



**THE CENTRALIZATION OF THE PROTEST AND FAILURE OF  
MARGINALIZED INDIVIDUALS IN MARIO VARGAS LLOSA'S CONVERSATION  
IN THE CATHEDRAL**

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**Abstract**

Mario Vargas Llosa is one of the prominent writers of Latin American Boom. His third novel *Conversation in Cathedral* published in 1969 is based on a historical, political event-oppressive regime of the dictator Manuel Odría during 1948 to 1956 and Llosa's personal experiences. The novel deals with the corruption, repression prevalent in every sphere of life during the dictatorship. It depicts how the unjust system touched and affected almost everyone in the country. Llosa presents us the events through the conversations of many characters, main of which is the conversation between Santiago Zavala, the son of a rich businessman, politician and Ambrosio, his father's chauffeur. Though the frustrated, failed protest of the protagonist Santiago against his father and the 'system' is at the central place of the novel, we also find the same events affecting many other insignificant and marginalized individuals in the novel. They belong to poor, lower class and that is why they are ineffectual rather servile. The present article discusses the feeble, frustrated, failed protests of the characters- Santiago, Ambrosio, Amalia, the prostitutes Hortencia and Queta. Only Santiago from these characters is from upper class. But he leaves his home, comfortable lifestyle and lives at a boarding house. He disinherits himself from his father's property and deliberately chooses to be 'insignificant'. All these characters are dragged into the quagmire of politics inadvertently. They strive to survive. They try to protest but end up in frustration, failure or in death. The present article intends to explore the protest journey of these marginalized individuals ending in failure and defeat in the novel.



**Key Words:** Protest, marginalized, centralization, insignificant, individual, dictatorship

Mario Vargas Llosa, born on March 28, 1936, is a Peruvian-Spanish writer, politician, critic, journalist, essayist, college professor and the recipient of the 2010 Nobel Prize in Literature. He is one of the prominent writers of Latin American Boom. His third novel *Conversation in Cathedral* published in 1969 is based on a historical, political event- the corrosive, oppressive regime of the dictator Manuel Odria during 1948 to 1956 and Llosa's personal experiences. The novel deals with the corruption, repression prevalent in every sphere of life during the dictatorship. It depicts how the unjust system touched and affected almost everyone in the country. Except a small privileged minority of rich, affluent, upper class of politicians and entrepreneurs it manipulated life of everyone. Mario Vargas Llosa presents us the events through the conversations of many characters, main of which is the conversation between Santiago Zavala, the son of a rich businessman and politician and Ambrosio, his father's chauffeur. Though the frustrated, failed protest of the protagonist Santiago against his father and the 'system' is at the central place of the novel, we also find the same events affecting many other marginalised and insignificant individuals in the novel. They are insignificant in the sense that they don't belong to upper or middle class of the society. They belong to poor, lower class and that is why they are ineffectual rather servile. The present article discusses the feeble, frustrated, failed protests of the characters- Santiago, Ambrosio, Amalia, the prostitutes Hortencia and Queta. Only Santiago from these characters is from upper class. But he leaves his home, comfortable lifestyle and lives at a boarding house. He disinherits himself from his father's property and deliberately chooses to be 'insignificant'. All these characters are dragged into the quagmire of politics inadvertently. They strive to survive. They try to protest but end up in frustration, failure or in death. Mary. E. Davis in her article "William Faulkner and Mario Vargas Llosa: the Election of Failure", calls it as "failure chosen by the characters as the honourable response to their situation." (Davis, 332)

Protest is an expression of strong disagreement with or objection to particular events, policies or situations. In literature, the protest is a statement of resistance against injustice or oppression. *Conversation in Cathedral* is no doubt a protest against corrupt, unjust, exploitative regime of the dictator Manuel Odria. As a political novel it delineates very effectively how during this regime- the constitutional rights were suspended, political parties forbidden, harsh censorship of press and radio and the politics sinking into something dirty and dangerous. It also deals with deeply unequal society where small privileged minority enjoying wealth and prosperity and large majority of poor people exploited and deprived from good education, salaries, and opportunities to improve in life. As Mario Vargas Llosa himself explains in 'The 2017 Berlin Family Lectures' on this particular novel, the story of dictatorship would give 'testimony' of what they lived during Odria regime. So far it is discussed much; the present article intends to explore the protest journey of the individuals in the novel.