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History As Fiction: The Role Of Historical Novels In Shaping Collective Memory

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Abstract: This research explores the dynamic interplay between history as well as fiction, concentrating specifically on collective memory's shaping by historical novels. History stresses empirical evidence with factual accuracy as a discipline. Historical fiction reconstructs the past in an imaginative way, adds emotional depth to it, and creates narrative aesthetics that people enjoy. Fiction is argued to do more than reflect the past in this study. Fiction actively participates in how societies remember, internalize, and emotionally relate toward the past. It uses theoretical frameworks from postcolonial critique (Gayatri Spivak, Ranajit Guha), historiographic metafiction (Linda Hutcheon), and memory studies (Maurice Halbwachs, Aleida Assmann) because the research investigates the power of historical novels to create emotionally resonant versions of history that are often absent from official records, recover marginalized voices, and challenge dominant historical discourses. The study analyzes key works like *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh, *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, along with *Sea of Poppies* by Amitav Ghosh. Each of these literary pieces engages with trauma, displacement, also with the politics of memory. This research explores an original angle on the role of affect and narrative form: literary techniques such as symbolism, unreliable narration, and intergenerational storytelling allow historical fiction to create felt histories, impacting memory more deeply than academic historiography often does. Novels of history engage with readers emotionally and also sensually thus providing for sites of healing and of resistance.

Keywords: Fiction, History, Literature, Myths, Collective Memory, Resistance.

Introduction

Each discipline has long improved as well as borrowed from the other since the boundary between literature and history has been porous. History within ancient traditions often appeared under poetic and epic forms such as Homer's *Iliad*, as well as the *Mahabharata*, and early medieval chronicles for which historical events were twisted using myth, legend, also cultural values. These early texts reveal to us that narrative has always been a mode through which societies made some sense of the past. This was quite obvious even before then, before the rise of the modern historical method. History and literature formally diverged due to the Enlightenment era's stress on chronology and empirical evidence. History started positioning itself as an objective scientific discipline at that time. Despite positivist historiography's rise, the literary impulse in historical writing has never been fully eradicated. Historical fiction emerged during the 19th century as a powerful genre. In particular, the novel was capable of rendering the past in experiential, memorial, and imaginative terms, not merely factual ones.

The works of Sir Walter Scott gave to the historical novel an early prestige. His blending of some historical fact with some fictional narrative offered to readers a compelling way for them to inhabit the past. Historical fiction evolved over time to dramatize major political events and illuminate the textures of everyday life because it foregrounds voices and experiences absent from official historical accounts. Historical novels have become important vehicles toward representing history's silences, ruptures, and emotional residues that formal historiography often overlooks, especially in postcolonial and post-trauma contexts. Literature can offer up an archive through the use of metaphor, interiority, and storytelling. This archive recovers these narratives and provokes further reflection also engages with empathy.

Historical fact alongside literary imagination now have become much more intertwined because of memory studies in addition to narrative theory plus postcolonial historiography throughout recent decades. Linda Hutcheon termed historiographic metafiction to reflect growing recognition that all history is fiction narrativized self-aware of narrative and historical constructions. This shift compels people to reevaluate the authority granted customarily to historical texts over fictional ones. As societies grapple with contested pasts about—whether Partition in South Asia traumatized, colonialism left a legacy, or genocide and slavery are

remembered—historical novels have emerged as sites where cultural memory shapes, challenges, and reimagines.

History study is not just confined to the archives or government records and scholarly texts. It is an evolving process for the collective memory that societies influenced. Societies remember what was the past through the narratives that are constructed by the social frameworks under Maurice Halbwachs's concept of collective memory (1950). These stories shift rather than stay constant. The shifting of cultural and political with emotional contexts influence each of them. Historical novels in this light are important sites where historical events are remembered as well as receive emotional and ethical depth often overlooked by formal histories.

Examining historical fiction is now relevant because of its ability to reshape the formation of collective memory as it intervenes in public discourse. In a time when digital media, nationalism, and identity politics shape historical views, literature stays a strong contrast. It retells events and engages ethically and emotionally through the past, implying enduringly how we understand justice, identity, and belonging.

Textual Analysis: Emotional Archiving And The Affective Truth Of History

Historical novels participate in emotional archiving namely past feelings preservation instead of passively retelling events. This emotional historiography form preserves and transmits affective truths that institutional history often overlooks or cannot express well. So, from literary and historical views, the novel is now a place of political resistance, epistemological intervention, and emotional resonance.

In Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Partition is not presented through any grand political analysts, yet an intimate village life slowly untangles itself. Singh constructs history from the ground up, through Jugga's silence, Nooran's suffering, also Hukum Chand's moral paralysis, not leaders' declarations. From a historical standpoint, the novel challenges dominant narratives of nationalist triumph, highlighting ordinary people's vulnerability. Literarily, it narrates violence without spectacle realistically, ironically, and restrainedly, thereby humanizing memory. Here, Singh quietly uses quietness and local detail as historiographic tools at an untouched angle resisting nationalist hyperbole favoring ethical minimalism.

In contrast, *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie is one which explodes with reliable narration plus linear time. Saleem Sinai's body turns into a symbolic record of India's past. From a literary standpoint,

Rushdie's use of magic realism blurs history as well as memory, which creates a palimpsest in which past, present, and future collapse into one narrative field. From a historical point of view, the novel critiques how national identity is in fact constructed, and also it shows how memory is manipulated so as to serve political ends. In a way that remains underexplored, Rushdie employs bodily historiography. Physical decay along with distortion plus fragmentation mark the troubled past of a nation, suggesting trauma exists within texts and bodies.

Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) has the opium trade as the backdrop in a transoceanic narrative that destabilizes colonial archives. Ghosh actively reconstructs forgotten networks of migration so resists actively through multiple languages, dialects, plus perspectives. From colonial records, resurrecting silenced voices, the novel critiques empire's erasures from a historical standpoint. Ghosh's polyphonic structure literarily creates a collection of global history from underneath. Ghosh's use for linguistic pluralism can be a unique perspective, as it is acting as a historical method. Language turns into memory's vessel, resistance's vessel, and creolized identity's vessel, which defies the colonial homogenized knowledge project.

Historical fiction offers a layered representation into the past within these texts. It also shows an emotional and moralistic point. These novels are doing things like supplementing official histories plus archiving emotions along with challenging boundaries of historical truth. Historical novels emerge as vital narrative forms through emotional archiving, bodily historiography, and linguistic plurality. These forms do not tend to create fictional distortions; they seek to preserve the inner histories within collective experience.

Historical Fiction As A Tool For Reconciliation: Revisiting Trauma And Healing

Historical novels possess the special capability to preserve shared memory as well as assist reconciliation in societies after conflict since they tackle past trauma. Historical fiction's narrative form permits readers to face painful pasts, consider historical events' emotional impacts, and locate routes for recovery. Trauma such as war, colonization, or partition often results from important historical events. Because of trauma, emotional scars remain long after physical conflict ceases. This trauma, when embedded inside collective memory, is also frequently silenced from official histories, yet historical fiction voices them that are marginalized and also those people whose experiences mainstream narratives leave out (Assmann, 2011; Spivak, 1988).

Khushwant Singh, for example, wrote *Train to Pakistan* (1956). It shows the harrowing impact that the Partition of India had on people and also on communities and on families. Singh allows readers to engage with the trauma of communal violence as well as displacement, since it represents emotional and moral disarray during Partition thereby providing a form of narrative catharsis enabling a collective reckoning with the past. The novel fosters empathy along with understanding by drawing readers into the characters' emotional lives. They navigate all of the complexities that involve loss as well as betrayal and also survival (Singh, 1956).

Likewise, *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie addresses postcolonial nation-building trauma since it stresses identity, belonging, and memory complexities. Due to the novel intertwining what is personal together with what is political, readers are able to grapple with those long-lasting effects of British colonial rule upon both people and nations. Rushdie creates a space via magical realism's narrative form where colonialism's trauma is felt through the characters' personal stories, not just reflected in historical facts. Characters achieve reconciliation of their fractured identities and of histories through magical realism beyond the limitations of historical narratives (Rushdie, 1981).

Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* of the year 2008 narrates all of the experiences of indentured laborers under the British colonial rule. The novel, through its polyphonic structure, offering of it an emotional archive that is of their lived experiences, reimagines histories that were forgotten of these marginalized groups. Ghosh's work helps contribute toward the reconciliation process by recovering silenced histories and giving voice to the voiceless. Historical fiction keeps historical events in memory. It also helps communities and nations heal through re-engaging with painful histories (Ghosh, 2008) and contributes to a broader social comprehension of trauma when it does so.

Fiction that is historical becomes an active agent for reconciliation, not simply a medium for the remembering of the past. These novels connect readers emotionally to the trauma of historical events, invite societies to engage with collective wounds, understand the emotional complexities of the past, also move toward a more inclusive, empathetic future.

