latin America and in Marshall C. Eakin’s words:

The collision of Native Americans, Europeans, and Africans, like three powerful streams converging to produce a roaring river, mixed these three peoples into a dazzling variety of combinations, producing something new and unique in world history. As the decades and centuries passed, the turbulent river gradually split into many different
streams, but all had their origins in the great waterway formed by the initial clash of these three groups . . . (1)

And “It is these dramatic collisions and convergences that provide Latin America with both its unity and its diversity” (Eakin 2).

Before the conquest of the Americas by Europeans (mainly by the Spanish and Portuguese), throughout Latin America, various groups of people had lived and settled and who are now termed as ‘Native Americans’ or ‘Indians’. Three great civilizations mark the history of Latin America — the Maya civilization, the Aztec civilization and the Incas civilization. Although these developed over a vast stretch of time (Maya civilization: AD 250-900 and then again from AD 1200-1450, Aztec civilization: AD 900-1500, and Incas: from mid-thirteenth to mid-fourteenth century); they shared certain common features: like, a complex, hierarchical social structure, highly developed irrigation and farming system, religious beliefs, formation of astronomical calendars, military conquests and expansion, etc.

Maybe Columbus in 1492 (when he reached the shores of Latin America) had never imagined that this first contact with the New World would lead to an unprecedented demographical change in the history of Latin America which would give a complete new turn to the destiny of the region. The Spanish gradually swept across the region, annihilating millions of Indians (ironically, a vast majority died due to diseases brought from the European world and which they were not immune to), and in the process laid the foundation of a colonial empire. Wherever the
conquistadors won, they set up Viceroyalties which acted like a political capital and which demanded the subservience of the defeated Native Americans.

Exploitation of the land and amassing enormous wealth led to the establishment of various landed estates, named differently as — haciendas, estancias, fincas, fazendas. This resulted in the increasing need of labour which led to the import of Africans as slaves, and thus started the long and darkest period of history — the import and exploitation of Africans. The property and wealth of the Spanish as well as the Portuguese (in Brazil) was founded on the sweat and blood of Africans as well as Indians. Gradually, as the colonial societies began to develop, the Europeans also established legal and religious institutions which the Native Americans and Africans were forced to follow. The Europeans mostly occupied the top positions in the social and political hierarchy while the non-Europeans were made to languish at the bottom of the strata, and, in Marshall C. Eakin’s words:

Across the Americas, the Spanish and Portuguese built colonial societies on a clear and harsh hierarchy: a social structure where a small, white elite controlled economic and political power through their control of land and a non-European labour force. The pronounced inequities built into these structures of exploitation are the most enduring and burdensome legacy of the conquest and colonization of Latin America. (105)

A subtle means of domination of the local people was the imposition of Christianity. However one simply could not supplant the ethnic religious beliefs of millions of non-Europeans (Native Americans and also the Africans, who brought
along their language, cultural practices and religious beliefs across the seas); which eventually led to a religious-mixing — where elements of Christian and non-Christian beliefs amalgamated to produce a mixed religion which could not be defined as European, Indian or African — rather truly American. Political and military conquest could not annihilate the cultures and cultural practices of neither Indians nor Africans; which eventually developed into a hybrid culture encompassing the ‘essence’ of each separate culture and led to what we call an ‘American’ culture.

This clash or collision of people and culture also led to the birth of a mixed population which eventually accounted for the majority of Latin American population. This population is the racially and culturally mixed population of the mestizos, mulattoes and zambos (created out of racial mixing between Indians and Europeans, Africans and Europeans, and between Indians and Africans respectively).

European culture, art and philosophy did influence Latin Americans, especially the elites who held important positions in the vice regal courts. Art, music, sculpture etc., were vastly imitated from the classic productions of the Spanish Golden Age. However with the emergence of a new ‘creole’ culture, by the late seventeenth century, people started forging their own creole identity and they began to identify themselves more as ‘American Spaniards’ and in Marshall C. Eakin’s words “By 1800, these Americans had begun to produce literature and history that reveled in the unique features of their “country” or patria, as they often called their locale or region” (161).
By the late eighteenth century, certain important political events (the American War of Independence and the French revolution) created furore across the globe and it had a tremendous impact on Latin America. By this time the Spanish and the Portuguese empires tried to restructure the social and political set up in their colonies. The ‘creole’ elites were used to occupying important positions in administrative as well as various trade units. But as a means to limiting the power of the creole elites, the Spanish and Portuguese empires redrew the boundaries and tightened the bureaucratic powers earlier enjoyed by these people. These positions were gradually usurped by the *peninsulares* (people of direct Spanish descent). This gradual discrimination would lead to a growing dissent among the creole elites and would eventually blow up into a full fledged revolt against Spain and its authority. The political circumstances along with the revolutionary upheavals in the US and France (these ideas of a separate identity and freedom from imperial authority acted as a fuel) would lead to massive rebellions across Latin America by the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Ironically, this War of Independence and then the consequent processes of nation-building threw Latin America into a deep morass of disastrous political events that would continue to plague Latin America till the twenty-first century. In this War of Independence, emerged such leaders like Simón Bolívar (who instituted the formation of Gran Colombia — Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador), José de San Martín, José Gervasio Artigas, Bernardo O’ Higgins etc.

However, this war of independence, as it turned out to be was simply a transfer of power from one group of elite to another bunch of elites, as C.W. Crawley
emphatically states that, “. . . though creoles had stepped into the shoes of Spaniards, and though political institutions had been shaped anew in most areas, but more particularly in the rural and Indian areas, the structure of colonial society at the close of the wars of independence had been little changed” (618).

The processes of nation-building proved to be a daunting task for those in power because after all they were left with a legacy of centuries of social and economic inequities which persisted and rather flourished as the region plunged into another war — this time a struggle within the nations and among the rulers for power: “The story in Latin America is not about liberty and equality, or how to define them, but about who will control power” (Eakin 199).

Before he died, Simón Bolívar stated: “He who tries to govern America ploughs the sea . . .” (Peter and Susan Calvert 7). This was ominous enough which proved to be very true as succeeding governments and their leaders would try to grapple with the problem of controlling the chaotic situation in Latin America.

Latin American nations would now be tormented by dictatorships, political factionalism, military coups — a result of the ever-present greed to grab power, and intense rivalry among the political groups (especially between the Conservatives and Liberals) who hardly worked together to stabilize situations. As the civilian political groups fought amongst each other for power and domination, military generals or dictators took advantage of the lack of a democratic spirit and large scale socio-economic inequities among the masses.
In most military regimes and dictatorships, any kind of resistance was suppressed, civilian political parties were nullified, press censorship was imposed, and widespread terror prevailed. For example, in the 1976 military regime in Argentina which was . . . to penetrate all aspects of Argentine society, beginning in the schools and universities. Teachers were once more purged, subversive (and not-so-subversive) books were burnt, artists were proscribed and driven into exile, formal political channels were closed down and, most notoriously, a whole sale counter-terror was unleashed on all suspected of being left-wing or having left-wing sympathies. Estimates of the number who perished in the first two years of what became known as ‘the Dirty War’ (la guerra sucia) fluctuated wildly at the time, but it is now known that some 9000 were killed and it is all but certain that the real figure was over 15000. Many of those who were rounded up, tortured and ‘disappeared’, it is certain, had no left-wing credentials. Friends and relations, seized on suspicion, also died, some children on the argument that since their elder brothers and sisters were suspects, they too in time would grow up into ‘subversives’. Women were seized, raped and tortured only because they were attractive, and the babies of some of the ‘disappeared’ were taken from their mothers at birth and given to military families. (Peter and Susan Calvert 121)

In short, the atrocities knew no bounds.
Economic problems also led to large scale unrest among the population. With the increase of plantations across Latin America, especially coffee plantations (in Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela etc.) and sugar plantations (in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic etc.); there also arose problems related to labour and their management. The large-scale immigration of low wage labourers, harsh working conditions, inadequate wages and discrimination led to massive labour strikes.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the emergence of labour unions formed to voice the needs of workers to grant and protect their rights; for example, in Cuba, The Sindicato Nacional de Obreros de la Industria Azucarera (National Union of Sugar Industry Workers, SNOIA) was formed keeping in interest the large-scale labour exploitation in the Cuban sugar plantations. In Puerto Rico, the Federación Libre de Trabajadores (Free Federation of Workers, FLT) was founded in the nineteenth century and out of it emerged the Puerto Rican Socialist Party in 1915 as its political branch.

Latin American economy was basically an export-based (dependent) economy. Till the late nineteenth century, Latin America was not impressively industrialized and most of the industries were set up by foreigners or through foreign investment. By this time, the working-class consisted of miners, transport workers, dockers, textile workers, artisans, skilled craftsmen etc. These varied groups of workers were hardly united and initially it was difficult to stage mass labour movements. Differences in ideas and tactics created divisions among labour groups and trade unions. Moreover, the nature and division of workers varied from country to country. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, countries like Mexico, Chile,
Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Uruguay and later Colombia, Ecuador etc. saw mass labour uprisings.

Workers resorted to strikes, boycotts, slowdowns and occasional sabotages. Most labour protests were violently suppressed by the state machinery; for example:

. . . the Chilean government carried out a series of extraordinary massacres against workers, killing several hundred people in the course of strikes and demonstrations in Valparaíso (1903), Santiago (1905) and Antofagasta (1906). In 1907, troops murdered well over a thousand defenseless men, women and children in Iquique by opening fire on nitrate workers and their families who had come to appeal for higher wages and better working conditions. (Bethell 330-1)

The activities of trade unions and labour groups had slowed down during the period of post-war depression during the 1920s and 1921. While repressive measures were strengthened, most governments sought to adopt policies aimed at reducing worker’s grievances. The late 1920s also saw the emergence of Communist parties in various countries.

