

## REPRESENTATION OF RAFAEL TRUJILLO AND HIS REIGN IN MARIO VARGAS LLOSA'S "THE FEAST OF THE GOAT"- A POSTMODERN HISTORIOGRAPHIC APPROACH

JOSEPH ALEYAMMA JANET

**Abstract:** Historiography has gained momentum in the postmodern period which celebrates multiple realities and pluralities. With the advent of postmodernism, history as a definite record of facts becomes challenging. It is not possible to have a single history but histories. These histories are interpretations which construct the past. Mario Vargas Llosa revises the reign of Rafael Trujillo of the Trujillo Era in this selected text. An essential marker that Llosa employs for this representation is power, its use and abuse by Trujillo. The regime of Trujillo takes on a darker side where the personal takes over the collective needs. "The Feast of the Goat" conveys the patterns of a dictator whose presence defiles the country and shows intensified shades of hatred among the loyalists too. This paper intends to analyse the narrative with postmodern techniques which interlinks three plots leading to the representation of Trujillo. This representation of a historical figure reinstates the work of a literary artist as a historian.

**Keywords:** historiography, postmodernism, power and paradox, representation

**Introduction:** Postmodernism and history share a common platform for discussion; the treatment of reality. While historians claim reality through a historical account of events of the past, postmodernists subvert reality. Facts can never be considered univocal in a historical account, be it of a person, a society, a system or even events, social, political or religious. This leads to the celebrated notion of postmodernism- a plurality of realities or multiple interpretations. The postmodern interest in the past, in history and interpretation has witnessed a plethora of postmodern fiction by various writers. Postmodernist writers resist the validity of history and thus engage in the process of historiography. Re writing history has attracted writers of the postmodern era as they escape the confines of history or any discipline that rests on a foundation. Keith Jenkins in his book "Rethinking History" says, "And this is that no matter how verifiable, how widely acceptable or checkable, history remains inevitably a personal construct, a manifestation of the historian's perspective as a 'narrator'". (14). This personal construct is what Mario Vargas Llosa has presented in "The Feast of the Goat". The fictional history put forward by the writer becomes a reconstruction and defies that history is a grand narrative. Llosa's "The Feast of the Goat" is primarily a representation of the Trujillo Era highlighting the life of the dictator of the Dominican Republic. The narrative in the novel interweaves three plots. These three plots: Urania's story, Trujillo's last hours and the assassination, presented in a non-linear manner exposes the human flaws of the dictator and his deeds that were in many ways a curse to the country. Mario Vargas Llosa has employed his narrative to bring about a historical representation of Rafael Trujillo. Llosa's postmodern technique of intersection history and fiction is what

frames this representation. Though the events that Llosa depict are real it is still tricky to say what details are fact and fiction. This representation focuses on his power structure and its influence on him. The reader is given an insight into the deadly regime of Trujillo mainly through characters who are directly or indirectly working for the regime. The individual desire for absolute power that burns in him is so prominently felt that the execution of his power knows no boundaries. The executions vary from lynching to beheading. There are many paradoxes that one could infer from Trujillo's power structures. Mario Vargas Llosa portrays Trujillo's language and deeds to establish the dark side of his power. Trujillo was the 'master manipulator' whose heinous acts of unsaid revenge intensified shades of hatred among loyalists and anti- Trujillistas. The conversations that Urania had with her invalid father, Senator Agustin Cabral on her return to Ciudad Trujillo (then Santo Domingo) exposes the bloody rule of Trujillo who was called 'The Chief'. People lived in eternal fear of the dictator who enforced his fame and name in many ways. One of the ways was to rename the capital city from Santo Domingo to Ciudad Trujillo. Freedom was relative term during his rule. "As Estrella Sadhalá always said, the Goat had taken from people the sacred attribute given to them by God; their free will." (FTG: 169). Urania's father, a former senator, was an innocent fool whose blind admiration and reverence for the Goat brought about his disgrace. He was not intellectually equipped to absorb the dirty play of power. In order to restore his position, Manuel Alfonso suggested that he prepare Urania, his daughter for the Chief. Such were the returns that the Chief extracted from loyal beings. Llosa mentions in the novel about Mr. Cabral, "He was a decent, honest man and that's why he was