The role of narrative form in shaping historical truths: fiction vs. Factuality

Historical fiction contributes greatly through reshaping historical truths. These truths are reshaped through all of its narrative forms which happen to be unique. Unlike factual accounts prioritizing linear chronology and objective analysis, historical novels use narrative techniques like unreliable narrators, fragmented timelines, and magical realism to question the foundations of historical knowledge. This artistic manipulation of form challenges the idea that history can be captured fully through empirical facts alone. It rather stresses on the interpretive, subjective nature of historical truth (White, 1973; Hutcheon, 1988).

Storytelling is a form shared between history and fiction according to Hayden White (1973). The historian selects as well as organizes facts in a narrative structure, plus they apply rhetorical devices for creation of meaning. Narrative manipulation in historical novels challenges official historical records and reveals how historical knowledge is constructed. *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Rushdie uses magical realism to question history's standard interpretation. The novel uses this technique to blur lines between fiction and history. Rushdie stresses that objective history alone cannot fully explain the past via integrating fantastical elements with historical events such as the partition of India and the independence movement, for individual experiences, memories, as well as emotions also shape historical consciousness (Rushdie, 1981).

Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) has a narrative structure toward shaping historical truth. That story framework is quite important too. Ghosh changes the focus from a set history to an open past using a diverse method showing clashing viewpoints. The narrative structure that is fragmented creates a view of history that is complex, and it presents the experiences of diverse characters which include indentured laborers, colonial officials, and traders. Through these multiple voices, Ghosh critiques the imperial historiography that silences or omits the lives of marginalized people (Ghosh, 2008). Each character's personal history becomes integral for understanding the broader historical forces at play so the novel underscores the importance of collective memory. It challenges the singular narrative of colonial history under state sanction.

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) makes use of narrative form. Truth of history is also interrogated in the novel. The novel does present a fragmented and a deeply emotional account of Partition, and it uses the personal lives of all of its characters so it can reveal the larger historical forces behind communal violence and

displacement. The novel focuses much more on human experience instead of just recounting events in a linear fashion, and this provides for a more intimate and subjective comprehension of history. The narration is indeed unreliable since contradictory viewpoints are shown and also moral ambiguity is represented. Each of these adds to a truth more historically subtle and complex (Singh, 1956).

Collective memory vs. Official history

Official history and collective memory create tension, a concern within historical fiction fundamentally. Collective memory is shaped by communities through shared comprehension of past events. Cultural practices, stories, also rituals transmit this memory within (Halbwachs, 1950). By contrast, official history is the sanctioned version of the past. Governments write it with dominant political groups plus academics as well. Memory has these two forms which are often opposed. Official history asserts a singular narrative, yet collective memory includes multiple, sometimes contradictory, interpretations.

Historical novels engage squarely with this tension as literary constructs. They do also provide a platform for all of the voices that are often silenced in the official narrative. In Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), personal accounts that are intimate of the villagers during the Partition of India present a collective memory, and this memory clashes with discourse that is nationalist surrounding the event. Partition, as it is depicted by Singh in the novel, does not just upheave political or territorial structures, but humans experience trauma which official histories, especially nationalist ones, tend to overlook. Characters feel Partition's violence, suffering, and personal dislocations in their bodies. That historical moment cannot be fully understood, except when we consider all of the national events' emotional and human costs.

Literary narratives become memory sites as Singh's novel exemplifies alternative historical understandings. Nationalist history is challenged by the narrative because it focuses on personal stories and locality. That history frames Partition neatly as dividing between two nations. Singh represents fragmentation of memory, and this representation reflects the multiplicity of experiences. Official histories will often suppress experiences in addition to responses to Partition.

Likewise, Salman Rushdie critiques official histories within *Midnight's Children* (1981) of postcolonial India. Rushdie particularly critiques the narrative around independence and the creation of national identity. Rushdie engages in counter-memory by way of the character that is Saleem Sinai, for his body turns into an archive for the nation's history, showing just how official history selectively forgets about marginalized groups, also their struggles, along with their complexities. Fiction exemplifies the disruption of the official historical narratives by way of the contrast between the novel's fragmented magical realist storytelling with the official celebratory history of Indian independence.

Official history's construction is often questioned by historical novels, engaging with it. As these examples show, they do not simply serve as retellings about the past but provide a narrative of collective memory that includes the silences, complexities, and contradictions often omitted by formal historiography.

Embodied Memory and the Materiality of Trauma

Historical fiction does not merely reconstruct the past through external events yet it also inscribes memory on the body and this reveals how trauma is lived felt and remembered physically. At this memory site, official narratives are now challenged and are contested. *Midnight's Children* shows Saleem Sinai's body falling apart as an allegorical map of India's trauma after independence. Saleem states "I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me" (Rushdie 131). His broken self symbolizes a sign. Also represented is the nation's fractured postcolonial identity. Saleem's nose, for it is capable of smelling emotions along with events, links sensory experience with historical memory, stressing that the body itself becomes a witness to history.