By mid-twentieth century, especially after the Second World War, situation remained grim in Latin America. With an ever-increasing population, dictatorship regimes, inefficient economic planning, unequal distribution of wealth and power — Latin American nations reflected a picture of unabated social and political unrest and disarray. The existing social conditions had already led to the emergence of groups voicing the need for social changes and reforms and as such, events and conditions
favoured the rise of communism as stated: “In summary, rich resources remained untapped, the masses continued to live in chronic poverty, illiteracy was widespread, and prosperity was enjoyed by a conspicuous few. The circumstances provided a fertile seedbed for the growth of communism” (Langsam and Mitchell 476).

The impact of the Cold War was deeply felt in Latin America as it raked up the ever present struggle between the elites and the impoverished masses and it led on to a new struggle between communism and capitalism, especially from the late 1940s to the late 1980s; and this period saw the rise of leftist movements (leftist political parties, left-wing guerrillas etc.). Latin America turned into a battle ground where the two superpowers — the US and the Soviet Union, exercised their powers; and transformed Latin America into a bloody site of contest — a contest played by the superpowers as well as the ruling elites, but the price of the instability (brought about by such conflicts) had to be borne by the common masses. With the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the US tightened its grip over the Latin American political scenario and thus began an era of US hegemony over Latin America, whose main aim was to suppress any communist or socialist uprising, control trade and investment actions, and maintain diplomatic and political superiority over its southern neighbour.

Today (21st century), Latin America has come a long way from the dark days of pre-and post colonial era. Although there seems to be some stability in the region, a lot remains to be achieved. Increase in population, growth of literacy rate, improvement in health sector, improvement in per capita income, industrialization are indicators of development and betterment; yet Latin America still remains plagued by some core political and social issues which are yet to be eradicated.
Peter Calvocoressi writes:

In a century and more after independence South America had become a byword for political instability and could, but for widespread ignorance of its affairs, have become no less a byword for social immobility. It was notorious for civil wars, revolutions, coups, political assassinations and short lived constitutions, while at the same time it entrenched extreme social and economic injustice. Its basic needs were the reverse of its experience; namely, political stability and social and economic change. (641)

Calvocoressi’s statement seems absolutely (politically) correct to fit in to Colombia’s condition, in particular.

Appallingly, Colombia has been registered as one of the most volatile regions in the hemisphere, which is justified in John H. Coatsworth’s report:

As many as a million people may have died in the Mexican Revolution, but more perished from disease and dislocation than combat. In more recent times, the last paroxysms of the cold war imposed a heavy toll on Latin America. 30,000 died in Argentina between 1976 and 1982; perhaps 300,000 in the Central American wars between 1978 and the early 1990s. Other examples could be cited, but it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Colombia’s history is one of the most violent in the hemisphere, with organized killing existing in high levels, punctuated with episodes of high intensity murderousness, for nearly two centuries.
Simón Bolívar, could not have imagined that the country he had liberated from the dominion of Spain would perennially be immersed in a bloodbath. Colombia’s unique geographical arrangement resulted in the development of separate and scattered group of disconnected communities. Geographical barriers tended to disrupt normal communication between various communities settled in different places and it also fostered the development of particularized local and regional cultures. Politically, this dispersion has manifested itself in regional antagonism and local rivalries, expressed in the nineteenth century in civil war and in atleast part of the twentieth century in intercommunity violence. (Safford and Palacios ix)

Regional differences including a highly stratified society, particular ethnic identity and political affiliations led to conflicts among the people. In Christin Shullo’s words:

This innate societal separation, based on regional economic and cultural differences and caused by the heterogeneous nature of Colombian society, is one of the main causes of the endemic violence in the country. This tradition of regionalism and isolationism has lent itself to a violent tradition that now stands between Colombia and a truly stable political system. (3)

Colombian politics is specifically of an elitist nature with rival civilian elites competing for power and status. Effectively excluding other social groups and institutions, such as the rural masses as well as the proletariat and also the military from active participation in or control of the political processes — these political
elites (who are also significantly the social and economic elites) have remarkably and astutely retained the reins of power. The subordination and also the deprivation of those occupying the lower strata of society dates back to the times of colonial social hierarchy that placed the Spanish born above the native born.

Colombian politics have always been dominated by two rival parties — the Conservative and the Liberal party. The origin of these two parties lies in the ideological rift that occurred between Simón Bolívar and Francisco de Paula Santander.

The Liberals opposed to the Conservatives’ centralist tendencies, such as authoritarianism, limited franchise, continuing colonial structures and institutions, retaining the alliance between the church and state, continuing slavery, and eliminating any excesses of freedom. On the other hand, the Liberals sought the separation of church and state, freedom of press, universal suffrage, decentralization of government, better opportunities for business and enterprise and abolition of the death penalty.

However, the ensuing conflict cannot be attributed simply to ideological differences. The actual ground for contest is power and privilege. There have been numerous instances in the Colombian political scenario when one party in power tried to limit or almost eliminate the rival party’s existence. Hence, political assassinations, murders, ‘disappearances’ etc. are not uncommon in Colombia.
Although removed from the battle for power, the common masses have always been the worst sufferers. Regional antagonism and cultural differences being prominent, Colombian masses were also divided between these two political factions. It has been ravaged by numerous political battles resulting in indescribable loss of life and property — the most notorious being the War of a Thousand Days (1899-1902) and la violencia (1948-53).

The 1960s also saw the emergence of guerrilla organizations like the FARC, ELN, M-19 etc., which proclaimed leftist inclinations, claiming to redress the wrong done to the common masses and significantly the peasant community.

Although recent governments have tried to sort out Colombia’s inherent problems, yet Colombia remains one of the most troubled and violent regions in Latin America. The country and its people have gone through and are still suffering, insurmountable and unthinkable experiences.

Latin American/ Colombian Literature:

Since its inception, literature has existed and performed as a medium of dialogue and reflection on various socio-political, cultural issues affecting that particular time. A lot has been said and debated about this quality of art — beginning from the mimetic theories of Aristotle to the most recent onslaught of theoretical bombardment upon the nature and intent of this art. Despite this, literature continues to inform and entertain, and most writers write with this sense of social as well as artistic responsibility.
For Latin American writers and their literature, this is even truer considering the extremely disturbing, disgusting and dismal situation of the region: “For them, as for many Latin Americans, literature has long been as legitimate a medium as any to explore the most compelling political, social and spiritual concerns of the past and the present” (Moss and Valestuk xiii).

Seen in the context of Latin America, the novel (as a genre) had not yet set its foothold in the beginning of the nineteenth century; however, as it began taking shape — it was decidedly marked by nationalist tendencies played out through fiction.

Spanish American writers were greatly influenced by the Romantic Movement, producing narratives in the Romantic fashion. Interestingly, Romanticism in Latin American literature was blended with the political conflicts and events that followed after independence, “such as the effort to overthrow the dictatorship that often replaced Spanish colonial rule” (Linstrom 27).

Romanticism helped Spanish American fiction in gaining newer features which eventually helped to create a truly ‘Americanist’ literature, as writers began including characters and types which were once marginalized:

With Romanticism, all that changed. For the first time it became recommendable to exploit ‘local colour’. From Scott’s kilted highlanders to Hugo’s black slave Bug Jargal and Mérimée’s Spanish gypsy, Carmen, exotic figures from the margins of society emerged triumphantly into literature. This meant that there was now a place for
the gaucho, for the Indian, and in the Caribbean, for the black slave.

‘Americanist’ literature was now possible and desirable. (Shaw 4)

Literature, now, did provide space for the gaucho, for the Indian and the slave. But ironically, sometimes literary tendencies and their intentions prove inadequate or contradictory. The themes and plots were definitely based upon nationalistic ideas — rural values, life and customs, the various wars fought in the land etc., however, they clearly failed to raise or question certain issues pertaining to these times. As Donald L. Shaw writes, these works had its ‘civic’ side, in aiding the literate public to achieve national consciousness. It helped that public to understand part of what their nationality involved, through coming to terms with the ‘otherness’ of other areas, other classes, other life-styles, in the same country. It might at times contain the presupposition that the way in which people visualized their national reality could affect the way they behaved as citizens. It could satirize, usually affectionately, some older aspects of social behaviour. It could moralize. It involved a certain degree of achievement of national self-awareness through the discovery that these new nations had marked individual characteristics, even if these were not always positive. What it did not normally do was to contain references to the harshness and complexity of real social conditions. As a rule it was intrinsically non-threatening to the status quo. (15)
And due to which, although these works, “contributed to a greater sense of nationality, tended to avoid seeing reality in all its complexity and problematicness” (Shaw 16).

Romanticism, in the latter part of the nineteenth century gave way to realism. Though both literary styles are different, Spanish-American writers fused them; hence giving rise to fiction imbued both with the Romantic tradition of experiencing and representing the extremes as well as the moderation of it through realistic conventions.

New writing techniques developed in order to give voice to changing circumstances and conditions. As the Latin American countries went through the various crises; writers across Latin America, as in other parts of the globe, started treating their literary creations with newer techniques. It needs to be remembered that the corpus of Spanish American literary work owes its origin to European models. Writers were invariably indebted to the European models of fiction. However, with changing circumstances and a growing confidence in the uniqueness and authority of an exquisite Spanish American experience — writers started carving out works which had a unique Spanish American effect. Latin American writers and their literature have predominantly been reflections and responses to the political scenario of their times. Latin America, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century was marked by a lot of changes in the economic and political sphere.