ruined.” (FTG: 178) Mr. Cabral is a highly victimized character in the novel through whom the readers get a vivid picture of the Benefactor’s loose and licentious nature while dealing with women. The sexual exploits that are mentioned in the novel by the Chief are power related and also exhibits his weakness. Trujillo’s language also reflects his personality. His perverted talks on women and sex depict his irreverence for women and his corrupted state of mind. Llosa provides information on the perverse system that the Chief had established. Victimization was an essential part of the regime to flourish with the corrupt and dictatorial mechanisms. The power relations that Trujillo maintained were monetarily enfolded. As and when it pleased the Chief, he used the monetary resources for his selfish motives. These selfish motives were curtailed behind the large scale generous ways of bringing prosperity to the Dominican Republic. “Later, money helped him to be more efficient, to remove obstacles, to buy, to attract, or bribe the people he needed and punish those who interfered with his work.” (FTG: 147) There are also instances mentioned in the novel where the Benefactor made payments for the Haitian-Dominican harmony from his patrimony to establish his compassionate nature and win the hearts of the people. While his utilization of money was power oriented it is very ironically placed before readers when Trujillo wasn’t aware that his own family members were extracting money from the regime for personal benefits. It is evident that the cash flow was used for personal and well as public necessities. The chief’s political stunts to settle down affairs with various systems are also malicious. As a dictator, he ensured his individual motive was successful behind

every action. Various instances like declaring his candidacy for governorship (an opposition to the regime), corrupting the church with gifts and concessions, the endless killing were all to pacify the intense anger and hatred that he foresaw among people. This mechanism will stabilize his power and establish the blind belief that people have in him. A contradiction is that people worshipped Trujillo, “not merely fear him but love him, as children eventually love authoritarian parents, convincing themselves that the whippings and beatings are for their own good.” (FTG: 63). These stunts of power seize rationality in totalitarian regimes. History states that Rafael Trujillo had parents of Spanish, Haitian and Dominican descent. Later on when he assumed power, he hired someone to rewrite his family history. It is absurd to notice that Trujillo was intensely a part of erasing the Haitian colonization. He made orders like, “Beginning at midnight, the forces of the Army and the police will proceed to exterminate without mercy every person of Haitian nationality who is in Dominican territory illegally...” (FTG: 197) The process of eradication of echoes the dislike of the lineage he belonged to. In a conversation with Simon Gittleman, he explained that this was the most difficult step he had taken to make the country great. The slogan of the Dominican Party: Rectitude, Liberty, True Work, Morality is questionable at the face of contradictions, Llosa has exemplified in Trujillo’s treatment of power. Rafael Trujillo is given a representation through various factual and fictional characters. This becomes a historical interpretation through the narrative.

### References:

1. Primary Source: Llosa, Mario Vargas. *The Feast of the Goat*. USA: Faber and Faber, 2001, Print.
2. Secondary Sources: Currie, Mark. *Postmodern Narrative Theory*. New York: Palgrave Publications, 1998. Print.
3. Dr. D. R. Pratima Roy, *Evolution Of Sri Sri From Translator To Transcreator In To Poesy: A Rhapsody*; English Studies International Research Journal : Volume 3 Issue 2 (2015) Issn 2347-3479, Pg 24-26
4. Jenkins, Keith. *Re-thinking History*. London and New York: Routledge Publications, 1991. Print
5. White, Hayden. “Postmodernism and Historiography”. Ritsumerkan University, Japan. 22. Oct. 2009. Lecture. Online. Transcript
6. William, Raymond Leslie. *The Modern Latin-American Novel*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998. Print

\*\*\*

Joseph Aleyamma Janet,  
Assistant Professor, Dept. Of English,  
Women’s Christian College,  
Chennai.