In *Train to Pakistan* Singh uses Partition's brutality to stress physical violence and bodily suffering. Jugga's eventual sacrifice is highlighted by the novel's focus on bodies used as tools of resistance and redemption. Jugga's silence and physicality speak louder than political rhetoric, and it reminds us that history is not just about leaders and battles but also about anonymous bodies carrying the weight of national trauma (Singh 190).

Amitav Ghosh focuses specifically on the corporeality of colonial exploitation within *Sea of Poppies*, furthering also this very idea. Flesh under imperial capitalism commodify indentured bodies on the *Ibis* ship.

Ghosh details how bodies bear the invisible imprints of migration, labor, with loss. He does not in any way romanticize suffering. As a female protagonist, Deeti's memory is shaped through her body's experiences her endurance her escape and her rebirth in exile (Ghosh 87).

These novels suggest that the body is not merely a passive recipient of trauma. Instead of that, it actively archives a lived history. Historical fiction shows just how memory is represented through both scars and also silence and suffering. Bodies are able to resist erasure when they carry forward untold stories from the past. Memory that is represented becomes a counter that is powerful. It is opposed to disembodied, sanitized official histories, then. Historical novels, as such, perform the past through the human form's materiality instead of just narrating it.

Myth, Magic, and Memory: Rewriting History through the Fantastic

Historical fiction often uses the fantastic—myth, magic realism, folklore—not merely for stylistic flourishes, but as important epistemological tools. These elements that defy rationalist colonial historiography frameworks present alternate ways to understand the past. This mixing of magic as well as history does represent Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. Saleem Sinai's telepathic powers along with his mystical connection to other children born at the moment of independence suggest a mythical story originates within the Indian nation. As Rushdie does write, "Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind...it selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also" (Rushdie 211). He brings to the foreground the mythic dimensions of memory. He asserts that what is emotionally true may be historically unverifiable yet culturally important.

Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* incorporates mythic archetypes, prophetic visions, and folk beliefs. Deeti's recurring visions along with her belief in reincarnation infuse her historical adventure with spiritual depth and suggest that for many communities, myth is not opposed to history—it is history. Indigenous epistemologies often dismissed through colonial modernity are reclaimed by Ghosh's use of the supernatural (Ghosh 114).

Train to Pakistan by Khushwant Singh has a realist approach. However, it is steeped within symbolic and archetypal resonances. Moral dilemmas permeate within the text plus sacrificial redemption occurs and

haunting silence exists so as to evoke a kind of mythic structure in which individual actions echo larger cosmic consequences (Singh 172).

These writers consider history not secular, linear, or empirical. They resist colonial dichotomies of fact opposed to by embedding of magic and myth within the narratives that are historical. fiction, truth vs. superstition. Histories that do not fit into Enlightenment models become a fantastic strategy that is decolonial for purposes of reclaim.

Such interweaving of the mythical and historical refines memory's texture. It affirms communities often remember within stories. Those stories might lack facts yet have deep meaning. These narratives increase history's resonance, allowing space for multiple truths. They do not twist history or ways of understanding.

Conclusion: Contemporary Implications And Reflections

Historical fiction remains a potent force for reimagining and retrieving subaltern histories in a time in which history and memory are contested to their very roots. Following postcolonial scholarship, especially that of Ranajit Guha (1983) and Gayatri Spivak (1988), writing has emerged as an integral method for inscribing subaltern voice and reshaping historical consciousness. Modern historical fiction challenges hegemonic, state-sanctioned histories by presenting counter-narratives grounded on individual, communal, and in some instances, marginalized experiences. They expose the nuances of identity, trauma, migration, and nationhood that are otherwise skirted by mainstream historical narratives.

Books such as Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008), Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), and Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993) show how fictions play out at the interfaces of colonial heritage, partition, and post-independence nation-building. These fictions speak to the continued struggle over the making, remembering, and politicizing of histories. They show that the past is never over but is remade afresh using memory, cultural production, and narrative.

In the international context of our era—characterized by migration crises, decolonization conflicts, and ethnic conflicts—historical fiction is a living-color archive. It does not only record but also criticizes and recontextualizes the past, refusing to make readers believe in official accounts and opting instead for the

affective and moral richness of history. Through sympathetic engagement and critical scrutiny, historical fiction contributes to the development of more comprehensive histories of the past, remembering that awareness of the past is central to the challenge of engaging with present-day injustice and envisioning more just futures.

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