The ‘regional’ novels, as they came to be widely termed as, flourished during this period. Nature, rural life, ethnic particularities, language and culture specific to a
particular region etc.— these ‘local’ realities were merged with broader national subjects. The techniques used in these new narrative forms would lead on to the generation of the much-acclaimed as well as debated phenomenon and technique (mostly considered to be specifically Latin American), that is, magical realism.

Be it the shift of concern to the rural interiors, the rivers, valleys, the deep forests of the Amazons, the pampas, the extremely difficult lives led by Indians, gauchos etc. or the heady days of the Mexican Revolution — writers initiated a notable shift in themes, experiences, and techniques. And this parallel development “of the Novel of the Mexican Revolution and the Regionalist Novel, both manifestations of *americanismo*, is the most important fictional phenomenon of the first part of the twentieth century. It signalled the long-awaited break with the European tradition” (Shaw 55).

Be it the Mexican Civil War or the proletarian issues (of Chilean miners, plantation workers, artisans etc.), most writers engaged themselves with social issues and radical politics while also experimenting with new literary forms and techniques. The corpus of literature produced during this period is a confirmation and assertion of Latin American writers as beacons and critics of the history and politics of the period. Although a lot has been criticized, one cannot

. . . deny the importance of understanding the regional novel as part of a cultural history in which the first decades of the twentieth century are both a transition from the past and a groundwork for the future. The best way to understand the importance of the regional novel within that transition may not be its efforts to adopt new narrative devices or its
elaboration of specific political themes. Instead, the periodization of regional narrative may best be derived from its appearances at the moment in which the novel came to occupy a central place in Latin American intellectual life. (Gollnick 57)

And most writers of the period “wrote with the supposition that their works would participate in broad dialogues on the major issues of their day, including the meaning of local history and its relationship to international politics and national development” (Gollnick 57).

The ‘regional’ novel in Latin America had its own unique position. With respect to that, however, these works of fiction were not altogether flawless — working on which future writers developed newer ways and techniques. These literary works started concentrating on themes and experiences unique to Latin America. This was the first step towards attempting to define and describe Latin American reality. Techniques of nineteenth century realism were inadequate to express the complex situation of Latin America. The writers

. . . preoccupied as they were with the discovery and expression of a genuinely Spanish American reality, they tended to see that reality as unambiguous, accepting, in the Realist tradition, that what they observed on the battlefields of the Mexican Revolution, on the pampas or the llano, Misiones or in the Amazonian jungle was really real. (Shaw 69)

And this actually led future writers to break off with the traditional techniques:
This is why to understand the pattern of fiction in Spanish America in the first half of the twentieth century, it is not enough to follow out the various movements which grew out of the realism of the end of the previous century. What led to the Boom was not a further process of development of Realism but a gradual break with Realism. (Shaw 69)

Reality, in Latin America, is extremely harsh and even gory to the extent that many would love to gloss over the terrible reality. By the mid-twentieth century, writers tried to present alternate views of reality, breaking the conventional norms of explaining/describing events with logic, causality and chronology. Writers had become increasingly skeptical about ‘reality’ and the writer’s capacity as well as task of interpreting that ‘reality’.

During this period, Latin America witnessed an exemplary radical movement which fuelled the fight for socio-political and cultural change, and which was much awaited by the common man as well as the intellectuals — that is, the Cuban Revolution. The revolution promised to herald a new and better future for the masses. This seemingly ebullient period coincided or rather propelled the ‘boom’ in Latin American literature. This period saw the beginning of the recognition and appreciation of Latin American literature across the globe with the publication of such memorable works like Julio Cortázar’s Rayuela (Hopscotch, 1963), Mario Vargas Llosa’s La casa verde (The Green House, 1964), La muerte Artemio Cruz (The Death of Artemio Cruz, 1963), and the widely-acclaimed Cien años de soledad (One Hundred Years of Solitude, 1967) by Gabriel García Márquez.
The writers of the period wrote with certain political and ideological commitment marked with innovations in writing techniques; assimilating the styles of Faulkner, Woolf, Joyce, Carpentier, Borges etc., and yet creating something which was essentially rooted in Latin American reality. They accommodated Faulknerian narrative and thematic styles and Borges’s unconventional models, use of motifs, celebration of the fantastic and emphasis on the breaking of barriers between ‘real’ and ‘magical’ experiences. Writers tried to create an essentially Latin American aura employing local myths and oral culture. Latin American literature no longer tended to be simply an extension and confirmation of European novelistic model; rather, it created its own space — celebrating both its uniqueness as well as its universality.

Latin American geography and history as well as its myths and oral tradition provided ample space to create a unique body of literature, and this uniqueness is aptly justified in John King’s terms:

. . . the search for identity; the appreciation of the heterogeneity of the continent; the dialectic between Europe and America; the blending of “high” culture and oral culture that would be at the heart of the practice that became known as magical realism; the use of baroque language as an appropriate form to do justice to the exuberance and boundless possibilities — in Carpentier’s terms — of the Latin American landscape and its heterodox identities. (68)

Experimental and explosive — the writers of the Boom period were equally engaged in politics as they were in the creation of their works. Writers like Mario Vargas Llosa with socialist leanings considered literature as a means of expressing
their distrust as well as disgust for the repressive political atmosphere. In Latin America, a writer’s concern does not simply remain an intellectual activity but also a political commitment as, “. . . it was at times of social upheaval that the writer’s “demons”, his largely unconscious obsessions, would be most active, and the writer, like a “vulture” would feed on the rotting carcass of society” (King 73).

These writers continued their political engagements and with increasing fame tried to influence matters:

With increasing fame and visibility, they also became international stars, but stars that continued an interest in politics and culture, albeit from changing ideological positions. Fuentes was an ambassador in the seventies and later, out of government office, he was a constant interlocutor of the Mexican and US political classes. García Márquez remained close to the Castro regime and to the troubled political situation in Colombia. Vargas Llosa ran for president of Peru in 1990. (King 76)

Before proceeding towards a discussion of Márquez’s works, a brief probe into Colombian literature would be helpful.

To talk of Colombian literature, and specifically of the Colombian novel, Raymond Leslie Williams’s statement strongly underpins its nature:

. . . that many, if not most, Colombian novels have functioned as objects of an ideological dialogue . . . Writing has always occupied an absolutely central role in Colombia and has been intimately associated
with politics. Publishing books have been a political act, often subversive in nature. (*The Colombian Novel* ix)

As in politics, Colombian literature has most often been elitist. A huge population being illiterate (especially during the colonial period as well as later); literary productions were basically confined to the powerful elites, who also simultaneously held political and economic powers and hence most literary creations were used as a medium of expression of dominant ideologies. Since colonial times; education, arts, literature, business, and politics were basically the premise of aristocrats and bureaucrats, who ordered and simultaneously exerted power over a multitude of illiterate masses, and which validates the point that:

The ruling aristocracy and *letrados* were thus linked as a powerful elite in colonies in which the vast majority of the population was illiterate; herein lie the historical roots of the connection between writing and power in Spanish America in general and Colombia in particular.

(*Williams, The Colombian Novel* 4)

A brief overview of the political situation, prevailing ideological standpoints as well as the literature produced during that particular period will facilitate an understanding of the journey of the Colombian novel since its inception till García Márquez catapulted it to a never-before achieved height.

After independence, the period from 1810-1862 can be called the germinative years for Colombia, when the process of building a new nation had started. But this beginning of a new nation proved to be extremely violent as the country plunged into
innumerable civil wars and the nation was thrown into a never-ending process of violence and crisis. The rivalry between the Liberals and the Conservatives and the ensuing ideological conflict became the root cause of the political disturbance which continued to plague Colombia even till the late twentieth century. With the Liberals and Conservatives professing separate and most often opposing principles, literature and literary productions became a means for substantiating and endorsing their respective ideologies.

In Colombia, the novel as a genre was not accorded a superior position as was enjoyed by other forms such as poetry and essays. Early nineteenth century literature was dominated by the educated elites who belonged to the powerful bureaucracy; and whose education and culture was influenced by the Spanish values implanted during centuries of colonial rule. Following the Spanish tradition, Colombia’s learned and sophisticated aristocrats established themselves through the pursuit of legal, political or literary careers.

During most of the nineteenth as well as the twentieth century, with a few exceptions, most novels went unnoticed. Considering the class values associated with literary productions, it showed that while Colombia’s literary critics and intellectuals belonged mostly to the oligarchy, the novelists most often did not belong to the dominant powerful class. Interestingly, the very act of writing as well as the acceptance and establishment of a writer implicates a power struggle:

As in the case of the upwardly mobile letrado of the Spanish bureaucracy, the middle-class Colombian writer has presented credentials before the chosen elite, but the acceptance of novelists
(rather than poets/ essayists) into the oligarchical intellectual inner circles has been rare. Each period has been represented by one or two prominent intellectuals who, in effect, appointed the chosen novelists. Authoritative scholar-critics who have played this role have included José María Vergara y Vergara, Baldomero Sanín Cano, Rafael Maya, Antonio Gómez Restrepo, and Gustavo Otero Muñoz, among others. Whereas Colombia’s novelists have tended to be Liberals, its literary critics have been mostly Conservatives. Recognizing this situation can help explain why Colombian novelists have always claimed the nation has no critics, while the critics have sustained that Colombia has no novelists. (Williams, The Colombian Novel 22-23)

