

HISTORICAL FLUX IN THE NOVELS OF KHUSHWANT SINGH: A Preview

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Abstract; The term ‘history’ refers to the incidents, events, and upheavals of the past. It carries two meanings in common understanding. It refers both to what actually happened in the past to representation of the past in the works of historians. The record of history, and its interpretation, perspective and the comment of the historian play a vital role in shaping the documents of the past. So, history has been considered as scientific and facts offered in the books of history need to be examined and analyzed carefully. History is in a way of representation of only those events that were considered significant by the historian. It has to be considered as a commentary on the events or people who could bring in some perceptible change. In his one act play, ‘The Red Oleanders’, Rabindranath Tagore says that there is no age of history which may be called old. It is always an eternal extension of the present.

Key Words: History, Khushwant Singh, Delhi a novel, Train to Pakistan, Independence, Patition.....

History narrative is as old as literature. It may be observed in Iliad, the Bible, even as early as in the 17th century there was prose-fiction that might be termed historical. When we speak of historical novel however, we tend to think of something more recent, the modern historical events in the 19th and 20th centuries, with major shift in the awareness of history itself. But, history narrative got its real full-pledged subject in fictions only in the 20th century, particularly in the post-colonial era. Historical fiction can represent a wide spectrum of historical interests ranging from the synchronic particularities of the given moment in the past to the diachronic working of the historical process itself.

It is only through the exercise of rewriting of history can present a deconstructive and creative reworking which supplement historical facts in order to give comprehensive account of historical process and of the continuum between lived experience and recorded history.

Histories were often written to impose an official order of cause and effect on the events and thereby justify the deeds or misdeeds of the ruler. Over the period of time it was realized that history is a complex phenomenon. It is always governed by multiple factors and it is not too

simple as can be understood or explained by simple cause and effect of each time. The record of the past needed to be scrutinized and that history had to be accessed with new parameters. The concepts of history, culture, language, place, society, etc., act as an individual and of a society in literary fictions.

In fact, history- that socio-cultural baggage that comes with individuals from the moment they are born in a society to the moment they die. Through history, a society speaks its past, represents its Ideas and ideologies of life. In writing a history, a society is constructing its own past to add meaning to its present. The past figures importantly in people's self representations in general. Therefore, we can call history a collective imagination of people who want to believe their past. Thus, these concepts act as filters or as frames in defining, influencing, and creating the identity of a history as well as a society.

Any intellectual engagement with history can at best be tentative and conscientious intellectual always attempts to reach beyond the boundaries of history to get the core of reality. In fact, it is for many postmodern reasons that the outstanding the treatment of history, nation, nationalism in Indian English fiction becomes a necessary entity. The history is grounded upon an assumption that human life is shaped by political, economic, social, and cultural forces; by understanding the influences, the course of national events may be understood. However, even if we consider all these influences upon human life, that cannot be a single narrative that can exhaust the diversity and complexity of human life and reality.

There are always different versions of and view points of the same events, and therefore, many histories instead of one History. This understanding leads us towards the theory of New Historicism. In the postcolonial context, history is not an absurd sequence of chance occurrences, nor a scholarly reporting of facts presented chronologically in the realistic mode claiming its authenticity, but, it goes beyond the simple binary of either redeeming or annihilating the past. There is a thin layer between History and Imperial History. From postcolonial perspective, history becomes a mode of representing the past which is recorded creatively for the benefit of the future. The recording of past is done in India through literary forms like fiction for some moral benefits. Indian writers have used freely and easily more than any writers of the world. Indian English-fiction is not exception to it.

The subject of post-independence novel is very amazing. It is characterized by an abundant variety, in both technique and subject matter. One of the significant themes of contemporary novel is the re-expression of the past, portrayal of the events from the recent Indian history. Many of the Post-Colonial novelists such as Khushwant Singh, Salman Rashdie and Chaman Nahal have made a specific use of history: our freedom movement and consequent emergence of two countries (so called Pakistan and India). History is a recurrent motif in Indian fiction. In historical

fiction, the novels of social criticism and social protest also form a distinct group among Indian English writers.

In Indian English novels, Post-colonial writers set a different trend in the domain of Indian fiction with plurality and complexity of Indian social life and subvert the notion of History and imperialists' record of Indian history. Manohar Malgaonkar's *A BEND IN THE GANGES* (1964); Chaman Nahal's *AZADI* (1975); Shashi Tharoor's *THE GREAT INDIAN NOVEL*; Rashdi's *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN* (1980); Bapsi Sidhwa's *ICE CANDY MAN* (1988); Amitav Ghosh's *SHADOW LINES*; Mukul Keshavan's *LOOKING THROUGH GLASS* (1995); and Khushwant Singh's *TRAIN TO PAKISTAN, I SHALL NOT HEAR THE NIGHTINGALE, AND DELHI*; are the best examples for such historical records. These are the comprehensive array of historical novels.

It is appropriate to mention the poem of T.S.Eliot, "Gerontion"¹ before going to discuss the handling of history in the novels of Khushwant Singh.

History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
 And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
 Guided us by vanities. Think now
 She gives when our attention is distracted
 And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
 That the giving famishes the craving.

History is told that re-existence of the past. The historical reality forms a part of work in terms of time and space. Literature can no longer be considered isolation from its social implications, cultural and moral values, and racial ethos. The historical setting of Indo-Anglican fiction is essential for it is an integral part of its cultural vision and ethos. Such things are made as possible even in the Indian novels by many novelists.

They endeavored to present the unified vision of man and his milieu. Many Indian writers have written many novels on the backdrop of Indian history. Among such novelists, Khushwant Singh is successful one who demonstrates the process of historical realities and Indian cultural ethos finding expressions in the art of fiction. Singh presents the unified vision of man and his milieu in his novels. As T.S.Eliot told the past is re-existed in the historical novels of Khushwant Singh.

Khushwant Singh has blended the elements of history and fiction in his major novels- *TRAIN TO PAKISTAN, I SHALL NOT HEAR THE NIGHTINGALE, AND DELHI*. Singh is very conscious of the fact that finding connections between social myth and reality; between social myth and history is characteristic of the Indian mind. He has created and recreated history in his novels. The Indo-

Anglican novelists, Singh has shown anything like stamina and stern consistency of purpose in using historical facts in his novels. He has given how a history can be a narrative novel at his “A Note from the Author” in his Novel ‘DELHI’;

*In this novel I have tried to tell the story of Delhi from its earliest beginnings to the present times. I constructed it from records chronicled by eye-witness. Hence most of it is told in the first person. History provided me with skeleton. I covered it with flesh and injected blood and a lot of seminal fluid into it.*²

He has revealed in his major novels an unexplored side of Indian history, which is really much painful. His literary career has to be seen in the historical context of Punjabi-literature. His literary works are characterized by a realistic and earthly flavor. His novels have queer blend of history, romance and sex. The historical events are incorporated nicely wrapped with sex and romance. His novels reflect the pictures of history and culture of India. They are the works of art with the knowledge of life-style of the people of the age, but not of history. They depict a true picture of social, economical and political conditions in addition to historical events prevailing at that time.

Conclusion: If we look at his novels, history has been profoundly infused in his first three novels- Train to Pakistan, I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, and Delhi. The first novel, Train to Pakistan, is on the background of aftermath partition of India in 1947. His second novel, I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, is on the background of 1942’s Quit-India Movement. And his third novel, Delhi has the history of over six centuries beginning with Balban to 1985. History or historical fact is not only a recurring subject but also heart and soul in his novels.

References:

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