For the greater part of this period, Colombia remained a nation in ‘conflict’. With nostalgia for colonial structures and a view of retaining the age old hierarchies, the Conservatives produced literary writings expressing the idea of a Hellenic/ Catholic Arcadia. On the other hand, the Liberals were set on creating the Liberal Utopia which anticipated large scale reforms and changes on the economic, political and religious front. In fact, “Literary expression began in the nineteenth century not as the “imaginative literature” we consider it today but as part of a debate between proponents of the Hellenic/ Catholic Arcadia and the Liberal Utopia” (Williams, The Colombian Novel 19). However, ironically, “Few utopias and arcadias were actually realized during the 1840s and 1850s beyond the textual . . . Rather, continual strife, including the civil wars of 1841, 1851-52, 1854, and 1859 to 1862, carried ideological differences to the battlefield” (23).
Manuela, written in 1858 by Conservative Eugenio Díaz is one of the notable works of that period. Written within the Romantic tradition, the work is more of a treatise on conflicting ideologies:

Manuela, then, is not a novel of the conflicts based on love affairs but one of ideological conflict posited in the novel . . . that Díaz did nothing more in Manuela than present the ideological battles of the country. The novel conveys ideological conflicts of the Colombia of the 1850s through the protagonist’s lengthy political discussion, from commentary by the narrator, and in its characterization. (Williams, The Colombian Novel 59)

Writing as a pure literary pursuit was superseded by the inclination of employing their works as a means of political dialogue. While the Conservative José Joaquín Ortiz tried to fictionalize a possible Hellenic/Catholic Arcadia in his María Dolores o la historia de mi casamiento in 1841; the Liberal Utopia found its supporter in the work of the Liberal Juan José Nieto in his work Ingermina o la hija de Calamar (1844). Very few novels were published during this period. Moreover, these early novels did not aesthetically match with their European counterparts, and not without reason — for most writers wrote with a strong sense of ideological commitment rather than emphasizing on “aesthetic” qualities as we understand today:

Nevertheless, Juan José Nieto, Eugenio Díaz, José María Angel Gaitán, and a few others pioneered what today’s literary scholars can identify as the first Colombian novels. Most of these works were aesthetic anomalies, particularly when read today as novels: In mid-nineteenth-century Colombia, as in eighteenth-century Great Britain,
the concept of literature was not confined as it is today to “creative” or “imaginative” writing. None of these pioneers considered himself a “novelist” but rather an *escritor*, which could refer to the fabrication of something like a novel or a political speech, history, or philosophy. Many of their works, which today are treated as novels, contained elements of each of these genres. In addition, terms such as *personal response* or *imaginative uniqueness*, inseparable for us today from the whole idea of *literary*, would not have made any more sense for Juan José Nieto or José María Samper than they did for Henry Fielding. The ideological enterprise of these mid-nineteenth century writers pertained less to “imaginative uniqueness” than to the ultimate ideological objectives related to the rationally conceived utopias and arcadias that they aspired to construct in Colombia. (Williams, *The Colombian Novel* 24-5)

The period from 1863-1885 can be taken as the second phase in the history of Colombia. Dominated by Liberals, the Constitution of 1863 was formulated and it was “one of the most liberal documents in the West at the time, assuring absolute freedom, humanitarian justice, the separation of church and state, the secularization of public education, free trade, abolition of slavery, freedom of expression and the press, and a federalist system of independent states” (Williams, *The Colombian Novel* 7). How far the Liberal Utopia was achieved is a matter of debate, but the period was marked by educational reforms, construction of railways, banks, and other technical and industrial establishments. Liberal doctrines however met with resistance, and debates and conflicts continued.
Jorge Issacs’ *María* in 1867 was the most notable work published during the period. Among other writers were José María Samper whose works contributed significantly to the political debate, and Temístocles Avella Mendoza whose novels *Los tres Pedros* (1864) and *Anacona* (1865) are examples of Romanticism in early Spanish American fiction. José María Vergara y Vergara was one of the renowned intellectuals of those times. He wrote *Historia de la literatura en Nueva Granada* (1867), which was one of the earliest works which tried to assess, compile and organize an overview of literary works produced till that time — an effort in promoting the idea of a Colombian “national” literature.

The period from 1886-1909 is another important phase in Colombian political history as this period saw the reinstating of the Conservatives into power, followed by political repression of the Liberals. During this period, “The major political event, within a constantly turbulent scenario, was the ratification of the Constitution of 1886 and the establishment of the Regeneration” (Williams, *The Colombian Novel* 62). The noted novelists of the Regeneration period was Tomás Carrasquilla, Eustaquio Palacios, José Manuel Marroquín, Soledad Acosta de Samper and José María Vargas Vila, while the important intellectual figures were Rafael Núñez, Miguel Antonio Caro, and José Asunción Silva. Núñez and Caro being the president and vice-president respectively — their works supported the Regeneration ethics, as also in the works of Samper, Palacios and Marroquín.

José María Vargas Vila was one writer who wrote against the Regenerationalist ethics and most of his works were
critically anti-establishment, a true counter-discourse, involving an anomalous combination of modernista aesthetic, ungrammatical use of language, and scandalous plots. The frequently anticlerical positions set forth in these novels were also in direct opposition to the ideology of the Regeneration. (Williams, *The Colombian Novel* 65)

Vargas Vila’s works voiced anti-Regeneration beliefs and in Raymond Williams’s words: “If Marroquín embodied the Regeneration ideal of the gentleman-scholar who wrote well (i.e. manipulated the craft of fiction adroitly in an ideologically acceptable fashion), Vargas Vila was his antithesis” (38).

The period from 1910-1929 saw the consolidation of the Conservative regime. It also saw the emergence of leftist groups, as well as the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. It was also marked by certain key events like labour strikes — most important being the United Fruit Company massacre in Ciénaga which was later fictionalized in the works of Alvaro Cepeda Samudio and García Márquez. José Eustacio Rivera is the most celebrated writer of this period with his novel *La vorágine* being accorded the highest place in the list of novels produced till date.

Apart from literary concerns, writing was still used as a means of waging a political battle and the acceptance or rejection of novelists and their works corresponded to their political pronouncements and also depended on the dominant political regime:

Daniel Samper Ortega and Vargas Vila represented opposite poles of the period’s ideological dialogue. Samper Ortega dedicated himself to
imparting good manners, fostering the education of the masses. He felt
mass education would result in social reform, and he attempted to
educate the public through both his pedagogical activity and his
novels. Vargas Vila, on the other hand, published several fictions
celebrating the social aberrations that his irreverent and sometimes
perverse characters practiced. Literature was performing several
functions by the early twentieth century, but the novels that received
official acceptance functioned as moral ideology. Obviously, Suárez,
Sánchez Gómez, and Samper Ortega appeared more frequently in
official publications and literary histories than did the contumacious
Vargas Vila. (Williams, *The Colombian Novel* 42-3)

Despite Conservatives having the upper hand in political as well as literary
matters, since only officially “correct” matters were sanctioned and published —
against this

the counter-discourse to the Conservative Republic manifested itself
both in political/ literary dialogue and in anti-establishment activity.
The political dialogue was headed by figures such as María Cano, a
leftist organizer of the 1920s who wrote critical essays. The rise of the
literary group Los Nuevos and the publication of the literary magazine
*Voces* in Barranquilla afforded an alternative to the conservative
Hispanism of official discourse. (Williams, *The Colombian Novel* 10)

*Voces* in Barranquilla served as a platform, as it invited and encouraged writers for
publishing their works:
On one level, *Voces* served as a regional organ, publishing the most accomplished costeño fiction writers at the time: Fuenmayor, García Herreros, and the short-fiction writer and poet Gregorio Castañeda Aragón. Modern and avant-garde figures to appear in the cosmopolitan *Voces* included Chilean poets Vicente Huidobro and Gabriela Mistral, Mexican José Juan Tablada, Peruvians Abraham Valdelomar and José María Eguren, and R.B. Cunninghame Graham. (Williams, *The Colombian Novel* 102)

In Bogotá, the political hub of Colombia, the “Conservative Regeneration was able to centralize cultural and political power in Bogotá successfully only through the continued repression of Liberals and, in turn, Liberal literary voices” (Williams, *The Colombian Novel* 65). As a counter to this repression, a circle of writers rejected by the regime of Rafael Reyes (president, 1904-1910), La Gruta Simbólica, met regularly for literary tertulias. Some seventy intellectuals participated in the meetings, among them poets, prose writers, and satirists, many of whom never published some of their most witty pieces of brief prose. The satire often targeted the government of Reyes. (65)

Clímaco Soto Borda was among one of these intellectuals and his novel *Diana cazadora* (1915) became the medium of protest against repression, where instead of “attempting to placate the literary establishment and its political counterparts, Soto Borda engaged in a counter-discourse in opposition to the Regeneration, which was in power . . .” (42).
With persistent regional differences and the predominance of poets and essayists in the literary tradition of Colombia, it was as yet not easy to consolidate the position of the Colombian novel. In other parts of Latin America however, the novel as a genre came to be widely recognized. With the modern, innovative techniques infused into fiction by writers like Borges, Carpentier, and Asturias, Latin American fiction was creating its own standard position in the world literary scenario. But as Raymond Williams states, Colombia as yet did not provide a fertile ground for the growth of the novel.

Considering the period from 1930 to 1946, most writers tried to follow Rivera and other noted criollistas. Noted novelists of this period were Eduardo Zalamea Borda, César Uribe Piedrahita, Bernardo Arias Trujillo, and José Antonio Osorio Lizarazo. An important contribution of these writers was the incorporation of oral culture into their novels. During this period, novels of social protest were also written where writers questioned the existing power structure as well as tried to delineate the psychological experiences of the masses in a stifling and corrupt environment.

Colombian novel was still not accorded its due place and in 1960, García Márquez declared Colombian literature to be a national fraud which is validated by Raymond Williams when he says:

This comment should be read exactly as it was intended: as a political statement about a literary establishment that has supported its mediocre poets — such as Guillermo Valencio — as national monuments and as an assault upon a weak critical tradition that has been either unable or
unwilling to recognize works of genuine value. \((The \ Colombian \ Novel\) 46)

Beginning from the 1940s, Latin American writers had begun to address political, and social issues, but without compromising the aesthetics of the genre. Breaking the regionalist barriers that limited most novels to only their region, these writers were trying to include modernist ideas as well as reaching up to an international audience:

In the 1940s and 1950s Latin American novelists began to successfully synthesize the long-standing socio political commitment of the writer concerned with the colonial legacy and the new modernist aesthetics. Indeed, these writers of the 1940s and 1950s — Asturias, Carpentier, Augustin Yáñez, Clarice Lispector, Juan Rulfo, and others — were as politically committed as they were dedicated to the idea of writing a new national literature that would be both modern (which meant a variety of things) and universal (which also had numerous understandings). \(Williams, \ The \ Columbia \ Guide\) 5)

Following the trend of these writers, Márquez and his contemporaries in Colombia initiated the creation of such fictions whose socio-political concern remained, but infusing in them new literary styles hitherto non existent in Colombian literature.

La violencia, which began after Gañán’s murder in 1948 is considered to be one of the worst periods of Colombian history. It became a phenomenon which
affected millions of life across Colombia, the after effects of which could still be felt till even the 1980s. This period from 1947-1974 constitutes one of the most volatile periods which witnessed the violence and mayhem of *la violencia* as well as the dictatorship of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. This period also saw the spectacular success of García Márquez’s *Cien años de soledad*, whose overwhelming popularity “profoundly shook the foundations of Colombia’s literary establishment” (Williams, *The Colombian Novel* 47).

*La violencia* became the plot and basis for a large number of novels produced during that time. Termed as the novels of *la violencia*, most of these works were “detailed, bloody descriptions of questionable sociological or literary value” (Williams, *The Colombian Novel* 8); and as Aníbal González writes:

> In midst of the many revolutions, coups d’état, uprisings, war of liberation, and dirty wars suffered by the continent in the past century, both political rhetoric and literary expression were often dominated by the lexicon and the images of violence, death, and destruction. (vii)

Exceptions were Manuel Zapata Olivella’s *La calle 10* (1960), García Márquez’s *La mala hora* (1962), Mejía Vallejo’s *El día señalado* (1963), and Alvarez Gardeazábal’s *Cóndores no entierran todos los días* (1972).

Before the worldwide popularity of García Márquez, Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, Pablo Neruda etc., Latin American literature rarely received global attention, and in fact, “Latin America was perceived to have no true literary tradition, just a long string of derivative novels about land and dictators” (Johnson 129). However, with the
publication of *One Hundred*, Latin American literature reached new heights, and “Reverence for *One Hundred Years of Solitude* repudiates the prior belief that no art comes from the so-called Third World” (138).

García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* became the touchstone of the Colombian novel — following which his successors either conformed to the numerous fictions of Macondo written after that, or tried to create anti-Macondo novels. Márquez’s success and popularity remained to a large extent unsurpassed, and which was consolidated by his winning of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982.

Márquez’s Life and Works:

Power — is something which had always fascinated Márquez. And why should it not? He belongs to a country and a continent which has been a witness to an absurd and gargantuan display of power and brutality by power lords (for centuries). Interestingly, his own fame and popularity across continents has allowed him unrestricted access to places and powerful people:

His favours and his friendship have been sought by the rich, the famous and the powerful — Francois Mitterand, Felipe González, Bill Clinton, most of the recent presidents of Colombia and Mexico and many other celebrities besides. Yet despite his dazzling literary and financial success, he has remained throughout his life a man of the progressive Left, a defender of good causes and a constructor of positive enterprises, including the founding of influential institutes of journalism and film. At the same time his close friendship with another political leader, Fidel Castro, has been a constant source of controversy
His friendship with the powerful (esp. politically) people of the world had always invited criticism as also wonder. His avowed socialism, his friendship with Fidel Castro, Omar Torrijos, the various presidents of powerful countries (including Bill Clinton); his diatribe against the endless dictatorships of Latin American countries and, against US imperialism, his journalism and finally his fictions — his own life does not seem to be less than hyper-real. A man whose political conviction and literary achievement is such that when in 1996, ex-President César Gaviria’s younger brother was kidnapped, one of the demands of the group was to install Márquez as the president of Colombia.

Márquez’s first-hand experiences (as a student, a journalist and eventually as a renowned writer) of Colombian politics would definitely be imprinted in his works. He had been a witness and a part of some of the essentially historic moments which brought about tremendous changes in the entire Colombian political scenario. One such event was the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán.

Recounting the historic moments of 1948, when Eliécer Gaitán (member of the Liberal Party) led a full-fledged protest against the merciless brutality of the ruling government (the Conservatives were in power then and went to extreme limits of annihilating any threat to their power); Márquez confesses that for the first time he realized and understood the frustrations of his late grandfather. Gaitán gradually turned into a messiah who could save millions of deprived and suffering Colombians.
from the abysmal depths of Colombian power politics and form a country and constitution which showed hopes for equality and peace.

Colombian politics had always been a ruthless game of snatching power — a game always played between the Liberals and the Conservatives. No matter what ideology they followed, they all had only one target — power. However, for the first time in Colombian politics, Gaitán’s political activities radicalized the whole picture of the scenario in a fundamental way

with a programme of moral renewal of the Republic that went beyond the historic division of the country into Liberals and Conservatives, making it more profound with a horizontal and more realistic distinction between the exploiters and the exploited: the political country and the national country. (García Márquez, Living 276)

Márquez joined the first political ceremony held by Gaitán on 7th February, 1948:

. . . a procession for the countless victims of official violence in the country, with more than sixty thousand women and men in strict mourning, carrying the red flags of the party and the black flags of Liberal grief. There was only one rallying cry: absolute silence . . . That was the “march of silence”, the most moving of all the marches ever held in Colombia. (García Márquez, Living 278-79)

Dirty as it was, Colombian politics and its politicians could not have let Gaitán carry on with his campaigns. He was proving to be a threat to the entire political
hegemony of the country. And on April 9, 1948, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was shot dead in Bogotá, and the repercussions of the fateful event could still be felt decades later.

Gaitán’s death unleashed a wave of violence and mayhem, which first began in Bogotá, but eventually spread to the rural areas. With his murder, political enmity between Liberals and Conservatives turned the country into a battlefield and Colombia was now destined to reel under one of the bloodiest of civil wars, which later on came to be known as the period of la Violencia:

> It was the crisis following his death which gave rise to the guerrilla movements that continue to compromise political life in the country until this very day. If it can be said that the War of a Thousand Days showed the upper classes the need to unite against the peasantry, the Bogotazo similarly showed the danger represented by the urban proletarian masses. Yet it was in the rural areas that the reaction would be most brutal, beginning twenty-five years of one of the world’s most savage and costly civil wars: the Violencia. (Martin, Gabriel García Márquez 109)

Whether one was directly involved in politics or not, the life of any average Colombian got deeply implicated in the rotten politics of the nation. Márquez was already influenced by his grandfather’s political ideas. He had to leave Bogotá and his studies in 1948 after Gaitán’s murder. Gradually, his life would go on to be deeply, badly implicated in the political events of Colombia, and which would profoundly influence his career as a writer.
After leaving Bogotá, he had to reluctantly resume his studies in Cartagena where he eventually landed up with a job in the office of the newspaper *El Universal*. Interestingly, newspapers were also set up with political motives. *El Universal* was founded by Dr. Domingo López Escauriaza:

. . . a patrician Liberal politician who had been state governor and a diplomat and now, in the light of growing Conservative violence, had decided to open a new front in the propaganda war on the Costa. This had been a month before the *Bogotazo*. There was no other Liberal newspaper in that very conservative city. (Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez* 112)

Those were the days of curfew and censorship. So any political propaganda or even protest had to be moderated. But this was also the beginning of his involvement (literary) and formation of as well as inclination towards certain political views. His first newspaper article was “a political piece about the curfew and state of siege, cunningly disguised as a general meditation on the city. The young writer asked prophetically how, in an era of political violence and dehumanization, could his generation be expected to turn out as ‘men of good will’ ” (Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez* 113-4).

Politics was dirty and violent in Colombia. Especially, during the times of *la Violencia*, Colombians had to suffer ignominiously. Conservatives were killing Liberals and elsewhere Liberals were doing the same. Most of the political events of those times influenced Márquez’s writings later. His ironical and oblique censure towards power, politics and gross violence would be a result of his exposure to the
oppressive times of the civil war. He began his career as a journalist during this time of suppression and censorship.

Situation in Colombia was grim and dismal, and so was the case across the world. Those were the times of political upheavals. The world was on the verge of being divided between the Communists and those fighting them. Wars were fought, sanctions were imposed, opinions were divided; and the dirty quest for power continued:

Internationally, the period — 1948-9 — was also an extraordinary time, one of the most intense and decisive moments of the entire twentieth century. García Márquez had been in Bogotá while the new inter-American system was being created there — largely in the United States, which had only recently dominated discussions in Europe about the establishment of the United Nations and had arranged, symbolically enough, to move the new organization’s meetings from London to New York. President Truman, who had taken the decision not long before to drop two atomic bombs on Japan, had now declared a worldwide crusade against communism — the CIA had been set up in 1947 as part of the anti-communist struggle — and the Pope had tacitly supported the American line; Truman had got himself re-elected on the strength of his position. The state of Israel had been founded with full support of the Western nations and NATO had been established; the USSR had imposed a blockade on Berlin and the USA had responded with an airlift; the USSR had then tested its own atom bomb and on 1 October 1949 the People’s Republic of China had been
founded. By the time García Márquez finally made the decision to take
hold of his own life and move on from Cartagena, the new
international system which would run the world throughout the
recently declared Cold War and beyond was firmly in place. This was
the context of his adult life and times. (Martin, Gabriel García
Márquez 125-6)

While Colombia was in a state of siege — a state of brutal suppression, censorship,
with ruthless mass extermination; the world in general was in no less terrible shape.
The times were crucial in forming his life as well as ideas. It was in 1948 in Bogotá
that García Márquez had first witnessed the devastations caused due to political unrest
when Gaitán was assassinated. Since then political repression and ruthless
suppression of any protest against the ruling government had caused untold sufferings
and incalculable casualties across the country.

In another political development — General Rojas Pinilla overthrew the
government of Laureano Gomez in 1953 and the military took over the reins of
control of the already devastated country. Márquez joined the liberal newspaper El
Espectador in Bogotá in 1954. To actually write anything ‘political’ during those
times was to invite trouble. Severe press censorship crippled newspapers and the very
idea of reportage:

In Colombia in those days the news was generally terrible. It was the
height of the Violencia. Massacres of Liberals continued in rural areas,
carried out by the oligarchy’s barbaric paramilitary assassins known as
chulavitas or pájaros, and Liberal guerrillas were fighting desperate
rearguard actions in many parts of the country. Torture, rape and the sadistic desecration of corpses were common place. Rojas Pinilla had imposed press censorship on 6 March and hardened it after the killing of the students in Bogotá. (Martin, Gabriel García Márquez 169-70)

One can easily surmise how difficult and dangerous it was to be a journalist at that time — especially, to be a journalist with a political consciousness.

Amidst surmounting political troubles, Márquez decided to visit Europe. It is not known definitely — whether this decision to go to Europe was motivated by political reasons (his news reports and articles were almost always implicitly or explicitly anti-government) or simply a journalistic sojourn. However, his visit and eventually his extended stay in Europe was important, considering that his visits and experiences also made an impact in the further shaping of his political views.

Interestingly, his mission was to report a big international political event — ten years after the devastations of the Second World War, in 1955, the ‘Big Four’ nations, namely the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, the United States and France (all four were actively engaged in the Cold War) — met in Geneva to negotiate and it was important because an “understanding between them was crucial if the world was to survive the unfamiliar and terrifying new era lived out under the shadow of global nuclear catastrophe which had begun with the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945” (Martin, Gabriel García Márquez 184). From Geneva, Márquez rushed to Italy to report on the Venice Film Festival, however, there was another reason (more political) to come to Eastern Europe, and that was: “he wanted to be
able to compare the two sides of the Iron Curtain, East and West, two worlds concealed behind the rhetoric of the Big Four. He knew what he thought in theory about capitalism and socialism; now he wanted to see for himself, in practice” (Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez* 187).

While he was in Paris, *El Espectador* was forced to shut down and under such grim situation; he started writing *In Evil Hour*. Ironically, times were really evil then, because this book would not see the light of the day until 1962. Plotted in Sucre, this book is about the ‘evil’ times of the *violencia*, as it was the dominating thought of most Colombians at that time. Violence, repression and a sense of fear pervades all throughout the novel. There is a brief period of peace when the novel begins but which is threatened by the secret pasquines which comes up on the doors of the supposedly respectable families of the town exposing their secret, immoral lives. A murder happens in the first morning of the beginning of the novel and this sets the trail for further violence. Just as the pasquines threaten to unsettle the lives of most families of the town, so does the clandestine papers (which are circulated in secret) threaten to unsettle the absolute power of the ruling government over the people. Being the representative of an absolute, autocratic government, the Mayor uses his power to rob lands, acquire property as well as cruelly punish those who defy his authority. However, despite curfews and severe repressions, the pasquines keep on appearing as a sign of a disruptive element — signifying that despite the violence and suppression, the protest will continue.

*No One Writes to the Colonel* (*No One*) emerged out of *In Evil Hour*. It was an episode in *In Evil Hour* but eventually the “materials took on a life of their own and
became this little masterpiece” (Bell-Villada, García Márquez 129). It is the story of a septuagenarian war veteran who keeps on waiting for a war pension which never arrives. Plotted in a pensive atmosphere of curfew and violence, the old Colonel had lost his son in political violence (he was shot dead when caught circulating clandestine papers during a cock fight). The Colonel and his wife are left with their dead son’s fighting cock which they nurture and look after despite their poverty. The whole town puts their faith on the fighting abilities of the cock which itself becomes the symbol of hope and protest. The cock becomes the symbol of a persisting sense of hope as well as a means of protest against the repressions, curfews and corruptions that had crippled their lives.

While he was still abroad, he visited Eastern Europe along with his friend Plinio Mendoza as they both had leftist inclinations. The visit was an eye-opener for both. ‘Socialism’ in practice, was not after all the most ideal form, as he and Mendoza believed. Or may be its practice should go hand-in-hand with the situation of a particular state while keeping room for modifications. With his illusions shattered, Márquez had to seriously question the workability of any political belief or its practice — be it socialism or capitalism. His later visits to Moscow and then to Budapest was even more disheartening and shocking. His first-hand experiences with politics and power would inevitably determine most of his works later on. The dismal picture of Eastern Europe, the façade of normalcy in Moscow and the grim prospects of Hungary (Budapest) had brought about a shocking disillusionment as well as a more pronounced illumination on the politics of power and the power of politics.
Instead of going back to Colombia, Márquez joined Plinio Mendoza in Venezuela to work in *Momento* (a Venezuelan magazine). And during his stay there he was again a witness to a major political event, when the dictator Pérez Jiménez, who ruled Venezuela with absolute authority, was removed from power. Those were the days of revolt, bloodshed and repression relived by Márquez. It was another story of a fall of a dictator in the never-ending stories of Latin American dictators and tyrants. However, during that time, his conversation with the major-domo of the presidential palace of Miraflores made him aware of another aspect which he had not given thought to. Ironically, this man who had worked for a number of presidents, fondly remembered the dictator Juan Vicente Gómez who had an otherwise ‘blood-curdling reputation’. Hence, emerged a crucial thought — why were people still attracted to such men? These men who had blood in their hands, a reputation of no mercy, brutality and demoniacal atrocities, yet, why were they still in power? What attracted common people to such figures? From the days in Caracas, when these thoughts occurred, it would take a long time for Márquez to actually write something about these patriarchs of Latin America — these men of power, absolute authority and bestial ruthlessness.

Amidst such political turbulence in Venezuela, Fidel Castro was making news in Cuba. Márquez got genuinely interested in the happenings in Cuba and although Castro had not yet declared his movement a socialist one, García Márquez had found himself able, for the very first time in his now long career as a journalist, to demonstrate an unrestrained enthusiasm for a politician and an evident optimism about his revolutionary crusade. (Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez* 245)
Castro’s Cuban revolution shook many a political foundation in Latin America. The fall of the Batista regime heralded a new era in Latin American politics, as on “... on January 1959, Fidel Castro led his guerrilla army into Havana and opened a new era in Latin American history. And for the very first time since the discovery, the whole planet would be touched directly by political events in Latin America” (246).

As the events in Cuba reached new heights, there also arose the need of a press agency that would cater to the interests of Latin American people specifically — a press which would be dedicated to the needs, the aspirations and correct representation of Latin America, its people and their situation. And eventually Prensa Latina (or the Latin Press) was set up with its offices in the major cities of every Latin American country. Márquez returned to Bogotá to work for Prensa Latina. Although, Cuba and Venezuela were going through immense political change, there was little effect on Colombian politics. The seemingly endless violence and political enmity between the Conservatives and the Liberals were the only things happening in Colombia. In Colombia, it seemed like there was no scope for any other party or any other political thought to emerge and dominate. His political experiences, expositions (his clandestine visits to the Eastern Bloc) as well as his involvement in the Cuban experience as a journalist, would later on inform his fictional works.

The Cuban Revolution gave hope of some political change in Latin America. But it was always easy to hope for, than to actually experience the materialization of that hope. No one really knew whether the Revolution was a socialist one or not in the beginning. What mattered was the change that the Revolution brought in the lives of
common people and for once, it was a revolution against US imperialism. Buoyed up by the activities and on Masetti’s (the founder of Prensa Latina) request, Márquez involved himself actively. However, there was already a chasm growing between the orthodox Communists and the followers of Che and Castro who were less dogmatic. Masetti, Márquez and Mendoza — were already been outlined as belonging to the latter group, and they began to face difficulties in the midst of increasing pressure from the communists who wanted to give a Moscow-style perspective to the Revolution.

Márquez was entrusted with the opening of a branch of Prensa Latina in New York in 1961 and ironically, the time could not have been any worse. An attack on Cuba by anti-Castro refugees (supported by the US) was imminent. Considering the present scenario then, New York was not the ideal place to work as a journalist (and that too working for Cuba). Apart from the censure from the anti-Castro and anti-revolutionary believers, the internal tension between the Cuban communists and Masetti’s recruits was also a matter of concern. Counter revolutionaries would threaten García and his colleagues in office, however, after sometime the threats also reached home when Mercedes (Márquez’s wife) received a call threatening her and their son Rodrigo.

The tension between the men with conflicting ideologies increased. The Revolution itself was now caught between hard-line communists and the “more intuitive revolutionary romantics” (Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez* 267), hence, casting a shadow on the future of the Revolution itself. Sectarianism was killing its spirit. Mendoza and Márquez had to resign finally and Márquez moved to Mexico.
Despite being forced to leave Prensa Latina, Márquez was more frustrated with the sectarianism that was brewing than the Revolution itself. The Revolution and later on the victory of the Bay of Pigs invasion was an effective retaliation of Cuba against US imperialism. As the US kept supporting Latin American dictators at the cost of millions of lives across the continent; Cuba kept up its resistance and this sustained the hopes of many men like Márquez and hence, despite the threats and other problems that he experienced in New York, he

. . . still felt that his difficulties were with the sectarians, not the Cuban regime itself. Perhaps he felt deep down that he should have hung on longer. His admiration for Castro can only have been growing as he watched the young Cuban leader and the steely Guevara defying the power of the United States and the serried ranks of bourgeois liberal Latin American countries. (Martin, Gabriel García Márquez 283)

A noticeable aspect in his writings was that till his arrival in Mexico, his world view was as yet limited to the Colombian condition. Mexico introduced him to the already popular writers, their writings and their world-views — men like Mário de Andrade, Juan Rulfo, Alejo Carpentier or those who were later on going to become his friends/rivals/colleagues — like Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes etc.

Till then Aracataca and Sucre occupied the geographical space in his works (both novels and short stories). Macondo and El Pueblo (Márquez’s fictional towns reflecting Aracataca and Sucre respectively) were the Colombian towns where most of the action took place in his earlier works. The setting of both No One and In Evil
*Hour* evoked Sucre while *Leaf Storm* and his other stories reminded of Aracataca. It would take sometime for his experiences (his escape from the Rojas Pinilla dictatorship, his clandestine visits to the socialist countries of the Eastern Bloc, and most importantly, his activities and participation in the Cuban Revolution) to be distilled and hence; by the time he began to write *One Hundred*, he could place his personal obsessions (his adoration for his grandfather, his grandmother’s stories, and the love-hate relationship with Colombia) into a larger Latin American or rather universal perspective; and in fact, “*One Hundred Years of Solitude* would still be set in Macondo but it would be obvious to the informed reader from the first page that this was an allegory of Latin America as a whole: Macondo had made the leap from national to continental symbol” (Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez* 277).

Márquez almost stopped writing as he struggled to gain a foothold in Mexico. His work in the magazines *La Familia* and *Sucesos* and later on his stint as a script writer in the Mexico film industry as well as his job in the advertising agencies like Walter Thompson and Mc Cann Erickson left him with no time for the job which he loved the best — that is, writing. As a man who always wanted to write/create stories, it was a frustrating period for him. In 1962, he was awarded the Colombian Literary Prize for *In Evil Hour* and ironically for him: “He had won a Literary Prize but he was no longer a writer” (Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez* 281).

However, this lean period in his creative career was actually paving the way to a life which may be was not even anticipated by Márquez himself. For years now, he had been trying to write a book wherein he could have purged the ghosts of his past that had always disturbed him — his grandfather’s house in Aracataca where he spent
his childhood, his memories of his grandfather himself, his superstitious grandmother and the host of aunts who would still continue to live in his memories and feed his imagination.

When Márquez was still in Colombia in Cartagena (in 1948), he had begun to write his first book — a book whose name itself explained his obsession — his obsession with his past, with the house where he grew up, with the man (that is, his grandfather) who introduced him to the outside world as well as the loss and pain of being separated (for ever) from him. Titled ‘La Casa’ or The House — the book never really materialized, although, interestingly it had almost all the elements that would find place in One Hundred. He could never go far with it, may be, because it was not the right time. Márquez had yet to filter in the various literary practices of writers across the world as well as to gain enough experiences thereafter which he could put in his world-view with authority, and undoubtedly in The House “... to an astonishing degree, are the germs of One Hundred Years of Solitude, with the themes of solitude, destiny, nostalgia, patriarchy and violence all waiting for the distinctive tone and perspective that were still more than a decade away from discovery” (Martin, Gabriel García Márquez 121-22).

In 1948, The House was taken up and abandoned. But now as he began writing in 1965 — armed with a whole lot of knowledge and experience; he then knew what shape to give to his long cherished dream of reliving as well as purging his memories suffused with a world-view which would not have been possible earlier. Seen from a linear and chronological perspective, One Hundred begins with the founding of an almost ‘edenic’ place called Macondo by José Arcadio Buendía and his followers.
The description of the place resembles coastal Colombia. Macondo is an innocent, almost unoccupied, and a very new geographical territory which evokes early America when Spanish settlers got to know the New World. The world of Macondo however does not remain innocent or primitive as time passes by. And with time the hopes and dreams that the founder Buendía had about Macondo are proven illusory. Macondo and its inhabitants are trapped and crippled by its remoteness and hence their ignorance. As Macondo gradually becomes involved in the political affairs that has been affecting the nation, the founding family and Macondo as a whole finds itself fighting in never ending wars — the reasons and causes of which seemed to be only one: power. This phase resembles the times of the numerous Civil Wars that Colombia had and in fact, almost most of the nations in Latin America were going through this — a phase of battling for power control which first led to the emergence of strongmen or gauchos or dictators as we call them now. Macondo experiences civil wars, economic prosperity, large scale immigration, workers’ strikes, and gradual economic, social and moral decadence — a chronology similar to what actually happened in Latin America in general and Colombia in particular. The linearity of the story however is made difficult by the diffusion of time span. The past, present and the future are placed in one plane.

Its themes, techniques and scale was to surprise readers across the world and even till today One Hundred is considered to be his masterpiece and a work par excellence. Ilan Stavans compares it with Don Quixote, and in his opinion:

. . . there are only two novelistic masterpieces written in Spanish whose influence radically revamped our understanding of Hispanic civilization. Cervantes’s Don Quixote and García Márquez’s One
*Hundred Years of Solitude.* *Don Quixote* accomplished it with its mordant critique of a seventeenth century Iberian empire. It offered an Erasmian celebration of free thought defined by misadventures abroad and a zealous Catholic Inquisition at home and across the Atlantic. The masterful *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is a sweeping genealogical narrative about an entire continent and its people: its corrupt politicians, its religious aspirations, its gender disparity, and its natural and historical calamities. (2)

*One Hundred* became an instant success. However, tagged along with success were responsibilities and commitments (esp. political). He realized he could now “act more overtly and to take symbolic stands that would have interested nobody just a few short months before” (Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez* 324).

Coming from the land of the gauchos and dictators, Márquez had in his mind to write about these ‘powerful’ people who ruled the destinies of millions of men and women. However, it would be a long time before he would publish the much-anticipated book. Before its publication, a number of significant events took place which eventually determined Márquez’s relationship with his (politically divided) friends and with politics itself.

Márquez already had witnessed the near failure of Communism in the Eastern Bloc. The Cold War had polarized people and nations — one could either be a Communist or anti-Communist. In August 1968, Czechoslovakia was invaded by the Russian army to quell some reform movement and much to the chagrin of
intellectuals and others, Cuba supported the Russian invasion. However, it was the Padilla affair which actually created a rift between Márquez and the other contemporary writers and intellectuals.

In the March of 1971 Padilla was arrested by the Cuban government, being accused of CIA-connected activities. His arrest initiated a spurt of protest from the literary world and a protest letter (in which they said that “although they supported the ‘principles’ of the revolution they could not accept the ‘Stalinist’ persecution of writers and intellectuals” (Martin, Gabriel García Márquez 351) addressed to Castro was written by a group of (mainly) Europe-based writers which included among many others; writers like Vargas Llosa, Plinio Mendoza, de Beauvoir, Julio Cortázar etc. And incidentally, although Márquez was not present there when the letter was written, his name was also included.

This complicated matters. Márquez’s faith in the Revolution, his admiration for Castro and his reservations against Padilla — all those would complicate the issue, and: “It was to be, without doubt, the single most important crisis in Latin American literary politics in the twentieth century, one which divided both Latin American and European intellectuals for decades to come. Writers and intellectuals had no choice but to commit and take sides in the cultural equivalent of a civil war” (Martin, Gabriel García Márquez 352). Eventually, Márquez’s implied criticism of Padilla and his continuing support for Castro, gradually alienated him from his friends, fellow writers, poets etc.
The Autumn of the Patriarch (The Autumn) at last appeared in 1975 — a terrifying portrait of a monstrous Caribbean dictator, drawn upon the features and natures of several tyrants who ruled various countries of Latin America. Some of them based on whom the evil ‘patriarch’ was created were: Manuel Estrada Cabrera of Guatemala, Porfirio Díaz of Mexico, the Somozas of Nicaragua, Juan Vicente Gómez and Marcos Pérez Jiménez of Venezuela and Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic. Apart from them, there are visible similarities of the patriarch with none other than Fidel Castro himself. This patriarch’s interminably long rule echoes the endless dictatorships of Latin America. It is a saga of man’s hunger for power as well as the corrupting nature of power. As the ‘autumn’ of the title suggests; it depicts the gradual decadence of a solitary, barbaric dictator, who despite everything clings on to power. With shifting narrative viewpoints, the book carries us through a vortex of endless barbarism and corruption, and over time it has established itself as “arguably the novel of Latin American dictatorship” (Bell-Villada, “Gabriel García Márquez: life and times” 17).

During this time, in 1973, Chile entered into a political turmoil when Chilean president Salvador Allende was deposed by a military junta. His faith in socialism again got a blow when Allende’s experiment of forming a socialist society through democratic means was thwarted. Despite the dismal picture of Latin American politics, Márquez continued to hope and fight for a better Latin America. He was never supportive of the Colombian political scenario and in 1974; Márquez along with other friends founded a left-wing magazine called Alternativa — dedicated to become the voice of the voiceless and to bring to light repressed and concealed facts, which
never saw the light of the day due to monopoly and censorship. Although the magazine failed to survive for long, its radicalism was a success:

The first number of Alternativa in February 1974 sold 10,000 copies in twenty-four hours. The police in Bogotá confiscated several hundred copies but this would be the only case of direct censorship in the magazine’s history (though there would be ‘indirect censorship’ through bomb attacks, court interventions, economic blockades and a sabotage of distribution, all of which would eventually bring about its demise). Later it would have persistent financial problems but the response in the early months was extraordinary. Before long it was selling 40,000 copies, an unheard-off figure for a left wing publication in Colombia. The first number had a slogan about consciousness raising — ‘To Dare to Think is to Begin to Fight’ — and an editorial, ‘A Letter to the Reader’, which stated that the new magazine’s aim was to ‘fight the distortion of national reality in the bourgeois press’ and to ‘counter disinformation’ (a theme which had been famously exemplified by the aftermath of the banana massacre in One Hundred Years of Solitude). (Martin, Gabriel García Márquez 379)

He now increasingly involved himself in political affairs. His support for Cuba and the Revolution continued. Cuba and Cubans were facing harrowing times due to the economic blockade imposed by the US. In September 1975, he published a few articles praising the heroism of the common Cuban man and their struggles and how Cuba defied the blockade inspiring many other revolutionaries across Latin America. He would also support General Omar Torrijos of Panama as well as the Sandinista
rebels who would eventually topple the Somoza regime of Nicaragua. His work experience with the Russell Tribunal propelled him to take up the issue of political prisoners languishing in the jails of most Latin American countries. The period between 1973 and 1979 was the high time of Márquez’s political activism. But things around him were not changing or happening the way he wanted them to happen.

Putting an end to his controversial statement that he will no longer be writing books unless the Pinochet regime ended, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* was published which became a major success. Based on a true story of the murder of his friend Cayetano Gentile in Sucre, it is a wonderfully crafted story, mixing facts and suspense into the narrative.

In 1982, he was honoured with the most prestigious Nobel Prize for literature. It was a moment of jubilation, not only for Colombians but for the entire continent, because “this was not only an award to a man from Colombia, a country quite unused to international congratulations; it was — it transpired — an award to a man admired and adored throughout a vast, isolated continent, a man who millions in that continent considered their own representative and, indeed, their champion” (Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez* 427).

‘The Solitude of Latin America’ — the speech that he gave in the theatre of the Swedish Academy of Literature, encapsulated the predicament of Latin America, the socio-political and historical conditions (since the time of Columbus’s landing in the Americas) which controlled the destinies of millions of the continent:
Combining a deconstructed magical realism with politics, the speech was an undisguised attack on the inability or unwillingness of Europeans to understand Latin America’s historical problems and their reluctance to give the continent the time to mature and develop that Europe itself had required. It restated his lifelong objection to ‘Europeans’ (including North Americans), whether capitalists or communists, imposing their ‘schemes’ on Latin America’s living realities. (Martin, Gabriel García Márquez 433)

The Nobel Prize took him to newer heights — he was at the zenith of popularity and respectability. Now, as friend of presidents (Mitterand of France, González of Spain, Betancur of Colombia, Carlos Andres Peréz of Venezuela etc.) and the beloved persona of Latin America, he could exert more influence on crucial issues (especially political). However, his unmistakable popularity and success was also the cause of lot of criticism and “. . . what is certainly clear is that although the prize gave García Márquez access to even higher strata of political and diplomatic influence in Latin America, it also unleashed an unparalleled level of right-wing hostility which has never ceased in the two decades since . . .” (Martin, Gabriel García Márquez 443).

In 1985 appeared *Love in the Time of Cholera* that confirmed “what had hitherto only been acknowledged: that García Márquez is one of the great novelists of romantic love and affiliated sentiments” (Bell-Villada, “Gabriel García Márquez: life and times” 18).
In 1986, he wrote *Miguel Littín, Clandestine in Chile*. Chile was then under the dictatorship of Pinochet. Exiled Chilean film-maker Miguel Littín dared to enter Chile (clandestinely of course) and succeeded in filming/documenting the repressive Chilean life. Nothing could be better for him to show his protest against Pinochet’s dictatorship by recreating Littín’s experiences through the book.

Just after completing *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Márquez had started working on his next novel, which would definitely include a lot of research and investigation of materials. Although almost all his novels had centered round his understanding and experiences of Latin American history and conditions, and especially in *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, he did have to read a lot on dictators and their regimes, yet the amount and extent of research that this novel demanded from the writer was immense. After all, he had embarked on the idea of writing a novel on Simón Bolívar — the hero of Latin America’s liberation from European colonialism. This historical figure who is one of the most read, most adored and most revered historical persona was now going to be Márquez’s subject. This is one book where Márquez had to be careful about historical verisimilitude or the correctness of events and episodes. Every dialogue and event had to be checked and cross-checked. The ‘patriarch’ in *The Autumn* was an image of the various, countless dictators of Latin America and this intriguing, monstrous dictator was a result of a lot of reading and understanding of various dictators and tyrants. Bolívar is one of the most researched and documented historical figures of Latin America and in his book which would ultimately be published as *The General in His Labyrinth (The General)*, somehow “he had to process that vast archive of information and yet maintain his own creative faculty so that Bolívar would somehow arise refreshed from the research rather than
lie buried under a mountain of dessicated facts” (Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez* 475).

Colombians had always suffered due to political violence. But by the mid-twentieth century, the matter was a bit different — it was now a matter of power, politics and drugs. Illegal drug-trafficking had become a menace that was mounting. Drug barons had become so powerful that certain parts of Colombia were now under their rule and jurisdiction. Drug lords were now fighting the policy of extradition of alleged traffickers to the United States. Whoever opposed them had to pay the price. Pablo Escobar was one of the richest as well as the most feared of the drug lords. Fighting against the extradition policy, these drug barons (esp. Pablo Escobar) unleashed unwarranted terror. During this period Escobar’s men kidnapped several Colombian journalists and other prominent people and four years later these events would form the basis of Márquez’s *News of a Kidnapping* — a more or less documentary novel based on interviews, diaries and anecdotes of the surviving victims. Based on the real experiences of the kidnapped victims, some of whom perished and others who survived, it is a gritty tale of fear, hope, resistance and above all the labyrinthine mess of Colombian politics and life. The fight between the ‘extraditables’ and the government policy had taken innumerable number of lives and the loss could never be compensated for.

After surviving a tumour in his lungs, he published *Strange Pilgrims* in 1992 — a collection of stories based outside Latin America. However, during this period he was already absorbed in the writing of another novel based in ancient Cartagena (during the colonial period) and once again it was about love. Aptly titled *Of Love and
Other Demons, (published in 1994) the story is somewhat unearthed by a reporter in Cartagena. As a young girl’s skull with still growing hair is found in the tombs of Santa Clara convent, the young reporter’s investigations lead up to the story of love — of unsanctioned love between a young girl (who was bitten by a supposedly rabid dog and she was to be exorcised of it) and a young priest. Set in the late colonial period in Cartagena and tinged with dark irony, the story questions religious orthodoxies, superstitions, questions of love and limitations on it as well as questions on what are these ‘demons’ and who creates them rather?

Márquez was growing old and much against hope, his political hopes of positive change and development in Colombia and Latin America was far from happening. For quite sometime, with growing age and an acute sense of increasing memory loss, he felt the need to write his memoirs. But before he could write his memoirs, he fell ill again and he was diagnosed as having lymphoma. He fought bravely. And surely he recovered. However, this near brush with death made it even more imperative to write the memoir.

Vivir para contarla was finally published in 2002. It was named Living to Tell the Tale in English and in Bell-Villada’s words: “. . . Vivir is García Márquez’s heftiest single tome. In terms of sheer human content, and as a singular exercise in recollection, it is arguably his richest and most multilayered piece of writing” (García Márquez 275).

Gradually, Márquez’s public appearances slowed down. Beset by illness, old age as well as the hopeless political situation, he was now seen attending to only a
few long-term commitments. However, he never stopped yielding his pen, and in 2004 was published Memories of My Melancholy Whores.

Indeed, Márquez’s life is no less than a top-class novel — the spectacular rise from being a struggling writer-journalist of a trouble-torn country to become the most popular and adored writer of Latin America. Considered to be the Cervantes of the modern world, this friend of Castro and Clinton had deftly explored and brilliantly captured the Latin American pulse.

Bell-Villada makes a justified assessment of his works and his life:

Aside from his having produced some great works, then, the most significant achievement of García Márquez is his having led the art of fiction back to real life and restored to prose narrative the hurly and burly of reality in all its rich and contradictory manifestations. The author himself is a living summary of all these contradictions. A visionary fantast and master fabulator, he is also the self-described “realist writer” and lyrical historian of his world. A highly self-conscious and sophisticated artist and a master stylist, he seldom comments on purely literary matters and is sublimely bored with aesthetics, criticism, or theory. A great comic novelist with a mischievous and “tropical” sense of humor, he also articulates a profoundly tragic vision and is himself a rather melancholy and intensely private man. A declared foe of Western imperialism, as mentors he claims Euro-American modernists like Faulkner and Woolf. A man of the people, born and raised in some impoverished
Caribbean settlements, still fond of salsa music and dance, he is also the globe-trotting cosmopolite, a man of high culture who cites Bach and Bartók among his favourite musicians. A convinced socialist who gives time and money to left-wing causes, he rejects the Soviet cultural model and can write with great eloquence about so bourgeois a subject as romantic love. (García Márquez 14)

The next three chapters will be an attempt to study the five selected novels in relation to his socio-political concerns and his attempt to be the voice of protest and dissent, while also envisioning a brighter future for Latin America through his literary creations.